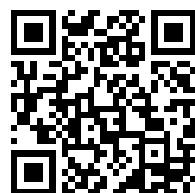

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THE WORKS OF
SAINT AUGUSTINE
A Translation
for the 21st Century

SERMONS



L. J. Lampson

SERMONS

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SERMON 51

THE HARMONY BETWEEN THE EVANGELISTS MATTHEW AND LUKE CONCERNING THE LORD'S GENEALOGY

Date: 418¹

Fulfillment of a Christian promise

1. Let's hope that the expectations which your graces have will be met by the one who raised them; because while we may safely assume that what I have to say to you is God's word and not mine, nonetheless I can much more properly say what the apostle says so humbly: *We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be God's and not come from us* (2 Cor 4:7). So I am sure you remember the promise I made you. I made the promise in God, and through him I now intend to keep it. When I made it, you see, I was asking for his help in keeping it, and now I am receiving his help in keeping it. But your graces will also remember that on Christmas morning I put off solving a question I had raised, because there were many people celebrating that day's feast with us, who usually find explanations of the word of God rather a bore. But now, I assume, it is only people who want to listen that have come together here. So I am not speaking to hearts that are deaf, or to disdainful minds.

These expectations, though, of yours are like prayers for me. More than that; the games on today have blown many people away from here, for whose salvation I am greatly concerned, and I urge you, brothers, to feel as much concern for them yourselves, and to pray earnestly to God for those who are not yet in earnest about the shows truth puts on, but are still given over to shows put on for the flesh.² You see, I know, I have no doubt at all that there are now some among you who thought very little of today;³ but they are breaking the habits that they had stitched together.⁴ People do change, after all, both for better and for worse. We are alternately heartened and saddened by experiences of this sort almost every day; heartened by people going straight, saddened by people turning crooked. That's why the Lord did not say that whoever begins will be saved, but *Whoever perseveres*, says he, *to the end, that's the one who will be saved* (Mt 10:22).

Bring home to your friends the delight of your show

2. What more wonderful present could be given us by the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God who is also son of man because he was even prepared to become *that*—what more magnificent present could he bestow on us, than to add to his sheepfold not only the spectators of these frivolous shows, but also several of those who are used to being themselves the spectacle in them to be gaped at? As well as the fans of the hunters, you see, he has also hunted the hunters themselves into the nets of salvation, because he too once provided a spectacle to be gaped at. Let me tell you how. He told us himself, before he became a spectacle to be gaped at he foretold it himself, and in prophetic language he declared beforehand what was going to happen as if it already had. He said in the psalm, *They dug my hands and my feet, they counted all my bones* (Ps 22:16.17). There you have how he became a spectacle to be stared at, so that they even counted his bones. He goes on to call it a spectacle even more plainly: *They, however, looked at me closely and stared at me* (Ps 22:17). He was stared at in mockery, he was stared at by people who didn't even cheer him on in that show,⁵ but raged against him; in much the same way he had his witnesses and martyrs stared at in the beginning, as the apostle says: *We have become a spectacle to the world and to angels and to men* (1 Cor 4:9).

There are, however, two kinds of people who look on at such spectacles, one of materially-minded,⁶ the other of spiritually-minded people. The materially-minded look on, and think how wretched and unfortunate those martyrs are, thrown to wild beasts, beheaded, burned with fire, and they are filled with detestation and horror.⁷ Others, however, look on, as do the holy angels also, and don't fix their attention on the mangling of bodies, but instead marvel at the completeness of faith. A splendid spectacle offered to the eyes of the mind is a spirit whole and unbroken while the body is torn to pieces. That is what you people gaze on with pleasure when the accounts of such things are read in church.⁸ After all, if you didn't form some sort of picture of what happened, it would mean you weren't listening at all.

So you can see that in fact you haven't disdained the show today, but rather have chosen which show you will attend. May God then be with you and help you to bring home to your friends, whom you are so sorry to see running off to the stadium today and refusing to come to church, to bring home to them the delights of your show. This, we hope, will cheapen in their eyes the other shows for love of which they have cheapened themselves, and start them joining you in loving God, whom no one can possibly be shamed by loving, because you are loving one who cannot be beaten;⁹ joining you in loving Christ, who by the very fact of seeming to be beaten became the champion who beat the whole world.

Because he did indeed beat the whole world, as we can see, brothers. He has subjected all the powers to himself, he has made kings pass under the yoke, not with a proud army but with the absurdity of the cross, not by hacking away with steel but by hanging on a tree, suffering in body, acting in spirit.¹⁰ In their view¹¹ his body was hoisted up on the cross; he in fact was subduing their minds to the

cross. In short, what jewel in the crown of rulers is more precious than the cross of Christ upon their foreheads?¹²

If you love him, you need never lose countenance, never look foolish. How many people, do you suppose, are coming back from the stadium with their tails between their legs, because the ones they were yelling for were beaten there! In fact, they would have been even more bodily beaten if they had won; they would have become a prey to vain rejoicing, a prey to the excitement of a twisted kind of greed.¹³ They have been defeated by the very fact of their running off there. How many do you suppose there were, brothers, who were in two minds today whether to come here or go there. Those who made up their minds by thinking about Christ and came along to the church defeated not any mere human being but the devil himself, the most dreadful hunter of the whole world.¹⁴ But those who eventually decided to run along instead to the stadium were of course beaten by the very one the others had defeated; defeated in him who said, *Rejoice, because I have overcome the world* (Jn 16:33). The reason the commander-in-chief allowed himself to be tested and tried was to teach his soldiers how to fight.

Nobody should belittle Christ for being born of a woman

3. So then in order to do this, our Lord Jesus Christ became a son of man,¹⁵ by being born of course of a woman. But supposing he hadn't been born of the virgin Mary, would he have been any the less so? Someone may say, "He wanted to be a man; he would have been a man, even though he hadn't been born of a woman; after all, the first man he made he didn't make from a woman." Let's see how to answer this one. You say, "Why should he choose a woman in order to get born?" The answer you get is, "Why should he avoid a woman in order to get born?" Suppose I am not able to show why he should choose to be born of a woman; you must still show me what he ought to avoid in a woman. But really we have been through it all before; if he had avoided a woman's womb, it would rather have indicated that he could be defiled by it. But in fact, the more undefiled he was in his own proper being,¹⁶ the less reason he had to shrink from a bodily womb, as though he could be defiled by it. But instead, by being born of a woman, he would bring home to us a point of great significance.

After all, brothers, I too am perfectly ready to admit that if the Lord had wanted to become man without being born of woman, it would have been something quite easy for his sovereign majesty to achieve. Just as he was able to be born of a woman without a man, so he could have been born without even a woman. But what he is showing us here is that in neither of its sexes need humanity despair of itself. Human beings, of course, are divided by sex into males and females. So if, while appearing as a man—and I agree he had to be that—he had not been born of a woman, women would have despaired of themselves, remembering their first sin, how it was through a woman that the first man was ensnared, and would have thought that there was absolutely no hope for them in Christ. So he came as a man to show his preference for the

male sex, and he was born of a woman to comfort the female sex. It's as though he made them a little speech and said, "To show you that it's not any creature of God's that is bad, but that it's crooked pleasures that distort them, in the beginning when I made man, I made them male and female. I don't reject and condemn any creature that I have made. Here I am, born a man, born of a woman. So I don't reject any creature I have made, but I reject and condemn sins, which I didn't make. Let each sex take note of its proper honor, and each confess its iniquity, and each hope for salvation."¹⁷

Man was ensnared through a woman administering poison; let man be restored through a woman administering salvation. Let woman compensate for the sin of the man ensnared through her by giving birth to the Christ. That too is why women were the first to tell the apostles about God rising from the dead. A woman brought the news of death to her man in paradise; and women too brought the news of salvation to men in the Church. The apostles were to carry the news of Christ's resurrection to the nations; the news was brought to the apostles by women. Nobody, therefore, should belittle Christ for being born of a woman, the sex that could not defile him as liberator, the sex to which he owed a testimonial as creator.

The faith of the gospel accepted in the whole world

4. "But," they insist, "how are we to believe that Christ was born of a woman?" I can answer, "From the gospel, which has been preached and is being preached throughout the whole wide world." But in their blindness they try to bring into question something already believed throughout the whole earth, intent on throwing dust in the eyes of everyone else, and not seeing what's there to be seen, while they try to pull to pieces what's there to be believed. They reply, you see, "Don't browbeat us with the authority of the whole world; let's just discuss the text of scripture. Don't play the demagogue; the big battalions are on your side because they have been brainwashed." To this my first answer is, "So the big battalions are on my side, are they, because they have been brainwashed? Well, these big battalions were once a very small company. What did these big battalions grow from, and this growth of theirs foretold so long before? After all, what has been seen to grow is only what had been foreseen. I shouldn't even say 'a very small company'; Abraham was one single individual."

Just think, brothers: Abraham was one solitary individual in the whole world at that time, in the whole wide world, among all men, among all nations, and to this one single man it was said, *In your seed shall all the nations be blessed* (Gn 22:18). What one man believed as an isolated individual has been manifested to many as the multitude of his seed.¹⁸ This multitude wasn't to be seen then, and yet it was believed; now it is to be seen, and yet it is impugned. What one man was told then, and what one man believed, is now opposed by a few people, because it is manifested in many.

He that made his disciples into fishers of men¹⁹ had his nets made of all kinds

of authority. If it's the majority that is to be believed, what is more numerous than the Church spread throughout the world? If it's the rich that are to be believed, let these people take note how many such it contains; if it's the poor that are to be believed, let them take note of the millions of poor people in it; if it's nobles, then practically the entire nobility is already inside; if it's kings, let them observe them all now subdued to Christ; if it's persons of exceptional eloquence, or learning, or wisdom, let them mark how many orators, how many experts, how many philosophers of this world have been netted by those fishermen to be drawn to safety from the deep. They were caught by reflecting on him who came down to cure the human soul's greatest of ills, that is pride, by the example of his own humility, and who therefore chose the weak things of the world to confound the strong, and the foolish things of the world to confound the wise—not those who really were, but those who seemed to be—and chose the ignoble things of this world and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are (1 Cor 1:27-28).

The value of secrets

5. "You can say what you like," they tell me, "we have discovered that where you read about the birth of Christ the gospels disagree with each other, and they can't all be true on the point they disagree about. After all," he goes on, "when I demonstrate the disagreement, I effectively refute their credibility; it's up to you, who maintain their credibility, to demonstrate their agreement." "What disagreement, please, are you going to demonstrate?" "An obvious one," he says, "which nobody can deny."—Don't worry, you can listen to it without a qualm, because you are believers. Pay attention, dearly beloved, and see how sound the apostle's advice is, when he says, *As therefore you received Christ Jesus our Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and confirmed in the faith* (Col 2:3). What we have to do, after all, is to abide firmly in him through the simplicity and assurance of this faith, so that he may open up to us, as faithful believers, the treasure that is hidden in him; as the same apostle says, *In him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden* (Col 2:6-7). He didn't hide them in order to deny them to us, but to rouse our desire for what is hidden.

That's the value of secrets. Respect in him²⁰ what you do not understand yet, and all the more so, the more veils you perceive. Isn't it the case that the more eminently respectable a person is, the more veils and curtains there are hanging in his house? Veils inspire respect for the secret hidden behind them. But for those who show respect the veils are lifted, while those who scoff at the veils are turned out and not allowed anywhere near them. Because we, then, have passed over to Christ, the veil is taken away.²¹

Faith in the scriptures

6. Some people bring up their pettifogging objections, and say, "Matthew, of course, is an evangelist, isn't he?" "Yes," we reply, with pious lips, with

devout hearts, without the slightest hesitation; that's our straight answer: "Matthew is an evangelist." "Do you believe him?" they ask. Does anyone fail to answer, "I do"—as your pious murmurs indicate? Yes, brothers; if you have no qualms about believing, there's nothing you need be ashamed of. I am speaking to you as one who was myself caught out once upon a time, when as a lad I wanted to tackle the divine scriptures with the techniques of clever disputation before bringing to them the spirit of earnest inquiry. In this way I was shutting the door of my Lord against myself by my misplaced attitude; I should have been knocking at it for it to be opened, but instead I was adding my weight to keep it shut.²² I was presuming to seek in my pride what can only be found by humility.

How much more fortunate are you people now! How serenely you learn, how safely, those of you who are still little ones in the nest of faith, being fed with spiritual food. But I, poor wretch, fondly imagining I was ready to fly, left the nest and fell to the ground before I could fly. The Lord, though, in his mercy, to save me from being trampled to death by the passers-by, picked me up and put me back in the nest. You see, I was seriously put out by these very problems which I am about to state and solve for you now, without the slightest qualm, in the name of the Lord.

How is Christ son of Abraham and son of David

7. So, as I was saying, this is how these people bring their quibbling charges: "Matthew," they say, "is an evangelist, and you believe him?" Certainly it follows; we admit he is an evangelist, we are bound to believe him. "Now look at the genealogy of Christ as set out by Matthew: *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham* (Mt 1:1). How is he the son of David, how is he the son of Abraham?" "Well, you can only show how by listing the generations." "We all agree, surely, that when the Lord was born of the Virgin Mary, neither Abraham nor David was still around in the ordinary human way. And you are saying he is the son of David, you are saying he's the son of Abraham, both at the same time?"²³ Suppose we now turn to Matthew and say, "So prove your assertion. What I'm hoping for is a list of Christ's ancestors." *Abraham, he says, begot Isaac. Isaac begot Jacob. Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar. Perez begot Hezron. Hezron begot Ram. Ram begot Amminadab. Amminadab begot Nahshon. Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab. Boaz begot Obed by Ruth. Obed begot Jesse. Jesse begot David the king.*

Now observe how from here on we come from David to Christ, who is called the son of Abraham and the son of David. *David, he continues, begot Solomon by her who had been Uriah's wife. Solomon begot Rehoboam. Rehoboam begot Abijah. Abijah begot Asa. Asa begot Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat begot Joram. Joram begot Uzziah. Uzziah begot Jotham. Jotham begot Ahaz. Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh. Manasseh begot Amon. Amon begot Josiah. Josiah begot Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the migration to*

Babylon. And after the migration to Babylon Jechoniah begot Shealtiel. Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel begot Abiud. Abiud begot Eliakim. Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok. Zadok begot Achim. Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar. Eleazar begot Matthan, Matthan begot Jacob. Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ (Mt 1:2-16). So in this way, by a chain of successive parents and ancestors, we find how Christ is the son of David and the son of Abraham.

The generations from Abraham to Christ

8. Against this faithfully recounted list they bring their first quibbling objection, because the selfsame Matthew goes on to say, *All the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the migration to Babylon fourteen generations; and from the migration to Babylon up to Christ fourteen generations* (Mt 1:17).²⁴ Then he goes on to tell how Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, beginning his account with the words, *Now the birth of Christ was like this* (Mt 1:18). What he had done by the chain of begetters was to spell out why Christ is called the son of David and the son of Abraham.

But now the story has to be told of how he was born and appeared among men. And so the story in fact follows, according to which we believe that our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as being born of the everlasting God, co-eternal with the one who begot him before all times, before every creature, all things being made through him, was also born by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, an equally important part of the faith we confess. Because of course I need hardly remind you, you know it perfectly well (I'm speaking, aren't I, to Catholics, my brothers and sisters), that this is our faith, this is what we profess and confess. For this faith there have been slain thousands of martyrs, all over the world.

Joseph's genuine sense of justice

9. You see, the people who want to undermine the credit of the books of the gospels are always ready to make fun of what follows, as though to show us how simple we are to believe what it says: *When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit. But Joseph her husband, being a just man and unwilling to disgrace her, wished to break off the engagement quietly* (Mt 1:18-19). Because he knew she wasn't pregnant by him, he naturally concluded she had committed adultery. *Being a just man*, as the scripture says, *and unwilling to disgrace her*—that is, make a public example of her, which is what many copies say²⁵—he wished to break off the engagement quietly. He is upset as a husband, of course, but as a just man he does not fall into a rage. This man is credited with such a keen sense of justice, that he would neither agree to have an adulteress as his wife, nor venture to punish her by publicizing the matter. He wished, it says, *to break off the engagement quietly*; he was unwilling not only to punish her, but even to put her to shame.

Observe how genuine his sense of justice was. The reason he wished to spare her was not that he was eager to have her. After all, many men spare their adulterous wives out of carnal love, wanting to keep them in spite of their adultery, in order to enjoy them in carnal desire.²⁶ But this just man does not want to keep her, and thus his love for her is not carnal; and yet he doesn't want to punish her either, and thus he is sparing her out of compassion. What a just man indeed he is! He doesn't keep an adulterous wife, in case he should seem to spare her because he loves her in a lustful manner;²⁷ and yet he neither punishes her nor exposes her to shame. Rightly indeed was he chosen to bear witness to his wife's virginity. So while he was made uneasy by human weakness, he was reassured by divine authority.

The meaning of Jesus

10. This, you see, is how the evangelist continues: *While he was thinking about this, behold the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For what is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. Why Jesus? For he, it goes on, will save his people from their sins* (Mt 1:20-21). So we are given to understand that “Jesus,” a Hebrew name, means “savior” in English,²⁸ which we can gather from the explanation of the name. As though he were asked, you see, “Why Jesus?” he goes on immediately to state the reason: For he will save his people from their sins. This is what we devoutly believe, this is what we firmly maintain, that Christ was born by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary.

Objectors prove useful for the discovery of truth

11. So what do these people say? “If I find a falsehood,” they say, “then obviously you can't believe any of it. Well, I've found one.” Let's see about that. I count the generations; that's what they invite us to do with their quibbling objections, and they actually make us do it. If we are living religious lives, if we believe in Christ, if we are not impatient to fly from the nest before it's time, then they actually make us do this—that we may come to know mysteries. And so your graces should please take note of how useful heretics are, useful that is in the plans of God, who makes good use even of the wicked. According to their way of looking at things, it's true, they are being conceded what they wanted, not the good result God draws from them.

As in the case of Judas; what tremendous good he drew from him! By the Lord's sufferings all the nations have been saved. But that the Lord might suffer, Judas betrayed him. So God both sets the nations free through the death of his Son, and punishes Judas for his crime. So in this case; nobody would probe the deeper meanings that are concealed here, being content with a simple faith, and so nobody would discover them, because nobody would probe them—unless the critical objectors were hammering at the door. When the heretics make their

objections, you see, the little ones are troubled; when they are troubled, they start asking questions. Their questioning is a kind of butting at the mother's breasts with the head, to make them yield as much milk as will satisfy the little ones. They are troubled and they ask questions. But there are others who know and have learned, because they have investigated, and God has opened to them when they have knocked,²⁹ and they themselves open to those who have been troubled. And thus it happens that those objectors prove useful for the discovery of the truth, though they make their objections in order to lead people astray into error. People would be more careless, after all, in the search for truth, if it didn't have its lying opponents. *For it is necessary, it says, that there should be heresies;* and as though we asked why, he immediately added, *in order that those who are genuine among you may be manifested* (1 Cor 11:19).

Generations according to Matthew—42

12. What then are they saying? Here we have Matthew counting the generations, and he says from Abraham to David there are fourteen, and from David to the migration to Babylon fourteen, and from the migration to Babylonia to Christ fourteen. Multiply fourteen by three; you get forty-two. But these people count, and they find forty-one generations, and they bring their charge, and they make fun of us and taunt us: "So what does it mean, when it says in the gospel that there are three fourteens, and yet when we count them all up we don't find forty-two but forty-one?" Without a doubt there is a deep, deep meaning represented here.³⁰ And we are delighted, and we give thanks to God that these critics give us the opportunity to discover something, and the more difficult the hiding of it made the seeking, the more pleasure we may have in the finding. As I said earlier, you see,³¹ we are laying on a show, a spectacular.

Well then, from Abraham to David there are fourteen. From there we begin counting with Solomon, because David begot Solomon. The count begins with Solomon, reaches Jechoniah, in whose lifetime the migration to Babylonia took place, and you have another fourteen generations, counting Solomon at the top of this second division, and also counting Jechoniah, with whom this count ends, to complete fourteen. The third division, however, begins with the same Jechoniah.

Why Jechoniah is counted twice

13. I beg your holinesses to take note of a lovely little secret meaning here. I must confess to you that to my mind it tastes delicious; so I think that when I offer it to you and you taste it, you will pronounce the same judgment. So pay close attention.

Beginning the count of the third division from Jechoniah as far as the Lord Jesus Christ, there are fourteen; because this Jechoniah character, being the last of the previous division and the first of the following division, is counted twice. Someone will say, "Why is Jechoniah counted twice?" Nothing took place in

the past among the people of Israel which was not a mysterious representation of things to come. It is not at all unreasonable to count Jechoniah twice; after all, if there's a boundary between two fields, whether a stone or a dividing wall, the one on this side is measured up to the wall, and the one on the other is measured from it as a starting point.

But then why wasn't this done at the first connection between divisions, where from Abraham we count fourteen generations up to David, and then another fourteen, not repeating David, but beginning to count from Solomon? We must give the reason, which contains a deep meaning. Your holinesses, please pay attention. The migration to Babylon took place when Jechoniah had just been installed as king in the place of his deceased father. The kingdom was taken away from him, and another man was put in his place.³² But all the same, it was during the life of Jechoniah that the migration to live among the nations took place. No fault of Jechoniah's is mentioned, you see, as a reason why he was deprived of the kingdom; but it's all blamed more on those who succeeded him.³³ So the captivity follows, they go off to Babylonia. It's not only the wicked who go, but holy people also go with them. In captivity there we find the prophet Ezekiel, we find Daniel there, and the three youngsters who became famous amid the flames. They all went off to captivity in accordance with the prophecy of the prophet Jeremiah.³⁴

The migration to Babylonia, a foreshadowing of the passage of the gospel for the pagans

14. Bear in mind that Jechoniah was rejected through no fault of his own, and so ceased to reign, and made the passage to the nations with the migration to Babylonia, and then observe that the shape of things to come in Jesus Christ the Lord was thus foreshadowed. The Jews, you see, later on did not want our Lord Jesus Christ to reign over them,³⁵ though they could find no fault in him. He was rejected personally, he was also rejected in his servants, and the passage was made to the nations, as though to Babylonia. This was part of Jeremiah's prophecy, that the Lord was ordering them to go to Babylonia.³⁶ And any other prophets who told the people not to go to Babylonia, Jeremiah spoke against as false prophets. Those who can read the scriptures may confirm for themselves what I say; those who cannot read them must just believe me. So Jeremiah in the name of the Lord uttered threats against those who were unwilling to go off to Babylonia; but to those who went he promised peace there and a certain prosperity in the vineyards and gardens they were to plant and till, and in their abundant produce.³⁷

So how then does the people of Israel, no longer symbolically but now in actual fact, pass over into Babylonia? Where were the apostles from? Weren't they from the Jewish people? Where was Paul from? *For I too, he says, am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin* (Rom 11:1). So then many of the Jews believed³⁸ the Lord. The apostles were chosen from among them; also from among them were the more than five hundred brethren who

were considered worthy to see the Lord after his resurrection.³⁹ From among them were the hundred and twenty in the house when the Holy Spirit came down.⁴⁰ And what does the apostle say in the Acts of the Apostles when the Jews spurned the word of truth? *To you, he says, we had been sent; but since you have spurned the word of God, behold we turn to the nations* (Acts 13:46).⁴¹ So the migration to Babylonia, in terms of the spiritual dispensation,⁴² happened at the time of the Lord's incarnation, and it was this that had been prefigured earlier in the time of Jeremiah.

And what does Jeremiah say to the exiles about these Babylonians? *For in their peace, he says, shall your peace be found* (Jer 29:7). So when Israel again migrated to Babylonia through Christ and the apostles—that is, when the gospel came to the nations—what does the apostle say as though in the voice of a new Jeremiah? *First of all, therefore, I beseech that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings should be made for all men, for kings and those who are set in high positions, in order that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life, with all devotion and purity* (1 Tm 2:1-2). The kings were not yet Christian, and he was praying for them. So Israel praying in Babylonia was heard. The voices of the Church were heard, they did become Christian.⁴³ And now you see fulfilled what was then spoken figuratively: *in their peace shall your peace be found*. They accepted the peace of Christ and stopped persecuting Christians, so that from now on the Churches could be built up⁴⁴ in peace and without anxiety, and peoples could be planted in God's farmland, and all nations could bear fruit in the faith, hope, and charity that is in Christ.

Jechoniah symbolized Christ as the cornerstone

15. The migration at that time to Babylonia occurred through Jechoniah⁴⁵ who was not allowed to be king in the Jewish nation, as a type of Christ whom the Jews refused to have as their king. Israel made the passage to the nations, that is, the preachers of the gospel passed over to the gentile peoples. So why should you be surprised that Jechoniah is counted twice? After all, if he represented Christ passing from the Jews to the Gentiles, recollect what Christ is between the Jews and the Gentiles. Is he not the very cornerstone? Observe in a corner the end of one wall and the beginning of the other. You measure one wall as far as this stone, and from it you measure the other. So the cornerstone, connecting the two walls, is counted twice. So Jechoniah, as representing the Lord, symbolized him as the cornerstone. And just as Jechoniah was not allowed to reign among the Jews but went off to Babylonia, so Christ, *the stone which the builders rejected, has become the head of the corner* (Mk 12:10), in order that the gospel might reach the nations.

Don't hesitate then to count the head of the corner twice, and you get the number that's written. And in this way there are fourteen, and fourteen, and fourteen, and yet there are not forty-two generations but forty-one. Because just as when a series of stones is arranged in a straight line they are all counted once, but when the series is skewed to make a corner, the stone with which the skew

is made must be counted twice, because it belongs both to the series which ends with it and to the series which begins with it; so too with this series of generations. As long as it remained in that people, in its divisions of twice seven, that is of fourteen, it didn't make a corner; but when the series was skewed to migrate to Babylonia, it's as if a kind of corner was made at Jechoniah, so that he has to be counted twice as a type of that other adorable cornerstone.

Christ's ancestry through Joseph

16. Here's another of their niggling objections. Christ's ancestry, they say, is traced through Joseph and not through Mary. May I have your holinesses' attention for a moment? They say it ought not to have been traced through Joseph. Why oughtn't it? Wasn't Joseph Mary's husband? "No," they reply, "who says he is?" Well, scripture says he was her husband, on the angel's authority: *Do not be afraid*, it says, *to take Mary as your wife. For what is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit* (Mt 1:20-21). He is also told to give the child a name, even though it was not born of his own seed. *She will bear a son*, it says, *and you shall call his name Jesus*. Scripture does, of course deliberately state that he was not born of Joseph's seed, when Joseph, anxious about how Mary came to be pregnant, is told, *It is of the Holy Spirit*. And yet he is not deprived of his paternal authority, since he is told to give the child a name. And in any case, the Virgin Mary herself, perfectly well aware that she had not conceived Christ by Joseph's conjugal embrace, still calls him Christ's father.

Joseph, the father of Christ

17. Let me tell you on what occasion. When the Lord Jesus Christ was twelve years old—as a human being, since as God he is before all times and apart from time—he stayed behind in the temple when they left, and went on engaging his elders in discussion, and winning their admiration at his teaching. They were returning from Jerusalem, and looked for him in their company, that is among those they were traveling with. When they didn't find him they went back, very worried, to Jerusalem, and found him discussing things in the temple with the old men, when he was—as I said—twelve years old. But why be surprised? The Word of God is never silent, though he is not always heard. So he is found in the temple, and his mother says to him, *Why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been very worried, looking for you. And he said, Did you not know that I have to be about my Father's business?* (Lk 2:48-49). He said this because he was the Son of God in the temple of God. That temple, after all, wasn't Joseph's but God's.

"So there you are," somebody says; "he didn't agree that he was Joseph's son." Now just a little more patience, please, brothers, because we haven't much time and we want it to last the sermon.⁴⁶ When Mary said *Your father and I have been very worried looking for you*, he answered, *Did you not know that I have to be about my Father's business?* because he was not willing to be their son in

such a way that they didn't realize he was the Son of God. The Son of God is always the Son of God, the one who created them, after all. But as son of man, born in time of the virgin without seed of her husband, he still had each of them as a parent. How do we prove this? Mary has already said, *Your father and I have been very worried, looking for you.*

Mary's modesty

18. In the first place, brothers, we should not pass over in silence such saintly modesty as Mary's, especially for the lesson it offers for the ladies, our sisters.⁴⁷ She had given birth to Christ, the angel had come to her and told her, *Behold, you shall conceive in the womb, and you shall bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called Son of the Most High* (Lk 1:31-32). She had been found worthy to bear the Son of the Most High, and she was so humble. She didn't put herself before her husband even in the order she mentioned them in, and say "I and your father," but "Your father and I" is what she said. She took no notice of the dignity of her womb, but she paid attention to the right order of marriage. The humble Christ, after all, would never have taught his mother to be proud. *Your father and I have been very worried, looking for you.* "Your father," she says, "and I"; because the head of the woman is the man.⁴⁸ How much less reason, then, for other women to be proud!

Mary too, you see, was called "a woman,"⁴⁹ not suggesting any loss of virginity, but simply using the word proper to her sex. The apostle says of the Lord Jesus Christ, *Made of a woman*; but for all that, he did not cancel the article of our faith in which we confess that he was born of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary. For it was as a virgin that she conceived, as a virgin that she gave birth, and a virgin that she remained. But they called all females "women," according to the usage of the Hebrew language. Here is the clearest example. The first female, whom God made of the rib taken from the man's side, was already called "woman" even before she slept with the man, which happened, we are told, after they had departed from paradise; scripture says, *He fashioned it into a woman* (Gn 2:22).

Christ does not deny Joseph as father

19. So when the Lord Jesus Christ answers *I had to be about my Father's business*, while he is indicating that God is his Father, he is not thereby denying that Joseph is his father too. How can we prove this? By the scripture, which puts it like this: *And he said to them, Did you not know that I had to be about my Father's business? But they did not understand what it was he said to them. And when he had gone down with them, he came to Nazareth and was subject to them* (Lk 2:49-51). It doesn't say, "He was subject to his mother," or "He was subject to her," but it says "He was subject to them." Who was he subject to? To his parents, surely. They were both his parents, and he was subject to them, seeing fit to be so just as he saw fit to be the son of man.

Just now it was the ladies receiving instructions; now it's the children's turn, to accept the example of respecting their parents and being subject to them. The whole world is subject to Christ; Christ is subject to his parents.

Son and Lord of David

20. So you see, brothers, when he said *I have to be about my Father's business*, he did not mean us to take him as saying "You are not my parents." They, though, are his parents in time, that Father is so eternally. They are the parents of the son of man. He is the Father of the Word and of his Wisdom, the Father of his power,⁵⁰ through which he formed everything. If everything is formed through that which reaches mightily from end to end and disposes all things sweetly,⁵¹ then they too were formed through the Son of God, they to whom he himself would later on be subject as son of man.

And the apostle calls him the son of David: *whom he had*, he says, *from the seed of David, according to the flesh* (Rom 1:3). As a matter of fact, the Lord himself put this problem to the Jews, and the apostle solves it here in these very words. After saying *whom he had from the seed of David*, he adds *according to the flesh* in order precisely to have us understand that according to the divinity he is not the son of David, but the Son of God, the Lord of David. This is how the apostle speaks somewhere else, when he wanted to speak in favor of the Jewish stock: *whose are the fathers, he says, of whom is Christ according to the flesh, who is God above all things, blessed for ever* (Rom 9:5). *According to the flesh* means "son of David"; *God above all things, blessed for ever* means "Lord of David."

So the Lord says to the Jews, *Whose son do you say the Christ is? They answered, David's.* They knew that perfectly well, they could gather it easily enough from the preaching of the prophets. And indeed he was *from the seed of David*, but *according to the flesh*, through the virgin Mary, married to Joseph. So when they answered that Christ was the son of David, Jesus said to them, *So how does David in the spirit call him Lord, saying: The Lord said to my lord, Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies under your feet? So if David in the spirit calls him Lord, how is he his son?* (Mt 22:42-46; Ps 110:1) And the Jews couldn't answer. That's what we have in the gospel. He did not deny he was the son of David, even though they were unaware that he was the Lord of David. What they held to about the Christ was that he came to be in time; what they did not understand about him was that he is in eternity. So therefore, wishing to teach them about his divinity, he put a problem to them about his humanity, as though to say, "You know that the Christ is the son of David; answer and tell me how he can also be the Lord of David." But to prevent them saying "He isn't David's Lord," he quoted David himself as a witness. And what does *he* say? He says the truth, of course. On the one hand you have that place in the psalms where he says to David, *I will place of the fruit of your body upon your throne* (Ps 132:11). There you have "son of David." And how is the one who is the son of David also "Lord of David"? *The Lord said to my lord*, he

says, *Sit at my right* (Ps 110:1). Are you surprised at David having his son as his Lord, when you see Mary has given birth to her Lord? David's Lord, because he's God; David's Lord, because he's everyone's; but David's son, on the other hand, because he's the son of man. One and the same person who's Lord and who's son: David's Lord, because *since he was in the form of God, he did not think it robbery to be equal to God*; David's son, because *he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave* (Phil 2:6-7).

Married love

21. So we can't say that Joseph wasn't a father, just because he never slept with the mother of the Lord—as though it were lust that made someone into a wife, and not married love. Would your holinesses please pay attention. Some time later Christ's apostle in the Church was going to say, *It remains that these who have wives should be as though they had none* (1 Cor 7:29). And we know many brothers and sisters bearing much fruit in grace, who by mutual consent withhold from each other in the name of Christ the desire of the flesh, but do not withhold from each other their mutual married love. The more the former is held in check, the stronger grows the latter. Aren't there couples who live like that, not looking for the joys of the flesh from each other, not demanding from each other the debt of desire? And yet she is subject to her husband, as is only proper. And the more truly so, the more chaste she is; and he genuinely loves his wife, as it is written, *in honor and sanctification* (1 Thess 4:4), as a fellow heir of grace, *just as Christ*, it says, *loved the Church* (Eph 5:25). So if the bond exists, if there is a marriage, if you can't say there isn't a marriage just because that act is not performed which can also be performed, but unlawfully, outside marriage (and if only all couples could live like that, but many can't⁵²), then these people should not unjoin couples who can so live, and not deny that he is a husband or she is a wife, just because they don't come together in the flesh, but are tied together in their hearts.

The procreation of children

22. From this, my brothers, you should get some idea of what scripture thought about those ancestors of ours⁵³ who were married with the sole intention of obtaining offspring from their wives. So chaste were they in their relations with their wives, even though according to the popular custom of the time they had several, that they never went in to them for carnal intercourse except for the sake of procreation, thus really and truly holding them in honor.

But anyone who desires his wife's body for more than is prescribed by this limit (the purpose of procreating children) is going against the very contract with which he married her.⁵⁴ The contract is recited, it's read out in the presence of all the witnesses, and what's read out is: "for the sake of procreating children"; and it's called the matrimonial contract. Unless this were what wives are given away and taken for, who with any sense of shame would give away his daughter

to another's lust? But to save parents from being ashamed when they give away their daughters, the contract is read out, to make them fathers-in-law, not whoremongers. So what's read out in the contract? "For the sake of procreating children." The father's brow clears, his face is saved when he hears the words of the contract. Let's consider the face of the man who is taking a wife. The husband too should be ashamed to take her on any other terms, if her father is ashamed to give her away on any other terms.

But if they can't manage it (I mentioned this a moment ago), let them demand the debt, but don't let them go beyond their debtors. Both the woman and the man may relieve their weakness with each other. Don't let him go to another woman, don't let her go to another man (that's where adultery gets its name from, as much as to say *ad alterum*, to another⁵⁵). Even if they go beyond the limits of the matrimonial bargain, don't let them go beyond the limits of the matrimonial bed. Is it really not a sin, to demand the debt from your marriage partner more than is required for the procreation of children? It is indeed a sin, though a venial one. The apostle says *But I say this as a permission* (1 Cor 7:6).⁵⁶ When he was talking about this whole matter he said, *Do not deprive one another, except by consent for a time in order to be free for prayer; and come together again, lest Satan should tempt you through your lack of moderation* (1 Cor 7:5). What does that mean? Don't impose upon yourselves beyond your strength, lest by refraining from each other you lapse into adulterous liaisons. *Lest Satan should tempt you through your lack of moderation.* And in case he should appear to be ordering what he was allowing (it's one thing to give orders to strength, another to make allowances for weakness), he immediately added, *But I say this as a permission, not as a command. For I would like all men to be like me* (1 Cor 7:6-7); as though to say, "I'm not telling you to do this, but I'm pardoning you if you do."

Sustaining the human

23. So, my brothers, think hard about this. Take these great men who only have wives for the sake of getting children, and such we learn the patriarchs were according to the indisputable evidence of so many pages of holy scripture; so if men who only have wives for the purpose of getting children, if they could be shown a way of having children without sexual intercourse, wouldn't they embrace such a blessing with unspeakable joy? Wouldn't they be tremendously happy to receive it?⁵⁷

You see, there are two works of the flesh which keep the human race going; holy and prudent people lower themselves to these works out of duty, the foolish plunge into them through greed. It's one thing to lower oneself to something out of duty, quite another to fall into it through greed. What are these things that keep the human race going? The first, for each one of us individually, which pertains to the taking of nourishment (which cannot be taken, of course, without a certain amount of sensual pleasure), is eating and drinking; if you don't do it, you die. So this is one of the props which sustain the human race in existence, in accordance with its own proper nature—eating and drinking.

But this prop sustains people in existence simply as individuals. They don't provide for a succession of generations by eating and drinking, but by marrying wives. So that's how the human race keeps going—first, so that people may just keep alive. But because, of course, they can't live for ever, however much care they bestow on the body, provision is therefore made for those who are dying to be succeeded by those who are being born. In this respect the human race, as it says somewhere, is rather like the leaves of a tree; of an olive tree, though, or bay tree, or any other evergreen, which is never without foliage, but yet doesn't always have the same leaves. As it says in that place, the tree sheds some while it produces others;⁵⁸ the ones that are opening succeed the ones that are falling. It's always shedding leaves, it's always clothed with leaves. So with the human race: it doesn't feel the loss of those who die every day, because they are being made up for by those who are being born. Thus the whole species of the human race continues in its proper manner, and just as there are always leaves to be seen on a tree of that sort, so the earth is always evidently full of human beings. If however they only died and weren't born, then the earth would be stripped of all people, as some kinds of trees are stripped of all their leaves.

Duty and lust

24. So then, since the human race carries on like this, necessarily relying on these two props, about which enough has been said, the wise and prudent and faithful person lowers himself to each out of duty, and doesn't dive in out of lust. How many people plunge ravenously into the business of eating and drinking, staking their whole lives on it as though it were the very reason for living! While in fact the reason they eat is to live, they think the reason they live is to eat. Every wise and sensible person finds fault with such people, and so especially does the divine scripture, as gluttons and drunkards and guzzlers, *whose god is their belly* (Phil 3:19). What brings them to the table is the lust of the flesh, not the need of restoring the tissues. And thus these people fall upon their food and drink. But those who sit down to their victuals out of the duty of staying alive do not live in order to eat, but eat in order to live. And so if these sensible and moderate people were offered the chance of staying alive without food and drink, how joyfully they would embrace this blessing, being no longer obliged to lower themselves to what they had never been in the habit of plunging into! Instead they would always be hanging upon the Lord, their attention to him never flagging because of the need to shore up the ruins of the body.⁵⁹

How do you imagine the holy Elijah took it, when he received a cup of water and a bread roll, to last him as nourishment for forty days?⁶⁰ Surely, with great pleasure and relief, since he was in the habit of eating and drinking because it was his duty to stay alive, not because he was the slave of greed. Now try offering the same benefit if you could—to someone who has set the whole of his happiness and good fortune in feasting, like a pig in the feeding trough. He loathes your so-called benefit, he refuses it utterly, he regards it as a punishment. So too in this other conjugal duty, sensual men don't look for wives for any

other reason, and that's why in the long run they are hardly satisfied even with their wives. Well if they can't or won't eliminate this sensual lust, if only they wouldn't allow it to go beyond the debt they and their wives owe each other, or even beyond what is conceded to human weakness! But obviously if you asked such a man "Why are you marrying a wife?" he would no doubt answer, out of a sense of shame, "For the sake of children." Then if someone he could have no hesitation in trusting were to tell him, "God is able to give you children, and most certainly will give them to you, even if you don't perform that act with your wife," that would certainly have him cornered, and he would have to confess that it isn't for the sake of children that he was looking for a wife. So let him admit his weakness, and accept that he was only pretending to accept a wife out of a sense of duty.⁶¹

Polygamy in the Old Testament

25. In this way those saints of old, men of God, looked for children, wanted to have children. This was the one purpose for which they united themselves with women, they had intercourse with women—in order to beget children. This was the reason they were allowed to have several. After all, if unrestrained sensuality were pleasing to God, one woman in those days would have been allowed to have several husbands, just as one man was allowed several wives. Why did none of those chaste women ever have more than one husband, while a man had several wives, if not because one man having several wives can result in a numerous progeny, whereas one woman will not be able to bear more children just by having more husbands?⁶² It follows then, brothers, that if our ancestors coupled with women and had intercourse with them for no other purpose than the begetting of children, they would have been absolutely delighted if they could have had children without that act of the flesh, seeing that it was for the sake of having them that they condescended to it out of duty, and did not plunge into it out of lust.

Can it mean then that Joseph wasn't a father, just because he had a son without any act of carnal desire? Far be it from Christian chastity to think so, seeing that Judaism didn't think so either. Love your wives, but love them chastely. Make use of the sexual act to the extent of begetting children. And because there is no other way in which you can have children, bring yourselves down to it with regret. It is, after all, the punishment of that Adam from whom we all trace our origin.⁶³ Don't let's congratulate ourselves about our punishment. It was a fitting punishment for one who deserved to reproduce mortal offspring, because he had made himself mortal by his sin. God has not removed that punishment, because he wants man to remember what he is being recalled from and what he is being called to; and he wants him to seek that ultimate embrace in which there cannot be any corruption.

Adoption

26. So a high birth rate was a necessity in that people up to the coming of Christ, to secure a numerous population in which could be prefigured all the models and examples of the Church that had to be prefigured.⁶⁴ That's why they had the duty to marry wives, through whom the population could increase, and in that population the Church of the future⁶⁵ could be prefigured.

But when the king of all the nations was born, the special honor of virginity started with the mother of the Lord, who was not only found worthy to have a son, but also found worthy not to lose her virginity. Such then was the style of that marriage, a marriage without any carnal corruption;⁶⁶ so why should not the husband in this marriage chastely receive as his own what his wife chastely gave birth to? Just as she was chastely a wife, so was he chastely a husband; and just as she was chastely a mother, so was he chastely a father. So anyone who says, "He oughtn't to be called a father, because he didn't beget his son," is more interested in satisfying lust in the procreation of children than in repressing the sentiment of love. Joseph achieved much more satisfactorily in spirit what another man desires to achieve in the flesh. After all, people who adopt children beget them chastely in the heart, though they cannot do so in the flesh.

Just look, brothers, just look at the rights conferred by adoption, how a man becomes the son of someone whose seed he was not born from, and as a result the one who adopts him has by this act of will more rights over him than the one who begot him has by nature. That being the case, then, not only did Joseph have every right to be called a father, he had the greatest possible right. After all, men also beget children of women who are not their wives, and they are called natural children, and children born in wedlock are given preference over them. As far as the carnal act goes, they are conceived and born in exactly the same way. So why are these given preference, if it isn't because the love of the wife of whom the lawful children⁶⁷ are born is the more chaste? The distinction is not based on carnal intercourse, which is the same in the case of both women. How is the wife superior, except in her sense of fidelity, her sense of the marriage bond, her sense of a more genuine and a chaster love? So if anyone could get children of his wife without intercourse, should he not do so all the more joyfully, the more pure she is whom he loves the more dearly?

The father of Joseph?

27. From this you must go on to observe that it can happen that one man not only has two sons, but also two fathers. We've mentioned adoption, so the possibility will naturally cross your minds. They say, don't they, "A man can have two sons, but he can't have two fathers"? Well, now we find he can even have two fathers, one who begot him from his seed, the other who adopted him out of love. So if one man can have two fathers, Joseph also could have had two fathers, being begotten by one, adopted by the other.

If this could have been the case, why do these people raise the objection that Matthew gives one genealogy, Luke another? Indeed it's true, we do find a

different genealogy given by each. Matthew said Jacob was the father of Joseph, Luke said Eli was. It could of course be the case that the one man whose son Joseph was had two names. But because they list different grandfathers and great-grandfathers and other remoter ancestors, and in their lists one has more names and one fewer, it's quite clear that Joseph had two fathers. That disposes of this objection—because it has been plainly and rationally demonstrated that it is perfectly possible to have one father who begot you, another who adopted you. So with two fathers established for Joseph, it's hardly surprising if different grandfathers and great-grandfathers and other ancestors are listed, going back from the two different fathers.

Adoption in scripture

28. Nor should you suppose that the custom of adoption is foreign to our scriptures, as though it were something in the traditional laws of humankind that is worthy of censure, and so cannot be reconciled with the authority of the divine books. Adoption is something that has a long history, and is familiar to the documents of the Church,⁶⁸ that a son can be had by favor of a free choice as well as by natural begetting. After all, women too used to adopt children born of maidservants from their husbands' seed, if they themselves had borne none; indeed they even ordered their husbands to have children by their maids, like Sarah, like Rachel, like Leah.⁶⁹ In performing this duty their husbands were not committing adultery because they were obeying their wives in a matter related to the conjugal debt, in accordance with what the apostle says, *It is not the wife who has authority over her body, but the husband; likewise it is not the husband who has authority over his body, but the wife* (1 Cor 7:4). Moses too, born of a Hebrew mother and then exposed, was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter.⁷⁰ To be sure, they didn't have the legal formulae that are in use now, but the choice of will was held to have the force of law; as the apostle says somewhere else, *The Gentiles who do not have the law perform by nature what the law requires* (Rom 2:14).

Well, if women were allowed to claim as their own children ones they had not given birth to themselves, why should men not be allowed to claim as their own ones they had not begotten with their physical seed, but with adoptive love? We read, after all, that the patriarch Jacob himself, father of so many sons, nonetheless made his grandsons, the sons of Joseph, into his own sons, saying, *These two shall be mine, and they shall receive land with their brothers; any others you beget may be yours* (Gn 48:5-6). Unless, of course, someone wants to say that the word "adoption" is not found in the holy scriptures—as though it made any difference what word is used when the thing itself is there, and a woman has a son whom she did not bear in the flesh, and a man has another whom he did not beget in the flesh! I, certainly, will make no objection if he doesn't want to call Joseph an adopted son—provided he grants that he could have been the son of a man he wasn't born from in the flesh.

Though as a matter of fact the apostle Paul does repeatedly employ the word

"adoption," and very significantly. For since scripture testifies that our Lord Jesus Christ is the only Son of God, it says that his brothers and fellow heirs, whom he is pleased to have, become so through a kind of adoption by divine grace: *When the fullness of time had come*, he says, *God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive sonship by adoption* (Gal 4:4-5). And in another place: *We groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies* (Rom 8:23). And again, when he was saying about the Jews, *I myself would choose to be anathema from Christ for my brothers, my relatives in the flesh, who are Israelites, he goes on, whose is the adoption and the glory and the covenant and the giving of the law, whose are the fathers, of whom is Christ according to the flesh, who is God above all things, blessed for ever* (Rom 9:3-5). This shows that either the word "adoption," or at least the reality, was of long standing among the Jews, like the covenant and the giving of the law, which he mentions in the same breath.

Difference in Matthew and Luke

29. Here we can add that there was another way, peculiar to the Jews, by which someone could become the son of a man he was not sprung from in the flesh. Kinsmen used to marry the wives of their kinsmen who had died childless, to raise up seed for the deceased. So the one who was born would be the son both of the man he was born of, and of the man he was born to succeed.⁷¹

I have said all this in case anyone should insist that you cannot rightly list two fathers of one and the same person, and then go on to bring a sacrilegious charge of lying against one or other of the evangelists who relate the genealogy of the Lord; especially because we can see that we are advised about this by the very words they employ. Thus Matthew, who is understood to mention the father Joseph was begotten by, lists the generations like this: "So-and-so begot So-and-so," until he reaches the point where he says at the end, *Jacob begot Joseph* (Mt 1:16). Luke on the other hand—because a son by adoption is not properly said to be begotten, and neither is one who succeeds to a dead man by being born of the woman who had been his wife—Luke did not say "Eli begot Joseph," or "Joseph whom Eli begot," but *Who was the son of Eli* (Lk 3:23), whether by adoption, or by being begotten by a kinsman to be the dead man's heir.

The line of Joseph

30. So now, enough has been said to show why it shouldn't bother us that the ancestry of Christ is reckoned through Joseph and not through Mary; it's because, just as she was a mother without carnal desire, so he was a father without carnal intercourse. So the generations come down through him and they go up back through him.⁷² And we mustn't cut him out of the list, just because there was no carnal desire in his case. We should allow that his greater purity confirms his fatherhood, or we might find ourselves rebuked by Saint Mary

herself. She refused to put her own name before her husband's, but said, *Your father and I have been very worried looking for you* (Lk 2:48). So these wrong-headed fault-finders shouldn't do what his chaste wife never did. So let us count the generations through Joseph, because just as he is a husband in a chaste way, so too he is a father in a chaste way.

But let us put the man before the woman, according to the order of nature and of God's law. You see, if we cut him out and set her up at the head of the list, he can say, and say with every justification, "Why have you cut me out? Why don't the generations come down or go back up through me?" Can you really say to him, "Because you didn't beget him with a carnal act of your own"? Then he will answer, "Well, but did she give him birth through a carnal act of her own?" What the Holy Spirit achieved, he achieved in both of them. *Since he was a just man* (Mt 1:19), it says. So, a just man, a just woman. The Holy Spirit came to rest in the justice of both of them, and gave both of them a son. But through the sex whose function it was to give birth he brought this about in such a way that the son would also be born to the husband. So the angel tells both of them to give the child a name;⁷³ this establishes the authority of the parents. For with Zachary too, while he was still dumb, it was the mother who gave the newborn son a name; and when those who were present signaled to the father what he wanted him called, he took a writing pad and wrote what she had already said.⁷⁴ Mary is told, *Behold, you shall conceive a son, and you shall call his name Jesus*. And Joseph too is told, *Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary for your wife. For what is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus; he is the one who will save his people from their sins*. It also says, *And she bore him a son* (Mt 1:25),⁷⁵ which as plainly as can be confirms his position as father, not by the flesh but by love. So he is indeed a father, in his own proper way.

The evangelists, you see, count the generations through him and pick their words with the greatest care and good sense, whether it's Matthew coming down from Abraham to Christ, or Luke going back up from Christ through Abraham to God. One counts downward, the other back upward, both through Joseph. Why? Because he's the father. Why is he the father? Because he is all the more definitely and solidly the father, the more chastely he is the father. It's true he was thought to be the father of our Lord Jesus Christ in another way, the same way as other men are fathers, begetting children in the flesh, not having them only by spiritual affection. Luke, you see, said, *Who was thought to be the father of Jesus* (Lk 3:23). Why was he thought to be? Because people naturally assumed what is usually done by men. So the Lord is not sprung from the seed of Joseph, though this was thought to be the case; and yet there was born of the Virgin Mary, to the piety and love of Joseph, a son, who was at the same time the Son of God.

The generations according to Matthew and Luke

31. But why did Matthew count the generations downward, and Luke count them upward? Listen why, please, as attentively as the Lord enables you to, your

minds now quite serene and free from the trouble of knotty and hostile objections. Matthew comes down through the generations, to signify our Lord Jesus Christ coming down from heaven to bear the burden of our sins, that all nations might be blessed in the seed of Abraham.⁷⁶ That's why he didn't begin with Adam—the whole human race comes from him, nor with Noah, because again the whole human race sprang from his family after the flood. The fulfillment of prophecy is not connected with the fact of the man Christ Jesus⁷⁷ being from Adam, from whom all human beings spring too; nor his being from Noah, who again is the ancestor of all. But it is connected with his being descended from Abraham, who was chosen at a time when the earth was already full of nations, that all nations might be blessed in his seed.

Luke, on the other hand, goes back upward, and he doesn't begin to list the generations from his account of the Lord's birth, but from the place where he tells the story of his baptism by John. In his incarnation the Lord undertook to bear the burden of the sins of the human race; so too in his baptismal consecration he undertook the task of expiating them. So Matthew signifies Christ coming down to bear our sins by counting the generations downward; Luke signifies Christ going up to expiate sins⁷⁸ by counting the generations upward—our sins, of course, not his own. The former, though, comes down the list through Solomon, whose mother David sinned with; the latter goes up the list through Nathan, another of David's sons, through whom he was purged of his sin.⁷⁹ For we read that Nathan was sent to him to rebuke him, so that he might be healed by repentance. Both lines meet in David, one coming down, the other going up; and from there as far as Abraham—or from Abraham as far as David—they don't vary from each other in any generation. In this way Christ, the son of David and the son of Abraham, goes back to God;⁸⁰ and back to God, of course, we have to be led by the deletion of our sins and our renewal in baptism.

The number forty

32. In the generations listed by Matthew the number forty clearly stands out. You see, the divine scriptures have the habit of not usually taking into account whatever exceeds certain round numbers. Thus, for example, the people of Israel is said to have returned home out of Egypt after four hundred years, when in fact it was four hundred and thirty.⁸¹ Thus here, the one generation that exceeds the number forty does not detract from this number's importance. Now this number stands for the life of toil we lead on this earth as long as we are in exile away from the Lord,⁸² the life in which arrangements are needed for preaching the truth in time.⁸³ This is because the number ten, which stands for the perfection of bliss, multiplied by four representing the fourfold nature of time and the fourfold nature of the world,⁸⁴ makes the number forty. That's why Moses fasted for forty days, and Elijah, and the mediator himself, our Lord Jesus Christ;⁸⁵ because in this time-bound state of ours restraint from bodily attractions and allurements is very necessary. The people also spent forty years wandering in the desert, and forty days of rain produced the flood.⁸⁶ The Lord spent forty days

after his resurrection with his disciples, to convince them of the reality of his risen body;⁸⁷ thus suggesting that in this life, in which we are in exile away from the Lord, the number forty stands, as I have just said, for our need to celebrate the memorial of the Lord's body, which we do in the Church until he comes (1 Cor 11:26).⁸⁸

So then, since our Lord came down to this state of life, and *the Word was made flesh* (Jn 1:14) in order to be handed over for our transgressions and to rise again *for our justification* (Rom 4:25), Matthew employed the number forty, undeterred by the one generation which exceeds the number forty (just as those odd thirty years don't detract from the perfection of four hundred). Or else you could say that this generation signifies that by the same token as they add up to forty-one, the Lord came down to this state of life to bear our sins, in such a way that he turns out to be an exception to this state of life, given his unique and peculiar privilege of being man in such a way that he is also God. About him alone, after all, it is said, what never could or ever can be said about any other holy person, however perfect in wisdom and justice, that *the Word became flesh* (Jn 1:14).

Luke lists 77 generations

33. Luke though, who goes back up through the generations from the baptism of the Lord, completes the number seventy-seven, beginning from our Lord Jesus Christ himself, going back through Joseph, and finally reaching God through Adam. He does so because this number signifies the blotting out of all sins, which is accomplished in baptism; not that the Lord himself had anything needing to be forgiven in baptism, but that in his humility he gave us an example of what would be useful for us. It's true that that was only John's baptism; nonetheless it was the occasion for a manifestation of the Trinity of Father and Son and Holy Spirit, by which was consecrated Christ's baptism, with which future Christians were to be baptized;⁸⁹ the Father manifested in the voice which came from heaven, the Son in the human person of the mediator himself, the Holy Spirit in the dove.

Symbolic meaning of 77

34. But why should the number seventy-seven contain all the sins that are forgiven in baptism? A likely reason occurs to me as follows: the number ten has in it the perfection of justice and bliss, when the sevenfold creature clings closely to the three persons of the creator; that's why the decalogue of the law finds its consecration in ten commandments.⁹⁰ But the transgression of ten is signified by the number eleven, and transgression means sin, when man, hankering after something more, goes beyond the measure of justice. That's why the apostle says that avarice is the root of all evils.⁹¹ And the soul that goes a-for-nicating away from God is told in the name of the same Lord, "You were hoping that if you parted company with me, you would have something extra."⁹² How

the one who sins refers his sin, that is, his transgression, to himself, because he wants to enjoy something as his very own private property (that's why those are blamed who seek what is their own and not what is Jesus Christ's,⁹³ while charity that does not seek its own is praised⁹⁴); and that's why this number eleven, which signifies transgression, is not multiplied by ten but by seven to produce seventy-seven. Transgression, after all, is proper to the creature, that is to man, not to the three persons of the creator. And it is the creature that is displayed by the number seven: three, because of the soul, in which there is a certain image of the three persons of the creator, that being where man was made to the image of God; and four because of the body, since as everyone knows, the body consists of the four elements.⁹⁵ And anybody who doesn't know what the four elements are can easily observe that the body of the world, in which our bodies move about from place to place, has four principal quarters, which the divine scripture is also constantly mentioning—East and West, South and North.

Sins, however, are committed either in spirit, as in some sheer act of will, or also in visible actions of the body, and therefore the prophet Amos repeatedly reminds us of God saying threateningly, *For three disloyalties and for four I will not turn you away* (Am 1:3.6.9.11.13; 2:1.4.6), which means "I will not pretend not to notice"; for three, because of the spirit's nature, and for four, because of the body's—the two things man consists of.

How to read sacred scripture

35. Thus seven times eleven, being as we have said the overstepping of justice attributed to man as sinner, makes the number seventy-seven, and this signifies the total number of the sins that are forgiven through baptism. That's why Luke goes back up to God through seventy-seven generations, showing that man is reconciled to God through the abolition of all sins. For the same reason, when Peter asked how often he should forgive his brother, the Lord himself said, *I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.*⁹⁶

No doubt other truths can be extracted from these hidden treasures of the mysteries of God,⁹⁷ by minds more thorough going and worthier than mine. All the same, I have said what I could, according to my capabilities, to the extent that the Lord helped me—to the extent that he has given me what to say—and as much as our limited time allowed. If any of you is eager⁹⁸ for more, you must knock at the door of the one from whom I too have received what I have been able to grasp and to express. Above all, don't forget this: not to be unduly troubled when you don't yet understand the holy scriptures; when you do understand them, not to get a swollen head. Instead, respectfully put to one side anything you don't understand, and anything you do understand hold firmly to in a spirit of love.

NOTES

1. The title of the sermon is not an accurate description of the contents of the sermon. Only at the end does he harmonize the two gospel genealogies. The central point he makes is his explanation of an inconsistency within Matthew's genealogy. From that he proceeds to a long consideration of sexual morality within marriage. The problems this raises for us today are briefly discussed in the appropriate notes.

A word may be said here about Augustine's style of biblical interpretation, and especially about his ideas on the meaning of numbers. It will all seem very strange to modern readers, but it has its own proper coherence, and also in my view something of permanent value. In the first place, Augustine's concern to save the scriptures from the charge of falsehood, or even of merely being mistaken, is one that any Christian interpreter ought to share. Nowadays this concern for the most part seems to be taken seriously by few scholars except the fundamentalists. I think the value of Augustine's method—which was common form with nearly all the Fathers—is that it shows that fundamentalist literalism is not the way to safeguard the inspired veracity of the scriptures. There are other and better ways, which imply and require of us profounder and more widely ranging conceptions of what is meant by truth. These will allow us to accept the likelihood that scriptural texts may mean much more than they appear to mean on the surface; above all that they may mean much more than we are able to grasp at any given time. This is a point Augustine is constantly making, as at the end of this sermon, when after his little *jeu d'esprit* with the numbers involved in the genealogies, he invites his listeners to look for other meanings too, which he has not been able to discover.

How seriously did he take his playing around with numbers? My answer would be that he took it about as seriously as crossword puzzles are taken by addicts, or chess by chess buffs. It was an irresistible challenge to intellectual agility, it was a kind of battle of wits with the divine wisdom that scattered these obscure clues through the divine scriptures, it was a game to be enjoyed—but a game with a serious motive, namely the discovery and display of God's saving truth.

This sermon was not preached on an ordinary weekday or Sunday, but either on the octave of Christmas, or the Epiphany, that is, on either 1 or 6 January, 418. I am not sure why the scholars are so definite about the year. There is no positive internal evidence for any particular year; there are, indeed, two points which would incline me to date it several years earlier. First, his assuming without much hesitation that the conversion of the Roman empire had been a straightforward fulfilment of prophecies; secondly his apparent assertion that the necessity of sexual intercourse was a punishment for the sin of Adam. Now these are two views, or should we say two attitudes he shared with most of his contemporaries, on which he came to change his mind—the crucial years for the evolution of his ideas being the first decade of the fifth century. So I think there is a case for putting the sermon back before 410. But no certainty is possible.

The scholars make no suggestion about the place where the sermon was preached. Again, there are no definite indications. It was in a city big enough to put on games in the amphitheater, but there were many such in North Africa. This is one of the few sermons in which Augustine gives us a brief reminiscence of his youth. I like to think he would have felt less embarrassment about doing that at home in Hippo where he was among people he knew well. But that is just a hunch—and a man less prone to feeling embarrassed than Augustine it would be hard to find.

2. It is unlikely that these games included gladiatorial combats, as the Italian edition suggests. These had been forbidden for some time by the imperial law of the Christian emperors. Nor does Augustine mention gladiators in his allusions to what went on at these shows. What he refers to later on is *venatores*, hunters, men fighting wild beasts, paid performers, the precursors, perhaps, of Spanish bull-fighters.

3. *Hodie contempserunt*; I treat *hodie* as the object of the verb *contempserunt*, but I admit that this is unusual grammar, *hodie* being properly an adverb formed from the ablative case. But I cannot see how else to take it here. The expression suggests that "today" was not just an ordinary day, but at least a minor feast, either the octave of Christmas or the Epiphany, which was not as important in the Latin Churches as Christmas was. The sentence also suggests that Augustine knew many of

the congregation personally—another reason for supposing that he was preaching at home in Hippo.

4. *Consuerunt*. He is making a pun, because this can be the third plural perfect of both *consuo*, to sew together, and of *consuesco*, to be in the habit of.

5. The comparison is with the shows in the amphitheater or stadium, where the hunters had their fans and supporters in the crowds attending.

6. *Carnarium*, of carnal people. I don't think these are simply to be identified with the enemies of the martyrs. His distinction between these and the *spirituales* runs even through the ranks of the Christians who were on the side of the martyrs (see 1 Cor 3:1ff). The materially minded merely saw the torments which the martyrs endured, and either gloated over them if they were pagan enemies, or were appalled and horrified at them if they were Christian friends. The spiritually minded, however, saw beyond the terrible torments to the Christ-like heroism of the martyrs, and rejoiced at this with the sufferers.

7. Detestation for the martyrs (their pagan enemies); horror at their dreadful fate (their Christian sympathizers).

8. The Acts or Passions of the martyrs were read on their feast days—accounts of their arrest, trial, tortures, and execution.

9. Unlike your favorite hunter in the stadium (or your favorite football team or boxer).

10. See 1 Pt 3:18ff.

11. Reading *illis*, with the text of the *Révue Bénédictine* (RB) 91 (1981), instead of *illius*—just "his body"—with the Maurist text.

12. Put there when they were baptized and confirmed.

13. Presumably because they would have won their bets.

14. Meaning either that there is no more dreadful hunter than he in the whole world, or (more likely, I think) that the whole world is what he hunts.

15. It could be translated "became the Son of man." Augustine is of course making use of that gospel expression by which Jesus so often refers to himself. But he always treats it (not entirely adequately, but that is beside the point) as merely signifying the humanity of Jesus, as meaning just a human being. And that is what he seems to intend by it here.

16. As divine.

17. It is not entirely clear where Christ's little speech ends; it could be after the next sentence. In spite of appearances to the contrary ("Christ had to be a man," "to show his preference for the male sex"), Augustine is here stating the essential equality of the sexes in the teeth of the extreme male chauvinists of his day.

18. *Quod creditit unus de sua singularitate, exhibutum est multis de seminis multitudine*; the sentence is as obscure in content as it is neat in form. We have to remember he is justifying his appeal to the authority of the multitude, which he is here contrasting to Abraham's *singularity*, or singleness. So *de sua singularitate* cannot refer to the content of Abraham's faith, what his faith was about (as the Italian translator seems to take it), but only to his condition (of being solitary when he made his act of faith). The present multitude, the world wide extent of the Church, is there to be seen, it doesn't need to be believed. But Abraham didn't see it, and could only believe it. The preposition *de* represents the position from which it was first believed, and then the position from which it has since been manifested.

19. See Mk 1:17.

20. It could be translated "in the secrets" (singular in the Latin). But in this passage he seems somehow to be identifying Christ (the Word) with the scriptures. At least, just as treasures are hidden in him, so he is the treasure hidden behind all the veils (i.e. the obscurities and apparent contradictions) of the scriptures, which we are about to try and draw aside.

21. See 2 Cor 3:16.

22. Think of a door that opens outward. He gives a slightly different account of his youthful attitude in *Confessions* 3, 5, 9, where he says it was the unclassical, un-Ciceronian style of the scriptures that repelled him and earned his contempt, not the discrepancies in their contents.

23. This is the first quibble, a kind of opening gambit, very easily disposed of (did anyone really put it forward, I wonder?). How can Jesus be both the son of David and the son of Abraham, have

two fathers in other words, since both of them had in any case been dead for centuries when he was born?

24. Be warned! The objection will not be stated until section 11—indeed section 12.

25. He explains *traducere* (disgrace), which is what his text read, by *divulgare* (make a public example of), which was the reading of other copies. Some of these still survive, for example, the Bobbio manuscript of the fourth or fifth century, that is, contemporary with Augustine. See sermon 82,10, where it appears to be in the text Augustine was then using. He would have found these variant readings in the copies of the scriptures kept by the different churches he visited and preached in.

26. Not Augustine at his most charming as a moralist! But while to our modern, and I think more incarnational, more authentically Christian way of thinking, carnal love, carnal desire is a good and proper element in the fully human love of husbands and wives (without which the more refined "spiritual" element may well founder); and while therefore we would judge it no bad thing for spouses to forgive their partner's adultery because they still love them "carnally"—we have to recognize that Augustine is here only representative of the much narrower, more grudging sexual morality of his day.

27. Reading *nec . . . parcere videretur*, instead of *nec . . . parcere videtur*—"nor does he seem to spare her"—of the text. The Maurist editors suggest this emendation, but do not adopt it. It seems to me to cry out for adoption.

28. He, of course, said "in Latin."

29. See Lk 11:9. This is one, positive reaction to attacks on the faith. But we also know of the opposite, negative reaction by ecclesiastical authority: the anti-intellectual attempt to limit, if not entirely to suppress, the asking of awkward questions and the scope of theological investigation. See the article "Coping with the Council: Christology after Chalcedon" by E. Butterworth SJ in *The Month* (1987). It is a long review of *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, part 1, by Aloys Grillmeier SJ, and it illustrates precisely this kind of reaction and the harm it does both to sound theology and to ecumenical unity, from the decades, indeed the centuries, following Chalcedon in 451.

30. He says, "a great sacrament."

31. Section 2 above.

32. See Jer 24:1, and compare 2 Kgs 24:8ff. From this latter text we find that Jechoniah was also called Jehoiachin—and in spite of what Augustine says, 2 Kgs 24:9 declares that "he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord"—a purely formal statement, it is true, as the poor young man only reigned three months, not a great deal of time to do much evil. Augustine has clearly overlooked this text.

33. What he means is the final destruction of the city, and the final exile, ten years later in 587, is blamed on them.

34. See Ez 1:1; Dan 1:6; 3:19ff; Jer 20:1-6; 21:10.

35. See Lk 19:14; also Jn 19:15.

36. See Jer 27:12-22.

37. *Ibid.* 29:4ff.

38. Reading with RB *crediderunt Dominum*, instead of *crediderunt in Dominum* with the Maurists. I translate as though Augustine was being a little careless with his grammar, and as though *crediderunt Dominum* is to be taken as meaning *crediderunt Domino*. His latinity, however, could, and perhaps should, be saved by translating the sentence, "So then many of the Jews believed he was the Lord."

39. See 1 Cor 15:6.

40. See Acts 1:15; 2:14.

41. A very free paraphrase of the text, quoted roughly from memory.

42. We have to remember that for Augustine and his educated contemporaries the "spiritual" was the most true, the most real, which was always being both signified and obscured by the more evanescent material event, or superficial meaning of a text. The spiritual dispensation, or divine plan by which the gospel is preached to the nations—and the people of God, the new Israel is "transferred" to the nations—is a much truer reality than the historical episode of the exile in Babylon in the sixth century before Christ.

43. Constantine and his successors.

44. He may be referring to the erection of church buildings, but I think his primary reference is to the sound building up of Church communities.

45. *Per Jechoniam*. I don't think this can mean "under Jechoniah" or "during Jechoniah's time"; you can hardly turn Jechoniah into a temporal expression. No, Augustine is deliberately stretching things, making Jechoniah instrumental in bringing about the exile, to strengthen him as a type of Christ.

46. The nerve of the man! He is going to go on speaking for as long again, and more.

47. A smart move to regain flagging male attention, perhaps?

48. See 1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:23.

49. *Mulier*. Latin has two words for "woman," the other being *femina* which is the more universal term. *Mulier* is often, perhaps usually, employed in the sense of "wife," and in ordinary speech was distinguished from *virgo* or *puella*, "virgin," "maid," "girl." So Augustine has to explain that its Hebrew equivalent (like "woman" in English, as a matter of fact) does not suggest any loss of virginity. If he had been preaching in English, he could have left the whole passage out, which would have been a blessing.

50. See 1 Cor 1:24.

51. See Rom 1:3. The rather odd reading of the Latin text is *qui factus est ei*, literally, "who was made for him," that is, presumably for God. The Greek just has "who came to be," "who was born."

52. This is obviously what he means, but not quite what he says in the brackets; what he says there, literally, is "(if only all could, but many can't)"—which must have elicited a few smothered sniggers—the bishop seeming to wish that all could perform the act, but many can't!

53. The patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob especially. He assumes that they only had intercourse with their wives for the sake of procreation, because the scriptural texts only actually mention those occasions: a rather weak argument from silence.

54. Literally *tabulae*: the matrimonial tablets.

55. This etymology, given by the grammarian Sextus Pompeius Festus about 150 AD (ed. Muller, p. 22), is accepted by Lewis and Short's Latin dictionary.

Augustine's doctrine on sexuality was a commonplace of his time. Those moralists who insisted on it do not appear to have seen that in fact this view of marriage tended to encourage at least masculine adultery. That's why it has so long been socially accepted form in Latin countries for men indeed to honor (and no doubt love) their wives, whom they marry purely for the sake of having children to carry on the family name—and at the same time to have one or more mistresses whom they keep for the sake of pleasure and relaxation. Augustine, of course, is against this; but by being so grudging in his toleration of "pleasure and relaxation" between husband and wife (which he coarsely dismisses, without making any distinctions, as mere lust), he is in fact encouraging this kind of adultery. This dour attitude to sexuality is not in fact Christian or biblical, but is read into scripture from the dominant philosophical *zeitgeist*. I think Hellenistic, Roman society suffered from a deep psychological split in this matter; on the one hand the standard represented by the *tabulae matrimoniales*, on the other the contrary ethos of popular wedding songs and epithalamia, popular romances, popular bawdry. This split is not characteristic of biblical or Jewish culture, as is evident from the Song of Songs, to cite no other texts. The Christian Fathers could have learned as much from the rabbis—if they had been willing to learn anything from rabbis.

56. *Secundum veniam*, from which comes the word "venial." But it simply won't do to argue that what is permitted *secundum veniam* is therefore a venial sin. The Vulgate reads *secundum indulgentiam*; it is being contrasted with what is commanded.

57. Could Augustine be quoted from here in favor of *in vitro* fertilization? A piquant thought.

58. See Sir 14:18.

59. What he is bringing into comparison with the pleasures of the table, not altogether successfully here, is the joys of heaven. He can evoke a desire for these in his listeners much more effectively when instead of contrasting them with earthbound "carnal pleasures," he presents them as surpassing them by fulfilling them—for example, in *The Trinity* VIII, 3, 4, where he is trying to raise his mind and imagination (and those of his readers) to some kind of grasp of "the good-in-itself," *ipsum bonum*, that is, God himself.

60. 1 Kgs 19:6-8.

61. *Accipiat quod officio se accipere praetendebat.* The more natural interpretation would be, "Let him accept what (namely, the pleasures of marriage) he was only pretending to accept out of a sense of duty." As though to say, "O.K., go ahead and get married for the wrong reasons, and stop pretending it's for the right ones." But I cannot quite see Augustine expressing such a sentiment, even ironically.

62. The custom of polyandry, one woman having two or more husbands simultaneously, is practiced in a few societies. And there is of course sometimes a problem of male infertility. In general the practice of polygamy (or polyandry) has much more complex causes, social, political, and economic, than Augustine is allowing for here.

63. It is just possible to explain what he says as really meaning that what he calls concupiscence or *libido* is the punishment for Adam's sin, and not the sexual act itself. If so, he is expressing himself very carelessly. But I think he does mean here that the sexual act, or at least its necessity, is the punishment of Adam's sin. And this is one reason which inclines me to give a rather early date to this sermon, because this is not a view he held in his later years.

64. Prefiguring is not something we are so conscious of the need for as were Augustine and his contemporaries. To us in our literal-minded culture it seems little more than an aesthetic luxury, that is not in fact to everybody's taste. For Augustine it was almost the central armature of meaning, needed to give unity to history and to the cosmos. Instances of such prefiguring models and examples would be Noah's ark, Jerusalem/Zion, the temple, the relations between Jacob and Esau, and of course the exile, as we have already seen in this sermon.

65. Reading *futura praesignaretur ecclesia*, with RB. The text here omits *futura*.

66. Loss of virginity was regarded as a corruption, a loss of physical integrity, indeed a kind of maiming, in this view.

67. *Liberi*; here, I think, distinguished from bastards—or children by slaves, given its derivation from *liber*, free.

68. That is, yet again, the scriptures—or so it would seem from the instances he goes on to give.

69. See Gn 16:1; 30:1; 30:9.

70. See Ex 2:1-10.

71. See Dt 25:5-6; Mk 12:19.

72. Down through Matthew, back up through Luke—a point he will eventually come to after his customary dilly-dallying on the way.

73. See Lk 1:31; Mt 1:21.

74. See Lk 1:62-63.

75. According to some Syriac manuscript; also Lk 2:7 according to some Latin manuscript; but the authentic text leaves out the "him."

76. See Gn 22:18; Gal 3:16.

77. See 1 Tm 2:5.

78. I have made a considerable emendation here. The text reads *iste autem ascendens significans purgationem peccatorum . . . ascendens generationes enumerat*: "this one (Luke) going up and signifying the expiation of sins . . . going up lists the generations." The repetition of *ascendens*, referring to the evangelist and his procedure, is redundant. Nor is there any indication why the procedure of going back upward in the generations count should signify expiation of sins. So I suggest—and have translated—an emendation as follows: *iste autem ascendentem significans ad purgationem peccatorum . . . ascendens generationes enumerat*. This makes an exact parallel with the sentence explaining Matthew's opposite procedure. Christ "went up" to expiate sins, a) by mounting the cross, b) symbolically by coming up from the waters of the Jordan at his baptism, c) by lifting up, and thus taking away, our sins.

My emendation makes better sense. The only explanation I can offer as to how—if it is, on my hypothesis, what Augustine actually said—it can have been changed for the worse in the manuscripts is as follows: the stenographer inadvertently wrote *iste autem ascendens significans ad purgationem etc*; his first copyist, reading it, couldn't make sense of that *ad*, and so erased it.

79. There is no justification for identifying the prophet Nathan with David's son of that name,

though the identity of name may lend some weight to Augustine's ingenious symbolism. The reader may like to have some fun by comparing the following texts, and seeing what can be made of them: 2 Sam 5:14, 1 Chr 3:5 and 14:14 about David's son Nathan; 2 Sam 7:1-4, and 2 Sam 12 about the prophet Nathan. It was a very common name, meaning "Given." Equivalents are common in African societies (Mpho and Neo in Sesotho, for example); and it is to be noted that Augustine had called his own son *Adeodatus* "Given-by-God."

80. In Lk's genealogy, 3:38.

81. 400: Gn 13:15; Acts 7:6; 4:30; Ex 12:40.

82. 2 Cor 5:6.

83. He will be more specific a few lines lower down; he means the sacramental structure of the Church and its life. See note 135.

84. The four corners of the world or the four points of the compass; for time, I imagine, the four seasons of the year.

85. See Dt 9:9; 1 Kgs 19:8; Lk 4:2.

86. See Nm 32:13; Gn 7:4.

87. See Acts 1:3.

88. See note 83.

89. The distinction is between John's baptism and Christian baptism, or baptism into Christ, in the name of Jesus. It is explicitly made in Acts 19:1-7. Christian baptism is seen as originating in Christ being baptized by John, and Augustine is explaining how this might be,

90. That explains, or at least illustrates, the perfection of 10. He doesn't explain why creatures are represented by 7; I suppose because he thought it was too obvious: the 7 days of creation. Only in fact they are 6!

91. See 1 Tm 6:10.

92. This seems intended as a kind of quotation, but there is no telling what is being quoted; it is not a biblical text. It represents, very briefly, Augustine's interpretation of the temptation in the garden, Gn 3:4-6. For a fuller treatment of the idea see *The Trinity* I, 5, 7; III, 6, 16.

93. See Phil 2:21.

94. See 1 Cor 13:5.

95. Fire, air, earth, and water.

96. The most commonly accepted Greek text has "seventy-times seven." But "seventy-seven times" neatly echoes, and reverses, the primitive requirement of seventy-sevenfold vengeance by Lamech, Gn 4:24.

97. See Mt 18:52 for a justification of Augustine's technique.

98. Reading *cupit* with RB instead of *capit* ("can grasp") with the Maurist text.

SERMON 52

THE TRINITY

Date: 410-412¹

The Trinity in the baptism of Christ

1. The reading of the gospel has set me a subject to talk to your graces² about, as though at the Lord's command. And indeed it is the Lord's command; I took it, you see, as a kind of order from him to preach a sermon, that I should understand he wanted me to speak about what he had wanted to be read. Please • listen then with all your eagerness and devotion, and these, I hope, will help me in my difficult task by winning the goodwill of the Lord our God.

What we see, what we are looking at as kind of divine tableau being presented to us by the river Jordan, is our God being shown us in three persons.³ When Jesus came and was baptized by John, the Lord by the slave, he was giving us an example of humility, and he showed us that this humility was a fulfilling of justice, when John said to him, *I ought to be baptized by you, and are you coming to me?* and he answered *Let it be so now, let all justice be fulfilled* (Mt 3:14-15)—so when he had been baptized, the skies opened and the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the appearance of a dove; then there followed a voice from above, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I have taken delight* (Mt 3:16-17). So we have the three, somehow or other, clearly distinguished: in the voice the Father, in the man the Son, in the dove the Holy Spirit. There is no need to do more than just remind you of this; it's easy enough to see. It's clear, there's not the slightest shadow of doubt that this triad is being presented to us, when Christ the Lord, coming to John in the form of a servant,⁴ is of course the Son; you can't, after all, say he's the Father, or say he's the Holy Spirit. *Jesus came*, it says—obviously the Son of God. Can anyone have any doubts about the dove, or say, “What is the dove?” since the gospel itself testifies in the clearest terms, *The Holy Spirit came down upon him in the appearance of a dove?* Likewise, there can be no doubt that the voice is the Father's, when it says *You are my Son* (Mk 1:11). So we have the three clearly distinguished.

The inseparable Trinity—difficult to explain

2. And if we take account of the places involved, I make bold to say (I say it timidly enough, but I still make bold to say it), we have the three apparently separable. Jesus comes to the river, from one place to another place; the dove comes down from the sky to the earth, from one place to another place; the Father's voice is heard neither from the earth nor the water, but from the sky. These three are apparently separated by place, separated by function, separated by action.

Now someone may say to me, "Demonstrate that the three are inseparable. Remember you're speaking as a Catholic, speaking to Catholics. Our faith, after all, that is to say the true⁵ faith, the right faith, the Catholic faith, which is not a bundle of opinions and prejudices but a summary of biblical testimonies, not riddled with heretical rashness, but founded on apostolic truth—our faith insists on this. This is what we know, this is what we believe; this, even if we don't see it with our eyes, nor even with our hearts as long as we are being purified by ⁶ faith,⁶ this all the same we hold with the firmest and most orthodox faith, that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one inseparable trinity or triad; one God, not three gods; but one God in such a way that the Son is not the Father, that the Father is not the Son, that the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. It is this ineffable godhead, wholly self-contained, renewing, creating, re-creating all things, sending, reclaiming, judging, liberating, this then that we know to be at once both ineffably a trinity, triad or three, and inseparable."

The help of the Lord in speaking about the Trinity

3. So what are we to do? Here you have the Son coming separately in the person of a man, the Holy Spirit separately coming down from the sky in the form of a dove, the voice of the Father separately being heard from the sky, *This is my Son*. Where now is the inseparable trinity? I see that through me God has made you very attentive. Pray for me, that while you are, so to say, opening your laps,⁷ he may grant the means of filling what you have opened. Join in the work with me. After all, you can see what I have undertaken (not only what, but also who), what I want to talk about, where I am placed, how I am placed in *a body that perishes and weighs down the soul, and the earthly dwelling oppresses the mind thinking many things* (Wis 9:15). So when I disentangle this mind from many things and concentrate it on the one God, the inseparable trio, in order to see something which I can say, I may say, don't you think, in order to express something worthwhile to you in this body that weighs down the soul, *For to you, Lord, I have lifted up my soul* (Ps 86:4)? May he help me, may he lift it up with me, because I am rather too weak for it, and it is rather too heavy for me.

The works of Father and Son are inseparable

4. The question that is commonly put by the more eager brethren, commonly discussed in the conversations of those who love God's word, about which there is commonly much knocking at God's door, is this: people say, "Does the Father do anything that the Son doesn't do, or the Son do anything that the Father doesn't do?" For the time being let us talk about the Father and the Son; when he to whom we say, *Be my helper, do not forsake me* (Ps 27:9), has brought our efforts to a successful conclusion, we will have to understand that the Holy Spirit too is in no way excluded from the activity of the Father and the Son.

So then, brothers, here's something about the Father and the Son. Does the Father do anything without the Son? We answer, "No." You're not quite sure about it? Well, what can he do without him through whom all things were made? *All things*, it says, *were made through him*; and to drum it into the heads of the slow, the obstinate, the argumentative, he added, *and without him was made nothing* (Jn 1:3).

The Father does nothing without the Son

5. So what then, brothers? *All things were made through him*. The whole of creation made through the Son—we naturally understand that the Father made it through his Word, God made it through his power and his wisdom. Are we going to say, "All things, to be sure, when they were created, were made through him, but the Father doesn't now govern all things through him"? Certainly not. Perish such a thought from the hearts of the faithful, away with it from the ideas of the devout, from the understanding of the pious. It's simply impossible that he should have created through him and not govern through him, unthinkable that what exists should not be controlled through him, when through him it was made to exist.

This too we can let ourselves be taught by the evidence of scripture. As well as telling us that all things were made and created through him, as we have just recalled from the gospel, *All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing*, it also says that what was made is controlled and managed through him. You recognize Christ, I suppose, as the power of God and the wisdom of God;⁸ acknowledge what is also said about Wisdom: *She reaches from end to end mightily, and manages all things sweetly* (Wis 8:1). So let us have no doubts that all things are governed through him, through whom all things were made. Thus the Father does nothing without the Son, the Son nothing without the Father.

Was the Father born? Did the Father suffer?

6. Now the problem crops up, which we have undertaken to solve in the Lord's name and according to his will. If the Father does nothing without the Son and the Son nothing without the Father, won't it follow, presumably, that

we have to say the Father too was born of the Virgin Mary, the Father suffered under Pontius Pilate, the Father rose again and ascended into heaven? Not at all. We don't say this, because we don't believe this. *I believed, you see, therefore have I spoken; and we too believe, therefore we also speak* (2 Cor 4:13).⁹ What's in the creed? That the Son was born of the virgin, not the Father. What's in the creed? That the Son suffered under Pontius Pilate and died, not the Father.

It's escaped our memory, has it, that there are some people who have got it all wrong, called Patriconians,¹⁰ who say that it was the Father himself who was born of a woman, the Father himself who suffered, the Father himself, in fact, who is the Son—they are two names, merely, not two things? And the Catholic Church removed these people from the communion of saints,¹¹ to stop them leading anyone astray, and let them go on quarreling, if they must, outside separately by themselves.

The kernel of the difficulty

7. So let me call your thoughts back to the difficulty of the question. Someone may say to me, "You have said that the Father does nothing without the Son, nor the Son without the Father; and you have produced evidence from the scriptures that the Father does nothing without the Son, because all things were made through him; and that what has been made is not governed without the Son, because he is the wisdom of the Father, reaching from end to end mightily, and managing all things sweetly. Now you tell me, apparently speaking against yourself, that the Son, not the Father, was born of the virgin; the Son, not the Father, suffered; the Son rose again, not the Father. So either admit that the Son does something without the Father, or else admit that the Father too was born, suffered, died, rose again. Say one thing or the other; choose one of the two." I, for my part, won't choose either. I won't say either one thing or the other; I won't say that the Son does anything without the Father, because if I do I shall be lying; and I won't say either that the Father was born, suffered, rose again, because if I do I shall be lying just as much. "How then," he says, "will you get yourself out of this corner?"

The birth of the Son of Mary was the work of both Father and Son

8. So you like the way the problem is set, do you? May God ensure that you also like the way it's solved. Here then is what I say, so that the Lord may rescue both me and you from this corner. After all, we stand together in one and the same faith in the name of Christ, and we live in one and the same house under one and the same Lord, and under one and the same head we are members together in one and the same body, and we are quickened or animated by one and the same Spirit. So in order that the Lord may set us free from the dilemma of this very troublesome question, both me the speaker and you the audience, this is what I say: the Son indeed, and not the Father, was born of the Virgin Mary; but this birth of the Son, not the Father, from the Virgin Mary was the

work of both Father and Son. It was not indeed the Father, but the Son who suffered; yet the suffering of the Son was the work of both Father and Son. It wasn't the Father who rose again, but the Son; yet the resurrection of the Son was the work of both Father and Son.

Now we seem to have rid ourselves of this problem, but perhaps only through my formulation; let's see if it's also through the divine formulation of the matter. It is up to me then to demonstrate by the evidence of the holy books that the birth of the Son was the work of both Father and Son, likewise his passion and resurrection; so that while it is indeed the birth and passion and resurrection of the Son alone, nonetheless these three things, while belonging to the Son alone, were not brought about by the Father alone or by the Son alone, but by the Father to be sure, and by the Son. Let us prove each point. You are listening as judges;¹² the case has been stated, let the witnesses step forward. Let's suppose you, the justices, say to me what is usually said to pleaders, "Bring the proofs of your proposition." I certainly will, and I will also read out to you the text of the heavenly law. You have listened carefully to my statement of the case; listen even more carefully now to my proof of it.

According to Paul the birth of the Son was the work of the Father

9. The first thing I have to bring proof of concerns the birth of Christ, how the Father effected it and the Son effected it, although what Father and Son effected together belongs only to the Son. I refer you first to Paul as a suitable counsel learned in divine law. Plaintiffs today, you see, also have a Paul who declares the laws for litigants, not for Christians.¹³ I refer you, I repeat, to the Paul who declares the laws of peace, not of litigation. Let the holy apostle show us how the Father brought about the birth of the Son. *But when the fullness of time, he says, had come, God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law* (Gal 4:4-5).¹⁴ You have heard it, and because it is clear and straightforward, you have understood it. There you have the Father causing the Son to be born of the virgin. For *when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son*, that is, the Father sent Christ. How did he send him? *Made of a woman, made under the law*. So the Father made him of a woman under the law.

Christ was born of a woman, a virgin

10. Or perhaps you are bothered because I said "of the virgin" and Paul says "of a woman." Don't let it bother you; don't let's linger on it; I'm not, after all, speaking to illiterate people.¹⁵ You get each thing said in scripture, both "of a virgin" and "of a woman." Of a virgin, how and where? *Behold, a virgin will conceive and bear a son* (Is 7:14). Of a woman, as you have just heard. They don't contradict each other. It's an idiom of the Hebrew language to mean by "women" not those who have lost their virginity, but just females. You have the evidence of a text in Genesis, when Eve was first fashioned: *He fashioned her*

into a woman (Gn 2:22). It also says somewhere else in scripture that God ordered the women to be set apart who had not known the bed of a man.¹⁶ So that's something we all ought to know. We mustn't let it hold us up, so that we can have time to explain, with the Lord's help, other things that are more likely to do so.

The birth of the Son also made by the Son

11. So we have proved that the birth of the Son was brought about by the Father; now let us also prove it was brought about by the Son. What is the birth of the Son from the Virgin Mary? It is certainly the taking of the form of a slave.¹⁷ Now hear that the Son too brought this about: *Who, when he was in the form of God, did not think it robbery to be equal to God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave* (Phil 2:6-7). *When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son made of a woman* (Gal 4:4), *who was made for him of the seed of David according to the flesh* (Rom 1:3). So we see the birth of the Son made by the Father. But because the Son *emptied himself, taking the form of a slave*, we see the birth of the Son also made by the Son. This has been proved. Let's pass on to the next point. Please concentrate on grasping it as it follows in due order.

The Son's passion was brought about by the Father and by the Son

12. Let's prove that the Son's passion was also brought about by the Father, and brought about by the Son. Let the Father bring about the Son's passion: *Who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all* (Rom 8:32). Let the Son too bring about his own passion: *Who loved me and gave himself up for me* (Gal 2:20). The Father gave up the Son, the Son gave up himself. This passion happened to one of them, but was brought about by both. Just like his birth, so too the passion of Christ was not the work of the Father without the Son, nor of the Son without the Father. The Father handed over the Son, the Son handed over himself. What had Judas got to do with it, apart from the sin?¹⁸ Let's pass on again to the next point; let's come to the resurrection.

The resurrection of the Son brought about by both Father and Son

13. Let's see the Son indeed, and not the Father, rising again, but the resurrection of the Son brought about by both Father and Son. Let the Father achieve the Son's resurrection: *Therefore he exalted him from the dead,¹⁹ and bestowed on him the name which is above every name* (Phil 2:9). So the Father raised up the Son by exalting him and waking him from the dead. Doesn't the Son also raise himself up? Of course he does. He said of the temple, as representing his body, *Pull down this temple, and in three days I will raise it up* (Jn 2:19). Finally, just as it belongs to his passion to lay down his life, so it belongs to his resurrection to take it up again; so let's see if the Son indeed laid down his life and the Father, not he himself, gave him back his life. That the Father did give

it back to him is obvious; that's what the psalm is talking about when it says, *And raise me up and I will repay them* (Ps 41:10). But that the Son also gave himself back his own life—well, what are you expecting from me? Let him tell you himself. *I have power to lay down my life*—I haven't yet said what I promised, I just said *lay down*, but you have already cried out, because you are flying on ahead. You are well taught in the school of the heavenly master; like people who listen carefully to the readings and devoutly repeat them, you are not unaware of what follows. *I have power, he says, to lay down my life, and I have power to take it up again. Nobody takes it from me, but I myself lay it down of my own accord, and I take it up again* (Jn 10:18).

Summary

14. I've carried out my promise; I have proved my propositions, I think, with the strongest documentary evidence. Hold on to what you have heard. I shall repeat it briefly, and so commend to your minds' safe keeping something that is in my humble opinion exceedingly useful. The Father wasn't born of the virgin, and yet this birth of the Son from the virgin was the work of both Father and Son. The Father did not suffer on the cross, and yet the passion of the Son was the work of both Father and Son. The Father did not rise again from the dead, and yet the resurrection of the Son was the work of both Father and Son. You have the persons quite distinct, and their working inseparable. So let us never say that the Father worked anything without the Son, the Son anything without the Father. Or perhaps you are worried about the miracles Jesus did, in case perhaps he did some which the Father didn't do? Then what about *But the Father abiding in me does his works* (Jn 14:10)? What I have said is plain enough, it only needed to be said. We don't have to work at understanding it,

- only to take care to remind ourselves of it.

The godhead is quite beyond material localization

15. There's still something else I want to say, for which I really do require both your keenest attention and your intercession with God. Well then, it's only bodies that are contained by and occupy local space. The godhead is quite beyond material localization. No one should go looking for it, so to say, in space. It is present everywhere, invisible and inseparable; not more in one part, less in another, but everywhere whole, nowhere divided. Who can see this, who can grasp it? Let us be modest in our aims; let us remember who we are that are talking and what we are talking about. This and that, whatever it is that God is, must be believed with piety, reflected on in a holy manner, and as far as possible, as much as is granted us, it must be understood in a way beyond telling. Let words be stilled, the tongue cease from wagging; let the heart be stirred, the heart be lifted up to the mystery. That, you see, is not something that can rise up into the heart of man,²⁰ but something to which the heart of man should rise up. Let us take a look at creation: *For his invisible things are to be observed,*

being understood from the creation of the world through the things that have been made (Rom 1:20); just in case, in the things God has made, which we are used to and on familiar terms with, we may perhaps find some likeness, through which to show how there can be three somethings, three that can be separately presented but that operate inseparably.

The creator is so far above us

16. Hey, brothers, I want your whole minds, your total concentration. First see what it is I am proposing; perhaps I may find it in the created sphere, because the creator himself is so far above us. And perhaps someone here, across whose mind the brilliance of the truth has flashed like lightning, perhaps someone here is in a position to say those words, *As for me, I said in my ecstasy*—what did you say in your ecstasy? *I am cast out from the sight of your eyes* (Ps 31:22). Well, the person who said this seems to me to have lifted his soul up to God, to have poured out his soul above himself while it was said to him every day, *Where is your God?* (Ps 42:4.3) and to have come into a kind of spiritual contact with that unchanging light; then, so it seems to me, being too weak in the sense of sight to be able to bear that brilliance, he fell back into his own sick and sorry condition, and began comparing himself with that light, and realized that he still could not adjust the lens of his mind to the light of God's wisdom. And because he had done this in an ecstasy, being snatched away from bodily consciousness and snatched up to God, he said on being fetched back somehow from God to the human level, “As for me, I said in my ecstasy—for I saw something indescribable in ecstasy, which I couldn't endure for long; and on being returned to this mortal coil and the many thoughts of mortals arising from the body which weighs down the soul,²¹ I said—what? I am cast out from the sight of your eyes. You are far, far above, I am far, far below.”

So what are we to say, brothers, about God? For if you have fully grasped what you want to say, it isn't God. If you have been able to comprehend it, you have comprehended something else instead of God. If you think you have been able to comprehend, your thoughts have deceived you. So he isn't this, if this is what you have understood; but if he is this, then you haven't understood it. So what is it you want to say, seeing you haven't been able to understand it?²²

Search for the likeness of God in yourself

17. Let's see, then, if we can't find something in creation, by which to show that there are three somethings which can both be separately presented and also operate inseparably. What shall we turn to? The sky, to discuss the sun and the moon and the stars? Or the earth, to investigate, perhaps, shrubs and trees and animals that fill the earth? Or shall we investigate the sky itself, or the earth itself, which contains everything to be found in heaven and on earth?

How long, O man, are you going to go round and round creation? Come back to yourself, look at yourself, inspect yourself, discuss yourself. You are looking

in creation for three somethings which can be pointed out separately and which work inseparably. If you are looking for them in creation, first look in yourself. After all you can't say you are not a creature. You are looking for a likeness. Are you going to look for it in animals? You were talking about God, remember, when you were looking for some kind of likeness, you were talking about the three persons of that inexpressible majesty; and because you failed at the divine level, you confessed your weakness with a becoming humility, and came down to the human level. Investigate the problem there. Are you going to search among animals? Are you going to search in the sun, in a star? Which of these, I ask you, was made after the image and likeness of God? You can look for something altogether more familiar and better than these in yourself. It's man, you see, that God made after his image and likeness.²³ Search in yourself—perhaps the image of the Trinity may hold some trace of the Trinity.²⁴ And what kind of image? A manufactured one and very remote, though even a very remote image is a likeness. But not in the way the Son is the image and exactly the same as the Father.²⁵ Your image in your son, after all, is rather different from your image in the mirror. Very different, in fact. In your son, your image is yourself, since your son is the same as you are in nature; in substance he's the same as you, in person he is other than you. So then man is not the image in the same way as the only-begotten Son is, but he is made after a certain image and after a certain likeness. Let him search in himself for something, if he can possibly find it, indeed for three somethings that are separately stated and that work inseparably. I will search, you search with me; not I in you and you in me, but you in you and I in me. Let us search in common, and in common study our common nature and substance.

One soul, image of God

18. Observe, man, and see if what I say is true. Have you got a body, have you got flesh? "I have," you say. "How else is it, after all, that I am in a place, that I move from place to place? How else do I hear the words you speak, but with ears of flesh? How else do I see the mouth you speak with, but eyes of flesh?" So you've got it, we are all agreed, and we needn't linger longer on such an obvious matter.

Now observe something else; observe what is acting through the flesh. You hear with your ear, but hearing doesn't come from your ear; there's another inside who hears through the ear. You see through your eyes; well just look at them. Have you acknowledged the house and ignored the householder? Do the eyes see by themselves? Isn't there another who sees with them? I'm not just saying the eyes of a dead person don't see, where it's agreed that the householder has departed from the body; but it's a fact that the eyes of someone who's thinking deeply about another matter don't see the face of someone who's present.

So turn your eyes to the person within. That is where some kind of likeness is rather to be looked for of three somethings that can be indicated separately

but operate inseparably. What has your mind got in it?²⁶ No doubt, if I look thoroughly, I will find many things. But there is something ready to hand which can be more easily understood. What has your soul got inside? I will remind you, you must recollect. I am not requiring you just to believe what I am about to say; don't accept anything I say unless you find it in yourself. So take a look at yourself.

But first—this is something I had overlooked—let us see whether man is the image, not of the Son alone or the Father alone, but of the Father and the Son together, and also of course in consequence of the Holy Spirit too. Genesis is speaking: *Let us make man*, it says, *after our image and likeness* (Gn 1:26). So the Father isn't making without the Son, nor the Son without the Father. *Let us make man after our image and likeness*. "Let us make," not "let me make," or "make," or "let him make," but "let us make." "After our image," not yours or mine, but ours.

The likeness of the Trinity in man

19. So, I begin the interrogation—and I am talking of something that is in fact *unlike* God. No one has any business to say, "Look what he's comparing God to." I have already said it, and said it again, and I've warned you, and I've warned myself: these things are very, very remote—the lowest from the highest, changeable from unchanging, created things from those that create, human things from divine. Take note, I begin by insisting that what I am going to say is very, very remote from God. Nobody has any right to slander me. So in case someone is sharpening his teeth, while all I'm asking for is ears, this is what I have promised to show you: some three things indicated separately, operating inseparably. How like or unlike these things are to the omnipotent Trinity I am not now considering but at this lowest and changeable created level we can find three somethings which can be indicated separately and which operate inseparably.

Oh, how pedestrian can your imagination be, how obstinate and unbelieving can you get in your prejudices! Why do you hesitate to allow in that inexpressible majesty of the godhead what you have been able to discover in yourself?²⁷ This is what I am saying, this is my question: Man, have you got memory? If you haven't, how have you retained what I have been saying? But perhaps you have already forgotten what I said just now. All right then, take just this that I say: "I said," two syllables which you could only retain through memory. After all, how could you know there are two of them if you had forgotten the first while the second was being uttered? So why waste any more time? Why am I being chivvied and harried in this way to convince you of the obvious?²⁸ It's as plain as a pikestaff, you have got memory.

Another question: have you got understanding? "I have," you say. If you didn't have memory, you wouldn't retain what I have said; if you didn't have understanding, you wouldn't be able to assess what you have retained. So you have got this too. You apply your understanding to what you retain inside you,

and you see it, and by seeing it you are formed by it, so that you can be said to know it.²⁹

Third question: You've got memory, by which you retain what is said; you've got understanding, by which you understand what is retained; about these two I ask you a further question: Have you been willing to retain and understand? "I've certainly been willing," you say. So then, you have got will. These are the three things which I promised I would declare in your hearing and to your minds; these three which are in you, which you can count distinctly, and which you cannot separate. So these three, memory, understanding and will; notice, I say, that these three are uttered separately, but operate inseparably.

Memory, understanding, and will

20. The Lord will be on hand to help; indeed I see he is on hand, from your understanding I understand that he is standing by. I infer from your voices, you see, how well you have understood; and I presume that he is the one who helps you to understand everything. I promised to show you three things indicated separately, operating inseparably. There you are; I had no idea what you had in mind; you showed me by saying "Memory." This word, this sound, this utterance proceeded to my ears from your mind. You were silently thinking about this thing that is memory, you weren't saying anything. It was in you, it hadn't yet come to me. Then in order to present me with what was in you, you spoke that word, "memory." I heard it, I heard the three syllables of the noun "memory."³⁰ It's a noun of three syllables, an utterance; it was pronounced, it reached my ear, it suggested something to my mind. What was pronounced has faded away, what was suggested, and what suggested it remains.³¹

But the point I am now inquiring about is this: when you spoke the word "memory," you can see, clearly, that this word is proper only to memory. The other two things have their own names, one being called understanding, not memory, the other being called will, not memory; it's only the third one that is called memory. But in order to say this, in order to operate or make these three syllables, what were you operating with? This word, which belongs to memory alone, was the work in you both of memory, for you to retain what you were saying, and of understanding, for you to know what you were retaining, and of will, for you to utter what you were knowing.

Thanks be to the Lord our God! He has helped us, both in me and in you. Really and truly, I'm telling your graces, I undertook to discuss this matter and put it across with the greatest trepidation; I was afraid, you see, that I might delight the wit of the clever, and bore the less clever to tears. But now I can see that you have not only grasped what I have said, listening so attentively and understanding so readily, but you have also flown ahead of what I was going to say. The Lord be thanked.

Memory, understanding, and will and the mystery of the Trinity

21. So now you can see that I have no worries about making a suggestion that you have already understood. I am not drumming something unknown into you, but repeating a suggestion you have already grasped. Here it is then: of those three things one was named, the name of only one of them was mentioned; "memory" is the name of just one of those three. And yet all three were in operation to produce the name of one of the three. The single word "memory" couldn't be pronounced without will, understanding and memory all operating. The single word "understanding" can't be pronounced without memory, will and understanding all operating. Nor can the single word "will" be pronounced without memory and understanding and will all operating.

So I think I have explained what I proposed. What I have separately pronounced, I have inseparably operated. All three produced just one of these names; and yet this one name which all three have produced doesn't belong to all three but only to one of them. All three produced the name "memory," but the only one of them it belongs to is the memory. All three produced the name "understanding," but the only one of them it belongs to is the understanding. All three produced the name "will," but the only one of them it belongs to is the will.

So too, the Trinity produced the flesh of Christ, but the only one of them it belongs to is Christ. The Trinity produced the dove from the sky, but the only one of them it belongs to is the Holy Spirit. The Trinity produced the voice from heaven, but the only one of them the voice belongs to is the Father.

Memory, understanding, and will in relation to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

22. So let none of you say to me, none of you try to bully or trick poor feeble me with the question, "So which of these three, which you have pointed out to us in our minds or souls, which of these three belongs to the Father, that is to some sort of likeness of the Father, which of them to some sort of likeness of the Son, which to some sort of likeness of the Holy Spirit?" I can't tell you, I can't explain. Let's leave something as well to people's reflections, let's generously allow something also to silence. Return to yourself, withdraw from all the din. Look inside yourself and see if you have there any pleasant private nook in your consciousness where you don't make a row, where you don't go to law, where you don't prepare your case, where you don't brood on pigheaded quarrels. Be gentle in hearing the word, in order to understand. Perhaps you will be able to say, *You will give exultation and joy to my hearing, and bones will rejoice*, but ones that have been humbled (Ps 51:8), not "made proud."

Three but one

23. It's enough then that we have been able to show three things which are indicated separately but operate inseparably. If you have found this in yourself,

if you have found it in man, in any person walking the face of the earth, still carrying around a fragile body which weighs down the soul;³² then believe that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit can both be separately indicated by certain visible signs and certain created appearances taken over for the occasion, and also that they operate inseparably. That's enough for now.

I don't say memory is the Father, understanding is the Son, will is the Spirit. I don't say it, however it may be understood, I don't dare to. Let's reserve these greater matters for those who can grasp them; for the weak, as one of them, I have done what I can. I haven't introduced these three things as though they were to be equated to that divine triad, as though they were to be marshaled into an analogy, that is to say into a strict comparison. I don't mean that.

What do I mean, then? Look, I've found three things in you, indicated separately, operating inseparably; and each one of those three has a name produced by the three; but it doesn't belong to the three, only to one of them. So now believe the same about that three which you cannot see, if you have heard and seen and grasped it about this three. What's in you, after all, you can know. When will you ever be able to know what is in the one who made you, whatever that may be? Even if you will be able to, you certainly can't now. And yet, when you are able to, do you think *you* will be able to know God in the same way as God knows himself? So let that be enough for your graces. I have said what I could; I have kept the promise you were exacting from me. Whatever more needs to be added, well you must ask the Lord to perfect and complete your understanding.

NOTES

1. The sermon is actually on one of the implications for trinitarian doctrine of the story of the baptism of Jesus, Mt 3:16-17. The problem is that in that scene each of the divine persons is manifested separately by a separate sign, the Son by the man Jesus himself, the Holy Spirit by the form of a dove, and the Father by the voice from heaven; and yet it is a cardinal point of trinitarian doctrine that the three divine persons work inseparably *ad extra*, that is to say in the created sphere we cannot say that the Father does some things, the Son other things, and the Holy Spirit different things again.

The point is discussed, very briefly, in *The Trinity* IV, 21, 30, and raised, but hardly discussed at the beginning of that work, I, 5, 8. Though in this last passage Augustine says that people weary him with questions on this particular point, it is not in fact one that he devotes much attention to in his magisterial work on the Trinity. He deals with this again in Letter 169, 2, 6, written to his friend and colleague Evodius (but it is a slightly huffy letter!) toward the end of the year 415. Both here and in *The Trinity* IV he uses the same illustration of memory, understanding and will to make his point.

Does this connection with other Augustinian texts help us to date this sermon? Before answering, we must note that in one instance what Augustine says here does not accord with a major theme of his *The Trinity*. In the closing section of the sermon he says unequivocally, "I don't say memory is the Father, understanding is the Son, will is the Spirit. I don't say it . . . I don't dare to." He is clearly

thinking it, but he is very hesitant about it. Now in the last books of *The Trinity*, books IX, X and XI especially, he very definitely and definitively does say just that; he uses the mental triad as a very clear model or analogy for the divine triad—of course with all the necessary reservations that he touches on here, and states more precisely in his letter to Evodius.

Now while in *The Trinity* he is using the mental triad, and in particular the relationships between these three mental acts to cast light on the processions of the divine persons, and not to solve the problem of combining their distinctness with the inseparability of their actions as here, could he have said what he says here at the conclusion of his sermon after writing those books of *The Trinity*? I find it hard to believe that he could.

The Trinity was a work that took him a long time to write and was often interrupted, as indeed he says in Letter 169. That letter, as we have seen, was written in 415 (this is the date given by the Maurists). Now in Letter 174 to Aurelius, bishop of Carthage, Augustine says he is sending his colleague the complete work, but complains that because he had been so slow about it, some impatient friends had got hold of an incomplete text and published it (that is to say, had it copied) without his permission. This incomplete text went up to the first two thirds or so of book XII—so it contained the books in which he develops the analogy of memory, understanding, and will representing Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This pirating of his incomplete text had clearly not taken place when he wrote to Evodius in 415. But the letter to Aurelius, according to the Maurists, was written in 416. I am inclined to think that is too early a date, because in the letter Augustine says he gave up work on the project when he discovered what had happened, and only completed it (writing books XIII, XIV and XV) at the express request of Aurelius—and all that would have covered a much longer period than a year.

Nonetheless, I think we may tentatively infer that when he wrote to Evodius, he had already got two thirds of the way through book XII of *The Trinity*, and stopped there under the pressure of other demands on him. If that is so, this sermon would have been preached quite a long time before 415. The majority of the scholars in fact date it to 410-412, while one puts it as late as 419-420. For the reasons given, I cast my vote with the majority.

The scholars make no suggestions about the place. But in note 15 below I give reasons for thinking that it was probably preached at home in Hippo.

2. *Caritatem vestram*. This is now my definitive translation of this honorific address.

3. *In trinitate*. The word *trinitas* simply means threeness or a threesome. Of course it also means "the Trinity." But "the Trinity" in English is a special religious word, another word for God in a special context. And that is not how Augustine is using it, for the most part, in this sermon. He uses it to refer to the element of threeness in the divine mystery. So I will rarely translate it by "Trinity." The Latin text gives it here, I think incorrectly, a capital T.

4. See Phil 2:7.

5. Reading *vera* with the text (Maurists) instead of *vestra*, "your faith," with RB.

6. See Acts 15:9.

7. The text does not read altogether grammatically here: *et quasi aperientes sinum, donet ipse unde quod aperuistis impleatur*. The first phrase is hanging in the air. Six manuscripts have a variant, changing *aperientes* into the imperative *aperite*, parallel to *Orate*, "pray"; then *donet* etc. would be a separate sentence. I suggest emending *et* to *ut*, which would then govern *donet*. It still leaves *aperientes sinum* a little ungrammatical (it should be an ablative absolute), but rather more satisfactorily contained in the sentence. The meaning is the same. You open your lap by spreading your knees (you are wearing a tunic, and possibly a long gown, not trousers) so as to catch more in the skirts of your garment.

8. See 1 Cor 1:24.

9. See Ps 116:10.

10. Meaning "Father-suffered-ites." They are more commonly known as Sabellians, from Sabellius their alleged originator of whom nothing is really known; or as Modalists, because they treat the three as no more than three modes or masks of the one, single divine being. They came to the fore about 200 AD, and were vigorously opposed by Tertullian in his treatise *Adversus Praxeum*. In the following century some of the opponents of Arius and allies of the great Athanasius were accused of being such, and condemned for it.

11. That is, the communion of the Catholic faithful. He is clearly echoing the Apostles' Creed; it seems certain that by "saints" here he is not thinking primarily of the saints in heaven, but of "the holy people of God," which is the primary sense of the expression in the creed.

12. See Sermon 23:1, notes 5 and 7.

13. Augustine may have been referring to an eminent Roman jurist of the third century, Julius Paulus. This is the most likely way of taking the passage. On the other hand, he may have been alluding to the litigants who more and more in his day brought their cases to the bishop for adjudication thus imposing a burden on him, and his colleagues, that he personally found extremely irksome, but wasn't able to refuse. I suppose such litigants in the bishop's court may have quoted Paul the apostle in support of their cases, especially, perhaps, marriage cases. See, for example, 1 Cor 6:1-6, also 7:1-16.

14. The word "made" sounds rather odd; it represents the rather crabbed Latin translation of the Greek, which RSV translates "born."

15. This gives us some idea of the occasion on which the sermon was preached. It was clearly not at a Sunday Mass for the whole community, where many of the congregation, perhaps most, would be illiterate. So it would probably have been at some weekday service, or service for some special group of the devout—some kind of house Mass perhaps? Now would Augustine hold such a service outside his own local Church? At Carthage he certainly might have done so, by invitation. But there is no suggestion of an invitation here. So I read this passage as implying that the sermon was probably preached in Hippo.

16. See Nm 31:17-18; Jgs 21:11. In fact these texts go against him; he introduces the negative. But the Vulgate texts distinguish between *mulieres* who *had* known the bed of a man, and *feminae puellae* or *virgines* who had not. Perhaps in Nm 31:18 his text had *mulieres* where the Vulgate has *feminae*.

17. The Maurists add "in the virgin's womb."

18. In Latin (and Greek) it is the same word which I have successively translated "give up" and "hand over," that is also used for Judas betraying Jesus—*trado*. That is why Judas is brought in here. From this same word, we should observe, comes the idea of tradition—handing on from one generation to another.

19. "From the dead" omitted by the Maurists.

20. See 1 Cor 2:9, literally translated.

21. See Wis 14:15.

22. Before coming to his proposal—to try and understand something of the Trinity in a created likeness—he puts in this very important *caveat* against supposing we can understand anything at all about God directly and univocally. He was quite as committed to a negative or "apophatic" theology which says what God is not instead of what he is—as any of the Greek Fathers. Compare also what Thomas Aquinas says in his *Summa Theologiae* 1a, q. 3, prologue.

23. See Gn 1:26.

24. This is a different use of the words "image" and "trace" (*imago* and *vestigium*) from the one we find in *The Trinity*. Here his use of the terms is loose and *ad hoc*, but the trace seems to be an extra quality of the image, ensuring its genuine likeness. In *The Trinity* on the other hand traces or *vestigia* are to be found throughout the material creation, and their likeness to the original or exemplar is far more remote than that of the image, which is only to be found in the human (and angelic) mind. Perhaps this is just one more indication that this sermon was preached well before the relevant books of *The Trinity* (IX to XI) were composed.

25. Here I follow the Maurists, as reproduced by Migne, in treating "Son" and "Father" as referring to the divine persons, by giving them capitals. The text of the Italian edition gives them lower case first letters, treating this sentence as a general remark about sons and fathers such as he goes on to make. If you prefer that, you will translate "a son" and "a father" instead of "the Son" and "the Father." I do not think it makes such good sense.

26. Saint Augustine locates the divine image in man in the mind, not as the later, decadent, catechetical tradition has it, in the soul. True, he doesn't always use these words strictly; but generally for him the soul is the animating principle which is active in the bodily senses and appetites, and so Augustine is quite ready to talk about the souls of animals or plants. The mind on the other hand

(*mens* or *animus*, as distinct from *anima*, soul), is the essentially non-bodily or spiritual element in man.

27. That is, three things that operate inseparably, while they are separately indicated, and thus really distinct.

28. He is acting this out, of course, in the pulpit, pretending to be pestered by silly questions.

29. In his view (the commonplace of ancient philosophy, shared by all schools) the intellect is formed by its object, the thing known, just as the senses are by their objects; i.e. it receives an impression from its object as wax receives an impression from a seal or signet ring; it is "shaped" by its object.

30. In Latin, the four syllables of *memoria*.

31. What was suggested: the meaning or idea in my mind; what suggested it: the meaning or idea in yours.

32. See Wis 9:5.

SERMON 53

ON THE WORDS OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL *BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT, ETC., BUT ESPECIALLY ON THE VERSE, BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART, FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD*

Date: 413-416¹

All want to be happy

1. Today is the feast of a holy virgin who publicly testified about Christ and who earned a testimonial from Christ, who was publicly slain and secretly crowned, and it obliges me to speak to your graces about that encouraging declaration the Lord was making just now in the gospel, telling us of several ways to attain a life of bliss—something which nobody fails to desire. Well clearly, you couldn't find anyone who doesn't want to be happy, or blessed.² But oh, if only people were as willing to do the work as they are eager to get the reward! They all run up eagerly when they are told, "You will be happy"; let them listen willingly when they are also told, "if you do this." Don't decline the contest if you have set your heart on the prize; let the advertisement of the reward kindle your spirit to get to work with a will. What we want, what we desire, what we are aiming at, will come afterward; but what we are told to do for the sake of what is coming afterward must come now.

Well then, let's start recalling these divine words, the injunctions and the benefits mentioned in the gospel: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 5:3). The kingdom of heaven will be yours later on, right now be poor in spirit. Do you want the kingdom of heaven to be yours later on? Ask yourself whose you are now. Be poor in spirit. Are you going to ask me, perhaps, what being poor in spirit means? No conceited person is poor in spirit; therefore being humble is being poor in spirit. The kingdom of heaven is high up above, but *Whoever humbles himself shall be exalted* (Lk 14:11).³

Who is meek?

2. Notice what follows: *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit possession of the earth* (Mt 5:5). You want possession of the earth now; make sure that you don't find yourself possessed by the earth. You will possess it if you are meek, you will be possessed by it if you are rough. And take care too, when you hear

the prize offered, possession of the earth, that you don't stretch out the skirts of your greed (Mt 5:4),⁴ which wants to possess the earth now and keep your neighbor out by fair means or foul; don't fall for this idea. You will only in very truth possess the earth when you stick closely to the one who made heaven and earth. That's what being meek means, you see, not resisting your God; insofar as you do good, taking pleasure in him, not being pleased with yourself; insofar as you justly suffer evil, being displeased with yourself and not with him. It's no small thing, after all, to please him by being displeased with yourself; you will certainly displease him by being pleased with yourself.

Who are the mourners?

3. Pay attention to the third point: *Blessed are the mourners, for they shall be consoled* (Mt 5:4). Mourning is the work, consolation the reward. What sort of consolation, I wonder, do people find who mourn in the way of the world? Grievous ones, consolations to be dreaded! Grief is assuaged with a consolation that carries with it the dread of further grief. For example, a child buried brings grief, another born brings joy. He has buried the first, he has taken the second in his arms; in the first he found grief, in the second he finds anxiety, so in neither does he find consolation. So the true consolation will be the one where something is given that cannot be lost; where those who now mourn because they are wandering exiles shall afterwards rejoice at really being consoled.⁵

Who are the hungry?

4. Now comes the fourth work and fourth reward: *Blessed are those who are hungry and thirsty for justice, because they shall be satisfied* (Mt 5:6). You want to be satisfied, of course, but what with? If it's the stomach looking for satisfaction, once the satisfying meal has been digested you will feel hungry again. *And whoever drinks of this water, he says, will be thirsty again* (Jn 4:13). If a dressing applied to a wound cures it, it doesn't hurt anymore. But the dressing applied to hunger, namely food, is so applied that it only gives temporary relief.⁶ A few hours after you have had your fill, hunger returns. Every day, to be sure, the remedy of eating your fill is available, but the wound of your weakness and need is not permanently healed.

So let us be hungry and thirsty for justice, in order that we may take our fill of the justice which we are now hungry and thirsty for. For we shall, of course, be satisfied by what we are hungry and thirsty for. Let our inner self⁷ be hungry and thirsty; it has its food, it has its drink. *I, he says, am the bread who came down from heaven* (Jn 6:14). There you have the bread of the hungry, yearn also for the drink of the thirsty: *For with you is the fountain of life* (Ps 36:9).

Who are the merciful?

5. Look what comes next: *Blessed are the merciful, for God will show them mercy* (Mt 5:7). Do it, and it will be done; do it with others, that it may be done

with you. Because you have plenty, and you are in want; you have plenty of temporal things, you are in want of eternal things. You hear a man begging, you yourself are a beggar to God. Something is asked of you, and you are asking for something. The way you treat your petitioner is how God will treat his. You are both full and empty. Fill the empty person from your fullness, so that your emptiness may be filled from God's fullness.

Who are the heart-pure?

6. Look what comes next: *Blessed are the heart-pure*, that is, those who are pure of heart, *for they shall see God* (Mt 5:8).⁸ This is the end of our love—the end to perfect us, not the end to finish us off. Food gets finished, a garment gets finished; the food is finished off by being eaten; the garment is perfected by being woven. Both are finished or ended. But one ending means destruction, the other means completion. Whatever we do, whatever we do well, whatever we strive for, whatever praiseworthy objects we are crazy about—well, when we attain to the vision of God, we won't seek such things anymore. What after all is there to seek, if you have got God? Or what will you be content with, if you are not content with God? We want to see God, we are looking for ways to see God, we are on fire to see God. Who isn't? But notice what it says: *Blessed are the heart-pure, for they shall see God.*

Provide what you need to see with. Thus, to take a material example, why do you long to see the sunrise with bloodshot eyes? Make your eyes healthy, and that light will be a joy; make your eyes unhealthy, and that light will be a torment. You will not be permitted to see with an impure heart what can only be seen with a pure heart. You will be driven back, you'll be taken away, you won't see it. Because *Blessed are the heart-pure, for they shall see God.*

How often has he already called people blessed? What ways to blessedness has he mentioned, what works, what rewards, what merits, what prizes? In no case has it been said “They shall see God.” *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit possession of the earth. Blessed are the mourners, they shall be consoled. Blessed are those who are hungry and thirsty for justice; they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful; they shall obtain mercy.* Nowhere is it said, “They shall see God.” We come to the heart-pure, then is the promise made of seeing God. Not without reason, because then we have the eyes God can be seen with. The apostle Paul is talking about these eyes when he says, *Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened* (Eph 1:18). So now these eyes, for their weakness, are being enlightened by faith; afterward, for their strength, they will be enlightened by sight. *For as long as we are in the body we are away from the Lord. For we are walking by faith not by sight* (2 Cor 5:6-7). And what is said about us, as long as we are in this condition of faith? *We see now through a glass in a riddle; but then it will be face to face* (1 Cor 13:12).

What is meant by the face, hands, and feet of God?

7. Don't start thinking here about a bodily face. If, in your ardent desire to see God, you get your bodily face ready for seeing, you will desire that sort of face in God too. But if now you have at least a spiritual enough idea of God not to think that God is something bodily (we dealt with that at some length yesterday⁹—if, that is, we managed to accomplish anything); if in your heart, as in a temple of God, we succeeded in smashing the idol of a human form; if now you call the text readily to mind, and take it deeply to heart, in which the apostle denounces those who *saying that they are wise have become foolish, and have changed round the glory of the incorruptible God and the likeness of the image of corruptible man* (Rom 1:22-23);¹⁰ if you too have now denounced such an evil, if you have renounced it, if you are cleaning out his temple for the creator, if you want him to come and make his home with you;¹¹ then *Think of the Lord with goodness, and seek him with simplicity of heart* (Wis 1:1). Notice to whom you say—if you do say it, that is, if you say it sincerely—*To you has my heart said, Let me seek your face* (Ps 27:8). Let your heart say it too, and add, *Your countenance, Lord, will I seek* (1 Cor 1:24).

You are seeking well, you see, because you are seeking with the heart. It talks about God's countenance, about God's arm, about God's hands, about God's feet, about God's footstool, about God's seat; but don't think about human limbs. If you want to be the temple of truth, smash the idol of falsehood. God's hands mean God's power, God's face is God's knowledge, God's feet are God's presence. God's seat, if you wish it so, is you. Or perhaps you will have the audacity to deny that Christ is God? "No," you say. You also grant that Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God?¹² "I do," you say. Then listen: "The soul of the just is the seat of wisdom."¹³ Where does God have his seat, if not where he lives? Where does he live, if not in his temple? *For the temple of God is holy, which is what you are* (1 Cor 3:17).

So mind how you receive God. *God is spirit; and it is necessary to worship God in spirit and truth* (Jn 2:24). Now, if you agree, let the ark of the covenant enter your heart, while Dagon crashes down.¹⁴ So listen now, and learn to desire God, learn to prepare what you need to be able to see God. *Blessed are the heart-pure*, he says, *for they shall see God*. Why prepare the eyes in your head? If you are going to see like that, what you see will be in a place. The one who is everywhere in his wholeness is not in a place. Purify what he can be seen with.

The reward matches the work

8. Listen, and understand if with his help I am able to explain the matter. May he help us to understand all these works and rewards we have mentioned, and how they nicely match one another. Where, I ask you, is mention made of a reward that does not match the work, that does not harmonize with it? Because lowly people seem to be very remote from kingship and royalty, *Blessed*, he says, *are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. Because people who are meek are easy to kick off their own land, *Blessed*, he says, *are the meek,*

for they shall inherit possession of the earth. As for the rest, they are as clear as day, they speak for themselves, we don't require explanations of them, we only need to be reminded of them. *Blessed are the mourners.* What mourner does not desire consolation? *They*, he says, *shall be consoled.* *Blessed are those who are hungry and thirsty for justice.* Who, when hungry and thirsty, does not seek satisfaction? *They too*, he says, *shall be satisfied.* *Blessed are the merciful.* Anyone who shows mercy, surely, is hoping to be requited by God in kind, so that the same will be done for him as he has done for the poor. *Blessed*, he says, *are the merciful, for God will show mercy to them.*

How appropriately each is attached to each, and nothing is offered in reward which does not suit the requirement. You are required, you see, to be poor in spirit; the reward is that you will have the kingdom of heaven. You are required to be meek; the reward is that you will possess the earth. You are required to mourn; the reward is to be consoled. You are required to be hungry and thirsty for justice; the reward is to be satisfied. You are required to be merciful; the reward is that you will obtain mercy. In the same way you are required to purify the heart; the reward is that you will see God.

In what special way the pure of heart will see God

9. Now you mustn't take this list of requirements and prizes in such a way that, when you hear *Blessed are the heart-pure, for they shall see God*, you assume the poor in spirit are not going to see him, nor are the meek going to, nor are the mourners going to, nor are those who are hungry and thirsty for justice going to, nor are the merciful going to see him. You mustn't suppose that it's only the pure of heart who are going to see him, all the others being excluded from doing so. All these, you see, are in fact the same people. They will see him, and the reason they will see him is not because they are poor in spirit, because they are meek, because they are mourners, because they are hungry and thirsty for justice, because they are merciful—but because they are pure of heart.

It's as though physical activities were allotted to the various parts of the body, and someone were to say, for example, "Blessed are those who have feet, because they shall walk; blessed are those who have hands, because they shall work; blessed are those who have voices, because they shall shout; blessed are those who have mouths and tongues, for they shall speak; blessed are those who have eyes, for they shall see." In the same way, he was as it were putting together the parts of a spiritual body, and teaching us what belonged to which. Humility is suited to having the kingdom of heaven; meekness is suited to possessing the earth; mourning is suited to being consoled; hunger and thirst for justice are suited to being satisfied; mercy is suited to obtaining mercy; a pure heart is suited to seeing God.

Faith in God purifies the heart

10. So if we long to see God, how is this eye going to be purified? Who wouldn't take pains, who wouldn't look for ways of purifying the instrument

with which he can see the one he is longing for with all his heart? Divine authority has given us this clear answer to our question: *Purifying their hearts*, it says, *by faith* (Acts 15:9). Faith in God purifies the heart, the pure heart sees God. But faith is sometimes defined as follows by people who wish to deceive themselves; as if it were enough merely to believe—some people, you see, promise themselves the vision of God and the kingdom of heaven for believing while living bad lives. Against these the apostle James indignantly took umbrage out of spiritual charity, so he says in his letter, *You believe that God is one*. You pat yourself on your back for your faith; you observe that many godless people assume there are many gods, and you congratulate yourself for believing that there is only one God. *You do well. The demons also believe—and shudder* (Jas 2:19). Shall they too see God? Those who are pure of heart shall see him. Whoever would say that the unclean spirits are heart-pure? And yet, *they believe—and shudder*.

*Our faith has to be distinguished
from the faith of demons*

11. So our faith has to be distinguished from the faith of the demons. Our faith, you see, purifies the heart, their faith makes them guilty. They act wickedly, and so they say to the Lord, *What have you to do with us?* When you hear the demons saying this, do you imagine they don't recognize him? *We know who you are*, they say. *You are the Son of God* (Lk 4:34). Peter says this and he is praised for it;¹⁵ the demon says it, and is condemned. Why's that, if not because the words may be the same, but the heart is very different? So let us distinguish our faith, and see that believing is not enough. That's not the sort of faith that purifies the heart. *Purifying their hearts*, it says, *by faith*. But which faith, what sort of faith? The one, surely, which the apostle Paul defines when he says *Faith which works through love* (Gal 5:6) This faith is different from the faith of demons, different from the morals of dissolute and desperate men. *Faith*, he says. “*Which faith?*” The one *which works through love*, hopes for what God promises. You couldn't have a more perfect, a more carefully thought-out definition than that.

So we have these three; anyone in whom is to be found the faith which works through love cannot help hoping for what God promises us. So hope is the companion of faith. Hope, of course, is necessary as long as we do not see what we believe, in case perhaps by not seeing we should despair and fall away. It makes us sad that we don't see; but we are consoled by the hope that we are going to see. So hope is here, and it's the companion of faith. Then there is charity by which we long, by which we struggle to attain, which kindles our hunger and gives us a raging thirst. This one too, then, is added, and you get faith, hope, and charity.¹⁶ How, after all, can charity fail to be there, since charity is nothing else but love? But faith is defined as that *which works through love*. Take faith away, that's the end of your believing; take charity away, that's the end of your doing anything. That you should believe is the province of faith;

that you should do anything is the province of charity. After all, if you believe and don't love, you don't bestir yourself to good works; and even if you do bestir yourself, you do so as a slave, not as a son, in fear of punishment, not in love with justice. So then, I repeat, that faith purifies the heart which works through love.

Don't think of God as a body

12. And now, what does faith itself actually do? With so many testimonies from scripture, so many different readings, such a plentiful variety of sermons and exhortations, what does it actually do, if not ensure that we see now by a mirror in a riddle, later on face to face?¹⁷ But not so that you should turn your thoughts back again to that face of yours. Think of the face of the heart. Force your heart to think about divine matters, compel it, drive it on. Anything that occurs to it in its thinking which is like a body, fling it away. You cannot yet say, "This is what he is"; do at least say, "This is not what he is." When, after all, will you say "This is what God is"? Not even when you see him, because what you will see is inexpressible. The apostle says he was snatched up to the third heaven and heard words that cannot be uttered.¹⁸ If the words cannot be uttered, what about the one whose words they are?

So perhaps, while you are thinking about God, some vast and wonderful shape in vaguely human form crosses your mind. You have set it up in the sight of your mind's eye, like something huge, massive, vast, its enormous bulk spreading in all directions. Somewhere you have reached the end of it. If you've reached the end of it, it isn't God. If you haven't reached the end of it, where is its face? You are thinking of some bulk or mass, and in order to distinguish its various members or parts, you have to define the bulky mass, give it an outline or limits. Otherwise you can't distinguish its parts, unless you have given it an outline. What are you up to, foolish, materialist manner of thinking? You have constructed a vast bulky mass, and all the vaster, the greater the honor you have imagined you are giving to God. Someone else just adds a yard or a pound,¹⁹ and he makes it even bigger.

Companions in seeking

13. "But I've read it," you say. What have you read, you who have understood nothing? But tell us all the same what you've read. Don't let's brush aside the child playing with ideas. Tell us, what have you read? *Heaven is my throne, while the earth is my footstool* (Is 66:1).²⁰ I hear you; I've read it too. But you, perhaps, think yourself the better for having read it and believed it. Well, I too believe what you have said. Let's be companions in believing. What am I saying? Let's be companions in seeking.

So there you are, hold on to what you have read and believed: *Heaven is my throne*, that is, "my chair"; "throne," you see, is a Greek word, for which the English²¹ is "chair" while the earth is my footstool. Haven't you also read that

other text, *Who measured the heaven with the palm of his hand?* (Is 40:12). I think you have read it; you recognize it, and affirm that you believe it. We both, after all, read each text in that same place, we both believe each. Now think hard, and instruct me; I'm appointing you the teacher, and making myself the child. Won't you please teach me? Who ever sat in the palm of his own hand?

The meaning of Isaiah 66:1

14. What you've done is to take the shape and outlines of God's limbs and features from the human body.²² But perhaps the notion crept into your mind that we were made in God's image as regards our bodies. I'll accept that for the time being as something to be considered, discussed, examined, thrashed out by argument. Please be so kind as to listen to me, because I was so kind just now as to listen to you. So—God is seated in heaven, and he is measuring heaven with the palm of his hand. Does the same heaven become wide when he is sitting in it, and narrow when he's measuring it? Or is God himself the same size in his seat as he is in his palm? If that's the case, God didn't make us in his own likeness, because we have palms which are much narrower than the part of the body we sit with. But if he is as broad in the palm as he's broad in the beam, then he made very unequal parts for us. No, that's not where the likeness lies. Such an idol should be ashamed of itself in a Christian mind.

So then, take "heaven" as standing for all the saints, since earth too stands for all who are on the earth: *Let all the earth worship you* (Ps 66:4). If we are right in meaning all those who live on the earth when we say *Let all the earth worship you*, then we are right in meaning those who live in heaven when we say, "Let all the heaven be occupied by you." After all, even the saints who are still living on earth tread the earth in the flesh, but live in heaven in the spirit. It's not for nothing that they are urged to lift up their hearts, and that they reply, when so urged, that they have done so.²³ It's not for nothing, either, that it says, *If you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is to be found, seated at the right hand of God. Have a taste for the things that are above, not for the things that are on earth* (Col 3:1-2). Insofar then as that's where they spend their time, they too are occupied by God, they too are heaven because they are God's throne; and when they proclaim the words of God, it's *the heavens that are declaring the glory of God* (Ps 19:1).

The meaning of breadth, length, height, and depth

15. So come back with me to the face of the heart; get that ready for seeing God with. The one to whom God speaks is inside. Ears, eyes, other parts of the body that can be seen, they are all the organs or the residence of someone or other inside. It's the inner person in whom Christ resides for the time being through faith; that's where he is going to reside in the full majesty of his divine presence,²⁴ when at last we have come to know *what is the breadth, the length, the height, the depth*; to know also *the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge*,

that we may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph 3:17-19).

So now, if this way of understanding the matter²⁵ doesn't offend you, set yourself to grasp the meaning of breadth, length, height, depth. Don't let your thoughts and imagination run about through degrees of latitude and longitude, and through the comprehensible vastness of this colossal, massive world. Observe within yourself what I am talking about. Breadth consists in good works; length in long suffering and perseverance in good works; height in the expectation of heavenly rewards—it's on account of this height that you are told to lift up your heart, Perform good works, and persevere in good works, for the sake of receiving God's favors. Reckon earthly things as worthless, or else when this earth is in turmoil because of some scourge sent by his wise providence, you may start saying it's been quite pointless your worshiping God, quite pointless your doing good works, quite pointless your persevering in good works. By doing good works, you see, it's as if you have had breadth; by persevering in them, as if you have had length; but by aiming at earthly returns, you have failed to have height. Now observe depth: it's the grace of God in the hidden secrecy of his will. *For who has ever known the mind of the Lord, or who has ever been his counselor? (Rom 11:34). And, Your judgments are like the great deep (Ps 36:6).*²⁶

The four dimensions of the cross

16. This manner of life, consisting in doing good, in persevering in it, in looking to heavenly rewards, in God's giving his grace secretly, wisely though, not foolishly; in not finding fault because one person is treated like this, another like that—there is no injustice with God, after all:²⁷ then, if you like, you may fit this manner of life to the cross of your Lord. It's not for nothing, you see, that he chose such a death, seeing that it was in his power to die or not to die. If it was in his power to die or not to die, why shouldn't it be in his power to die this way or that way? So it's not for nothing that he chose the cross, on which to crucify you to this world.²⁸ The breadth of the cross is given by the horizontal beam, where his hands are fixed, thus signifying good works. Length is given by that part of the upright which extends from the crossbeam to the ground; that's where his body is crucified, and in a manner of speaking stands, and this standing signifies perseverance. Next, height is given by that part of the upright which sticks up above the crossbeam to the head, so that it signifies expectation of the things that are above. And where do we have depth but in the part which is fixed in the ground? Grace, you see, is something secret, that always remains concealed. It can't be seen, but from it rises up what can be seen.

Next, if you have understood all this,²⁹ by practicing it as well as understanding it, for a good understanding have all who practice it (Eph 3:19), extend yourself now, if you can, to the recognition of Christ's love, a recognition that surpasses all other knowledge.³⁰ When you have reached that point, you will be filled with all the fullness of God. Then will be experienced that *face to face* (1 Cor 13:12). You will be filled, of course, with the fullness of God, not so that

God is full of you but so that you are full of God. Look there, if you can, for some bodily face. But it's time now such trifles were taken out of the sight of the mind. The little boy must throw away his toys, must learn to deal with more important things. We are all of us in many respects small children; and when we were so even more than we are now, we were tolerated by our elders. *Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one can see God* (Heb 12:14). By this too, you see, is the heart purified, because it implies the faith which works through love.³¹ So it is that *Blessed are the heart-pure, for they shall see God* (Mt 5:8).

NOTES

1. This sermon can be dated and placed because allusion is made in it to Sermon 23 (see section 7, note 9), and because it is alluded to in Sermon 277, 15 (PL 38: 1266). That sermon was preached on the feast of the martyr of Saragossa, Saint Vincent, whose feast was and is celebrated on 22 January. This sermon therefore was preached on 21 January, and the holy virgin mentioned in the opening words of it must have been Saint Agnes. Sermon 23 would then have been preached on 20 January. Scholars differ about the year, some dating these three sermons to 413, others to 415 or 416.

All were preached in Carthage in three different basilicas. According to a later catalogue of Augustine's sermons, this one was preached in the Bowery Basilica, for which see Sermon 30, note 1.

2. See *The Trinity*, XIII, 4-5, 7.9 (PL 42: 1018ff).

3. See Prv 3:34.

4. See Sermon 52, 3, note 10. There I translate *sinum* more literally by "laps" instead of by "skirts" as here.

5. He is not intending here to trivialize natural human grief; he is only saying that the consolation it sometimes receives cannot be the one our Lord means, because it is so precarious. So the mourning our Lord is blessing must be something more than such griefs. He suggests it must be grief for our estrangement from God by sin.

6. *Relevet*. The text I am using has *revelet*, presumably a misprint. It would mean "that it only gives temporary revelation," which hardly makes sense.

7. See 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 3:16. English colloquialism has coarsened Paul's expression "the inner man" to mean precisely just the stomach!

8. His text has the peculiar word *mundicordes*, which he hastens to explain (*vulgate qui sunt mundo corde*). We should remember that in the ancient languages "heart" represented the mind or thought, not the feelings, and that in this context purity of heart means honesty of mind together with purity of intention. In this life, as he will go on to say, quoting Acts 15:9, it is faith that purifies the heart, so purity of heart primarily means lucidity of faith. It excludes all kinds of self-deception and self-justification rather than what we customarily think of nowadays as impure thoughts. Not that these are exactly an aid to seeing God; but they are not the precise impediment that either Jesus or Matthew or Augustine has in mind here.

9. Sermon 23.

10. His quotation has the very odd reading of *et similitudinem imaginis*, instead of *in similitudinem*, etc. That is why I have had to translate *immutaverunt* by "changed round" instead of simply by "changed."

11. See Jn 14:23.

12. See 1 Cor 1:24.

13. This is not, as the Italian editor says, a quotation of Wis 1:1. It could be construed as a positive rendering of the negative statement of Wis 1:4. Is it perhaps an apocryphal text? "Seat of wisdom" becomes a title of Mary in the litany of Loreto. I doubt if the composers of that litany would have taken it from Augustine's use of it here; they would have taken it from a source that he and they had in common. But I cannot discover what that source is.

14. See 1 Sm 5:1-3.

15. See Mt 16:16-17.

16. See 1 Cor 13:13.

17. *Ibid.* 12. He discusses this text in a rather different style in his *Confessions* 12, 13.

18. See 2 Cor 12:2-4.

19. Literally, "a cubit."

20. From here to the end of the sermon he is having a conversation with a single (imaginary) interlocutor; all the "you's" are in the second person singular. This hardly comes out in the English translation, but it is important to bear it in mind; otherwise he gives the impression that he is treating the whole congregation as if they were a pack of children. But this was not, I am sure, the case. What he was really doing was entertaining them to this conversation between himself and this imaginary childish man, whom they could all join in laughing at together—while recognizing him perhaps, a little ruefully, in themselves.

21. Latin *sedes*, whence English "see" as in "the see of Canterbury" or "the Holy See."

22. He deals with this question also in *The Trinity*, VIII, 4, 7, but in a very different style—in a way, in fact, more tolerant of such imaginings. There he recognizes that we cannot think without them; they are indeed useful, as long as we don't take them to be literally true. He gives the example of thinking about the apostle Paul. When you do this, your imagination forms the picture of a man; your imagination may provide you with a short fat man, mine may give me a tall thin man. It doesn't matter, provided neither of us supposes that our particular image is a true likeness of the apostle, which is something we lack. In spite of our imaginations, we have to admit, "We don't know what he looked like." So there is nothing wrong in even having images of God in your imagination, provided you are quite clear in your mind that he doesn't really look like that—he doesn't *look* like anything, and we cannot know what he is like. Here he is addressing a less sophisticated audience.

23. From the little dialogue introducing the preface at Mass. It is to be noted that Augustine is assuming this dialogue is being conducted with the saints on earth. *All* the baptized faithful are assumed to be and supposed to be the saints on earth, the holy people of God.

24. *Praesentia divinitatis suae*; more succinct than my rather long-winded translation. But *praesentia* here means more than just "presence" in the ordinary, colorless sense. The phrase smacks a little of court etiquette, according to which suitors are ushered, or summoned, into "the Presence." Augustine is not implying that Christ is *not* present now in the believer through faith, but will only be so in the next life. But he is remarking that his presence now is not his divine Presence, because it is not visible; he is not seen enthroned in the midst of his heavenly court.

25. Taking heaven to mean the saints; or in general, the nonliteral, metaphorical interpretation of such expressions.

26. That this interpretation of these spiritual dimensions was thought up on the spur of the moment is suggested by its inconsistency. The first three measure you, like God measuring the heavens in the palm of his hand; the last is a measure of God. The context in Ephesians suggests that they are all in fact dimensions of the measureless love of Christ.

27. See 2 Chr 19:7; Rom 9:14.

28. See Gal 6:14.

29. See Mt 13:51.

30. There is a rather odd variation here on Eph 3:19 where, as in his earlier reference to it, it is the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge. Here it is quite unequivocally the recognition, or acknowledgment of that love that surpasses all knowledge. He is asserting, apparently, that this recognition is the highest possible form of knowledge.

31. See Gal 5:5.

SERMON 53A

THE EIGHT BEATITUDES IN THE GOSPEL

Date: 405-420¹

Putting into practice God's word

1. Your graces have heard the holy gospel together with me. May the Lord assist me as I talk to you about the passage that has been recited, so that what I say may be suitable for you, and bring forth fruit in your habits and conduct. Every hearer of God's word, you see, should reflect that he ought to order his life in accordance with what he hears; he shouldn't be content² with praising God's word with his lips and treating it with contempt by the way he lives. After all, if what is said is a pleasure to hear, how much greater a pleasure it should be to put it into practice. I, here, am playing the part of the sower, you are God's field; don't let the seed be wasted, let it come to a good harvest.

With me you have just heard how Christ the Lord, when his disciples came to him, *opened his mouth and began to teach them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 5:2-3), etc.³ So the one true master began teaching his disciples when they came to him, and he said what I have briefly reminded you of. You too have come to me, in order that with his help I may speak to you and teach you. Can I do anything better than teach the same things as such a great master set before us in his words?

Who possesses security?

2. So, be poor in spirit, in order that the kingdom of heaven may be yours. Why are you afraid of being poor? Think of the wealth of the kingdom of heaven. People are afraid of poverty; let them be afraid, rather, of iniquity. After the poverty of the just, in any case, will come great prosperity, because there will be complete security; here, on the other hand, the more you increase what are called riches but are really not so, you also increase fear, and you don't put an end to greed. You can find me many rich people; can you find me one who has no worries? He's in a fever to go on getting, he's in a sweat about losing. When can such a slave ever be free? It's slavery to serve any mistress; and can it be freedom to serve Dame Avarice?

- So, *Blessed are the poor in spirit*. What does "poor in spirit" mean? Being poor in wishes, not in means. One who is poor in spirit, you see, is humble; and God hears the groans of the humble, and doesn't despise their prayers. That's why the Lord begins his sermon with humility, that is to say with poverty. You can find someone who's religious, with plenty of this world's goods, and yet not thereby puffed up and proud. And you can find someone in need, who has nothing, and won't settle for anything.⁴ This one does not have more grounds for hope than the former; the first is poor in spirit, because humble, while this one is indeed poor, but not in spirit. That's why the Lord Christ, when he said *Blessed are the poor, added in spirit*.

The apostle speaks to the poor

3. Any of you then who are listening and are poor, don't seek to become rich. Listen to the apostle, not to me; see what he said: *There is great gain, he says, in piety with contentment. For we brought nothing into this world, and we cannot take anything out of it either; if we have food and clothing, let us be content with that. For those who wish to become rich—he didn't say "who are," but "who wish to become"—those therefore who wish to become rich, fall into temptation, he says, and into a snare, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For avarice is the root of all evils, and some people by craving for it have gone astray from the faith and involved themselves in many sorrows* (1 Tm 6:6-10). When you hear "riches" it sounds such a lovely word. *They fall into temptation; is that a lovely word? Many foolish and harmful desires; is that a lovely word? Ruin and destruction; is that a lovely word? To be involved in many sorrows; is that a lovely word?*

Don't let one unreal good lead you astray, and get you stuck with so many real evils. Because, however, the apostle was not addressing those who are rich with these words, but those who are not, to warn them off wanting to be what they are not, let's also see with what sort of words he accosts those he already finds to be rich. I have told you what had to be said, and you that are poor have heard me; now it's the turn of any of you here that are rich to listen to the same blessed apostle.

Paul exhorts the rich

4. Writing to his disciple Timothy, with the rest of the advice he gave him he also said this: *Command the rich of this world*. The word of God has already found them to be rich; if it had found them to be poor, it would have told them the things I have already mentioned. So, *command the rich of this world not to be haughty in their ideas, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on the living God, who bestows all things on us abundantly for our enjoyment. Let them be rich in good works, let them be ready to give, to share, let them store up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may lay hold of true life* (1 Tm 6:17-19).

Let's consider these few words for a few moments. Above all, he says, *command the rich not to be haughty in their ideas*. Nothing so easily generates pride as riches. Anyone who's rich and not proud has trampled on riches and become dependent solely on God; being both rich and proud means not possessing, but being possessed. Being rich and proud means being like the devil; what have you got when you are rich and proud, when you haven't got God?

He also added: *nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches*. Having riches ought also to mean knowing that what you have can be lost; so try and have what cannot be lost. So after saying *nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches*, he added: *but on the living God*. Riches indeed can be lost; and I only hope they get lost without getting you lost too. The psalm mockingly addresses the rich who set their hopes on riches: *Although man walks in the image of God*. Man of course was certainly made after the image of God (Gn 1:27), but he should recognize himself as something that has been made, lose what he himself has made, and remain what God made him. So, *although man walks in the image of God, yet will he be troubled in vain*. Why's that, *he will be troubled in vain*? *He stores up, and does not know for whom he has collected them* (Ps 39:6).⁵ The living can observe the truth of this about the dead; they can see the property of many dead people not being owned by their children, but they either squander it by riotous living or get cheated of it by sharp practice; and what's much more serious, while all this effort is being put into gaining possession, the one who gains possession also loses possession of himself.⁶ Many people are killed for the sake of their wealth, so there you are; they left behind them here what they used to own; since they never did with it what he told them to, how were they able to face him when they went to meet him?⁷ So mind that your riches are the real ones: God himself, *who bestows all things on us abundantly for our enjoyment*.

The example of the sower

5. *Let them be rich, he says, in good works.* Let that be where their wealth becomes apparent, that be where they sow. It's about works such as these, you see, that the same apostle was speaking when he said, *But in doing good let us not falter; for in time we shall reap* (Gal 6:9). Let them sow; he can't yet see what he is going to gain; he must trust, and scatter the seed. Can the farmer who is sowing already see the crop harvested? He flings and chuck around grain that has been garnered with so much care and toil. He entrusts his seed to the earth; won't you entrust your works to the one who made heaven and earth? So, *let them be rich—but in good works*.

Let them be ready to give, to share. Why *to share*? Don't let them be the only ones to have. You've spoken, my dear apostle, you have taught us about sowing; now show us the harvest. He does so. Now hear about the harvest. Don't be idle about sowing, greedy-guts; hear, I repeat, about the harvest. After saying, you see, *Let them be rich in good works, let them be ready to give, to share*, because he has only told them so far to scatter the seed, he has to tell them what they

may expect to harvest, so he goes on. *Let them, he says, store up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may lay hold of true life.* The bogus life, which delights the riches, is going to pass away. So after this life we have to come to the true life.

You are very fond of what you own; put it in a safer place, or you may lose it. Certainly your whole anxious preoccupation, whoever you are who are so fond of riches, is not to lose what you own. Listen to the advice of your Lord: there is no safe place for it on earth; transfer it to heaven. You were always ready to entrust what you had accumulated to the most faithful of your slaves; well, entrust it to your faithful Lord. However faithful your slave may be to you, he can still lose it without wishing to. Your God can't lose anything; whatever you entrust to him, you will possess at his place, when you also possess him.

The rich and poor have met each other

6. Because I said "Transfer it and put it in heaven," don't let a materialistic thought creep into your mind and say to you, "And when am I to dig up, or take what I own from the earth and place it in heaven? How am I to climb up there? What kind of cranes am I to use to lift everything I own up there?" Look at the hungry, look at the naked, look at the needy, look at the immigrants, look at the captives;⁸ they shall be your porters as you transfer your property to heaven. No doubt the same thought occurs to you here, and you say to me, "How shall these people be my porters? Just as I was wondering how I could lift up my property to heaven, and was unable to find an answer, so I wonder now how people I give it to are to lift it up there, and again I can't find an answer."

So listen to what Christ says to you: "Make out a letter of credit; give to me there, and I will pay you back here." Christ says, "Give to me there on earth where you have plenty, and I will pay it back to you here." Here too you are going to say, "How shall I give to Christ? Christ is in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father. When he was here in the flesh he was prepared to be hungry for our sakes, and thirsty, to be in need of hospitality; all these kindnesses were shown him by religious people who were found worthy to receive their Lord into their houses."⁹ Now, though, Christ doesn't need anything, he has established his incorruptible flesh at the right hand of the Father. How am I to give him anything here, when he doesn't need anything?"

It has evidently escaped you, what he said, *What you have done for one of the least of mine, you have done for me* (Mt 25:40). The head is in heaven, but he's got members on earth; let the member of Christ give to the member of Christ, let the one who has give to the one who lacks. You are a member of Christ, and you have something to give; he's a member of Christ, and he is in need in order that you may give it. You are both walking along the same road, you are companions together. The poor man's shoulders are free, you the rich man are weighed down with packages. Give away some of what you are staggering under, give some of your heavy load to the needy; in this way lighten your own burden, and your companion's lot.

Holy scripture says, *The rich and the poor have met each other; and the Lord made them both* (Prv 22:2). A lovely, lovely saying, *the rich and the poor have met each other*. Where have they met each other, but in this life? This one's well dressed, that one's in rags—but only when they met each other. They were both born naked—even the rich one was born poor. He shouldn't fix his attention on what he found here, but cast a glance back at what he brought with him. What did the wretched creature bring with him when he was born, but nakedness and tears? That's why the apostle says, *We brought nothing into this world, nor, what's more, can we take anything out of it* (1 Tm 6:7). So he should send ahead of him something he can find when he leaves it. So there is the poor man and there's the rich, and they have met each other, and the Lord made them both; the rich to help this one, the poor to test that one. So, *blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 5:4).¹⁰ They may possess wealth, they may not possess wealth; let them only be poor, and theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Who are the meek? ^

7. *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit possession of the earth* (Mt 5:5).¹¹ Meek. Those who don't oppose the will of God, they are the meek. Who are the meek? Those who, when it goes well with them, praise God, and when it goes badly don't blame God; who glorify God in their good works, and blame themselves for their sins. *They shall inherit possession of the earth*. Which earth, which land, if not the one of which the psalmist says, *My hope are you, my portion in the land of the living* (Ps 142:5).

The mourning of the penitent

8. *Blessed are the mourners, for they shall be consoled* (Mt 5:4).¹² My brothers, mourning is really mourning when it is the mourning of the penitent. Every sinner, surely, ought to be a mourner. Who do we mourn for, but the dead? And what is quite so dead as the wicked? Here's a great thing; they only have to mourn for themselves, and they come to life again. Let them mourn by repentance, they shall be consoled by remission of sentence.¹³

Hungry now, satisfied later

9. *Blessed are those who are hungry and thirsty for justice, because they shall be satisfied* (Mt 5:6). Being hungry for justice is proper to this earth of ours. Being satisfied will come in another place where nobody will sin; it will be repletion with justice such as the angels enjoy.¹⁴ We meanwhile, who are hungry and thirsty for justice, should be saying to God, *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven* (Mt 6:10).

A beggar to God

10. *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy* (Mt 5:7). The best possible order: after saying *Blessed are those who are hungry and thirsty for justice, because they shall be satisfied*, he added, *Blessed are the merciful, for God will show them mercy.*¹⁵ You are hungry, you see, and thirsty for justice. If you are hungry and thirsty, you are a beggar to God. So you are standing as a beggar at God's door; and there's another beggar standing at your door. The way you treat your beggar is the way God treats his.

Where God sees is where he gives the prize

11. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Mt 5:8) Do everything mentioned already, and your heart is purified. You have a pure heart, because you don't pretend to be friendly, and nurse unfriendly feelings in your heart. Where God sees is where he gives the prize.¹⁶ Anything there in your heart that gives you pleasure, don't give it your approval or your praise; and if an evil desire tickles you, don't consent to it; and if it grows very keen, you must pray to God against it, that something may be done inside about purifying the heart, where God is being prayed to. Clearly, when you want to invite God to answer to prayer, clean out your inner room. Sometimes the tongue is silent and the soul is sighing, that means God is being prayed to inside in the room of your heart; there should be nothing there to offend God's eyes, nothing to cause him displeasure.

But perhaps you may find difficulty in cleaning out your heart; call him in, he won't refuse to clean out a place for himself, and he will agree to stay with you. Or are you afraid of receiving such a great potentate, and being turned upside down by him, as people of modest and slender means are usually afraid of being forced to receive in their houses great folk who are passing through? I agree, there's nothing greater than God; don't worry, all the same, about not having enough room; receive him, and he enlarges your living space. You have nothing to set before him? Receive him, and he feeds you; and, what is even more marvelous to hear, he feeds you on himself. He will be your food, because he said so himself: *I am the living bread who came down from heaven* (Jn 6:41). Bread of this sort invigorates, and never deteriorates.¹⁷ So, *blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.*

Be a promoter of peace

12. *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God* (Mt 5:9).¹⁸ Who are the peacemakers? Those who make peace. Do you see two people quarreling? Be a promoter of peace between them. Say nice things about this one to that one, and about that one to this one. Do you hear one of them, apparently in anger, saying nasty things about the other? Don't repeat them; suppress the abuse uttered by an angry individual, give honest thought to the

business of reconciliation. What's more, if you want to be a peacemaker between two quarreling friends of yours, begin the work of making peace with yourself; you should first pacify yourself inside, where perhaps you are wrangling and brawling with yourself every day. That person had some internal wrangling going on in himself, didn't he, who said, *The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, so that you cannot do whatever you will* (Gal 5:17)? They are the words of the holy apostle. *For I delight in the law of God according to the inner self, but I see another law in my members fighting against the law of my mind, and taking me captive in the law of sin which is in my members* (Rom 7: 22-23). So if there is a kind of daily battle going on in the inner self, and the good fight is being fought to save the higher powers from being overcome by the lower, to stop lust conquering the mind, covetousness conquering wisdom, then that's the right kind of peace you should be making in yourself, to ensure that the better part of you controls the lower.

Now the better part of you is the one where the image of God is to be found. This is called mind, it's called intelligence; that's where faith glows, hope takes courage, charity is kindled. Does your mind want to be capable of conquering your lusts? Let it submit to one greater than itself, and it will conquer one lower than itself, and you will have in yourself a peace that is genuine, stable, and supremely well ordered. What is the order of this peace? God controls the mind, the mind controls the flesh; nothing could be better ordered.

But the flesh still has its weaknesses. It wasn't like that in paradise; it became like that through sin, it's because of sin that it is chained to this clashing with our own selves. One who is without sin has come to harmonize our soul with our flesh, and he has been good enough to give us the pledge of the Spirit. *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God* (Rom 8:14). *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.*

All this fighting, though, which tires us out in our weakness—even when we don't give in to evil desires, we are still somehow or other engrossed in the combat, we are not yet safe—all this fighting will be over then, when death is swallowed up in victory. Listen how it will be over and done with: *The perishable body—this is what the apostle says—has to put on imperishability, and this mortal thing put on immortality. But when this mortal thing has put on immortality, then shall come about the saying that is written: Death has been swallowed up in victory* (1 Cor 15:53-54). War is at an end, and eliminated by peace. Listen to the victory celebrations: *Where, O death, is your striving? Where, O death, is your sting?* (1 Cor 15:55). That's now the tone of victory celebrations. No enemies at all will be left, no contender within, no tempter without. So, *blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.*

It's not the penalty that makes the martyr, but the cause

13. *Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice* (Mt 5:10). The addition of these last words distinguishes the martyr from the bandit; the

bandit too, after all, suffers persecution for his evil deeds, and he is not competing for a prize, but paying the penalty that is his due. It's not the penalty that makes the martyr, but the cause; you must first choose your cause, and then you can suffer the penalty without a qualm. There were three crosses in one place when Christ suffered; himself in the middle, on this side and that two robbers. Just look at the punishment, it's all exactly the same; and yet one of the robbers found paradise on the cross. He in the middle delivers judgment, and while condemning the proud he comes to the relief of the humble. That cross was for Christ his judicial bench. What will he do when he comes to judge, if he could do that while he was being judged? To the robber who confessed he said, *Amen, I tell you, today you shall be with me in paradise* (Lk 23:43).¹⁹ This one, you see, acknowledged his case was different. What had he said, anyway? *Remember me, Lord, when you come into your kingdom* (Lk 23:42). "I'm well aware," he says, "of my evil deeds; certainly, let me go on being crucified, until you come." And because everyone who humbles himself shall be exalted, he immediately delivered his verdict and granted a pardon: *Today, he said, you shall be with me in paradise.*

But the Lord, all of him, was buried on that very day, wasn't he? Well, as regards the flesh he would be in the tomb; as regards the soul he would be among the shades of the underworld, not to be chained there, but to release others from their chains. So if on that selfsame day he would be among the shades as regards the soul, in the tomb as regards the flesh, how could he say, *Today you shall be with me in paradise?* But is Christ, all of him, just soul and flesh? Has it slipped your mind that *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (Jn 1:1)? Has it slipped your mind that *Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God* (1 Cor 1:24)? So it's in the person of the Word that he said, *Today you shall be with me in paradise.* "Today," he says, "as regards the soul I am going down to the shades, but as regards the godhead I am not departing from paradise."

Chew the cud on what you have received

14. To the best of my ability I have expounded all the beatitudes of Christ to your graces. Indeed, you are all so keen, I see, that you still want to hear more. Your graces have challenged me to say much, and no doubt there are other things I could say. But it's better that you should chew the cud on what you have received, and inwardly digest it to your profit.

NOTES

1. This sermon, not found in the Maurist edition, was first published by Dom G. Morin from a manuscript of a book of homilies in the National Library of Vienna. He thinks it likely that the

copyist of that manuscript modified the text slightly in one or two places, as we shall see in subsequent notes.

There is nothing to suggest where the sermon was preached. From the concluding words, in which Augustine says that although the congregation appear to want more, he is going to stop there, and doesn't promise to take up the thread next day or next week, as he sometimes does, I infer very tentatively that it wasn't preached either at Hippo, his own church, or at Carthage, where he would usually stay for some time when he visited the city. As regards the date, two scholars suggest any time between 405 and 411, while another dates it to the end of his career, say between 425 and 430. We really have nothing to go on. His treatment of 1 Tm 6:6-10 when he is dealing with the first beatitude is very like his treatment of the same passage in Sermon 39. It is at least likely then that the two sermons were preached during the same period of his career. But as I remark in note 1 to that sermon, it could have been preached any time between 405 and 420. The same I think is true of this one, and I don't regard 420 as a fixed date.

The sermon takes a rather different line on the beatitudes from the previous one.

2. *Quaerat*. The word properly means to seek or inquire. But the context here makes me wonder if in popular Latin it was not already receiving the derivative sense it has acquired in the Spanish *quiero*, which commonly means simply to like or to want.

3. The "etc.," Dom Morin thinks, is the work of the copyist. He suggests Augustine would here have recited the whole text of the beatitudes.

4. *Et in nullis rebus sedentem*; "and sitting/settling/lingering in no things." From the context, it must be contrasted with what he has just said about the well-to-do person who is for all that not puffed up and proud. So it will hardly do to interpret it, with the Italian, as meaning "deprived of any kind of support."

5. Augustine adds the words "of God." His text, as we can tell from his discourse on this psalm (*Expositions of the Psalms* 38, 11; PL 36, 421), simply read "Although man walks in the image"—translated by RSV as "walks as a shadow." See also Sermon 60, 2. It could have been the copyist of the homilies book who added "of God," but I am inclined to think it was Augustine himself.

6. This is as messy a sentence in the Latin as in the English, although rather more succinct. You could argue about who loses possession of himself, the heir trying to regain possession of the inheritance he has been cheated of, or the sharp practitioner who has done the cheating. Augustine would answer that it is anyone who is totally preoccupied, justly or unjustly, with possessing or acquiring wealth.

7. "He" and "him" is God. For the whole passage see also Sermons 36, 2; 39, 4; 61, 10; 85, 3; 125A, 4.

8. He is not thinking of prisoners who are awaiting trial or serving sentences, but people captured or kidnapped by brigands and desert tribes, and held for ransom; that is what the word *captivos* suggests.

9. See, for example, Jn 4:7ff; Lk 10:38ff; Mk 14:9ff

10. For this whole passage see also Sermons 39:6 and 53:2.

11. See Sermon 53, note 5.

12. See Sermon 53, notes 5 & 7.

13. The translation reproduces the rhyming balance of the Latin, *poenitentia . . . indulgentia*. But it doesn't quite get the full flavor of *indulgentia*, which contains an idea of being petted, indulged, made much of, like the prodigal son on his return to his father.

14. This indicates the wide meaning of "justice" in the biblical sense, which Augustine is being faithful to here. It means everyone and everything being just right—being perfect, in fact, as our heavenly Father is perfect.

15. This is his version of the text in Sermon 53, 3. One infers that it really was the version in his Bible, not just his free quotation; and therefore that the quotation at the beginning of this section has been tidied up by the copyist, bringing it into line with the Vulgate.

16. See Mt 6:4; 6:18.

17. *Reficit, non deficit*. *Deficit* actually has more the meaning of "fails," "gives out."

18. Sermon 53 did not get this far with the beatitudes.

19. Two observations here: first, his argument is slightly askew, since he begins by distinguishing the cause of Christ from that of the robbers, but goes on to talk about something rather different that distinguishes the cause of the so-called good thief; secondly, I say "so-called" because there is a most interesting variant reading among the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, which has Christ saying *to the one who reviled him*, "Be of good cheer, today . . ." etc. This splendid notion, that Christ took *both* his fellow criminals/victims with him to paradise, has been ignored by the whole Christian tradition, whether learned or popular, including Augustine. I think it is so splendid it must be authentic.

SERMON 54

ON WHAT IS WRITTEN IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 5:16: SO LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE MEN, THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS, AND GLORIFY YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN; AND AGAINST THAT MATTHEW 6:1: TAKE CARE NOT TO PERFORM YOUR JUSTICE BEFORE MEN, TO BE SEEN BY THEM

Date: 410¹

Confessions and opposites

1. Many people, dearly beloved, are constantly upset because after our Lord Jesus Christ had said, in the sermon on the mount, *So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven*, he went on to say later on, *Take care not to perform your justice before men, to be seen by them*. Anyone not too good at understanding things and yet eager all the same to obey commandments, is troubled in mind, and torn between contraries and opposites. It is, after all, as impossible for anyone to oblige one master who is giving contradictory orders, as it is for anyone to serve two masters—which the Savior himself asserts in the same sermon.² So what is the wobbly soul to do, when it reckons it is unable to oblige, and is afraid not to oblige? You see, if he places his good works in the light to be noticed by other people, in order to carry out the command, *So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven*, he will consider himself liable to be held guilty of acting against the command that says, *Take care not to perform your justice before men, to be seen by them*. And again, if he's afraid of this, and to avoid doing it hides the good things he does, he will suppose he is not serving the one who bids him, *Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works*.

The example of Paul

2. Anyone, on the other hand, who understands the matter rightly can fulfill both requirements, and will serve the all-embracing Master, who would not have condemned the slothful servant if he had been told to do something that was absolutely impossible. Listen to Paul, the servant of Jesus Christ, called an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,³ both doing and teaching each of these

things. Notice how his light shines before other people, so that they may see his good works. *We commend ourselves*, he says, *to everybody's conscience in the sight of God* (2 Cor 4:2); and again, *We aim at good things, not only before God, but also before men* (2 Cor 8:21); and again, *Please everyone in everything, just as I too please everyone in everything* (1 Cor 10:33).⁴

Notice, next, how he takes care not to perform his justice before other people to be seen by them; but let each one, he says, *test his own work, and then he will have glory in himself and not in another* (Gal 6:4); and again, *For this is our glory, the testimony of our conscience* (2 Cor 1:12); and the plainest of the lot of them, *If I were still pleasing men*, he says, *I would not be Christ's servant* (Gal 1:10).

But if people are upset by the commands of the Lord apparently contradicting one another, I'm afraid they are much more likely to object to his apostle, and say, "How can you say, *Please everyone in everything, just as I too please everyone in everything*, and also say, the same you speaking, *If I were still pleasing men, I would not be Christ's servant?*" To forestall this objection, may we have the assistance of the Lord, who was also speaking in his servant and apostle, and may he open his mind to us, and make it easy for us to obey.

Works in the open

3. As a matter of fact, the words of the gospel carry their own explanations with them, and because they feed the minds of those who are knocking, they do not stop the mouths of those who are hungry.⁵ What we have to examine is the intention of the human heart, where it is aimed at, what it has in mind. If anybody wants his good works to be seen by other people because he is parading his glory and his indispensability before their eyes, and seeking recognition of them from other people, then he hasn't fulfilled either of the commands the Lord gave on this point. He has in fact taken care to perform his justice before other people to be seen by them, and on the other hand his light has not so shone before men, that they should see his good works for the purpose of glorifying the Father in heaven. It's himself, after all, that he wanted glorified, not God; and it was his own profit he was looking for, not the will of the Lord he was choosing. Of such people the apostle says, *They are all looking after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ* (Phil 2:21).

That's why the sentence didn't end there, when he said, *So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works*; but he immediately added why this was to be done: that they may glorify, he said, *your Father in heaven*. So when a person is seen by people to do good, his conscience should be prompted by the intention to do good, but not by any intention of getting well known for it, except for the praise of God and the advantage of those who get to know about it. The benefit they get from it is being delighted with God who has enabled a person to do such things; and so not giving up hope if they want such a capacity for doing good to be granted to them as well.

And so when we come to the other sentence, *Take care not to perform your justice before men*, he did end it precisely with those words, *to be seen by them*.

He didn't add, *and glorify your Father in heaven*, but he did add instead, *Otherwise you will not get any reward from your Father in heaven* (Mt 6:1). With these words he also showed that people, whom he does not want his faithful to be like, look for their reward precisely in being seen by other people; that's where they find their good, where they indulge their vanity and their conceit, where they empty themselves out and puff themselves up, where they begin to swell up and then to waste away. Why wasn't it sufficient, after all, to say *Take care not to perform your justice before men*? Why should he add *to be seen by them*, if not to suggest that there are, happily, some people who do perform their justice before others, not though to be seen by them, but for the works themselves to be seen, and for the Father in heaven to be glorified, who has been pleased to grant the performance of it to the ungodly whom he has justified?*

Faith in whom they live

4. People of this sort do not even count the justice they perform as their own, but as his by faith in whom they live.⁷ That's why the apostle too says, *That I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having my own justice which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, which is from God, justice from faith* (Phil 3:8-9); and in another place, *That we might be the justice of God in him* (2 Cor 5:21). That's also why he found fault with the Jews as follows: *For being ignorant, he says, of the justice of God, and wishing to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the justice of God* (Rom 10:3). So if anybody wishes his works to be seen by the public in such a way that that one is glorified, from whom he has received the things that are seen in him, and so that the very people who see them are challenged by the sincerity of their faith to imitate his good works—then his light really does shine before the world, because it is the brightness of charity that he radiates, not the smoke of pride that he belches out. And by that very fact he is careful not to perform his justice before men, to be seen by them; because he doesn't even count that justice as his own, nor does he perform it to be seen himself. No, it's so that that one may be understood as the author of it, who is praised in the person that has been justified, and that he may carry out in the praiser what is being praised in the other, namely that he may make the praiser praiseworthy.

Notice too how the apostle, after saying, *Please everyone in everything, just as I please everyone in everything*, didn't just stop there, as though that were the goal he had set himself, to please people—if that were the case, he would be lying when he said, *If I were still pleasing men, I would not be Christ's servant*. No, he immediately added the reason why he was pleasing people: *Not seeking, he says, my own advantage, but that of the many, so that they may be saved* (1 Cor 10:33). In this way he both didn't please people for his own advantage, in case he should cease to be Christ's servant, and he did please people, for the sake of their salvation, in order to be a proper steward of Christ's. For himself his own conscience before God was sufficient, but from him there shone out before other people an example for them to imitate.

NOTES

1. There is no indication of where this sermon was preached. Two scholars date it to 409 or 410. The only reason for this that I can see from internal evidence is that the sermon deals with the same problem as he discusses in Sermon 47, sections 12 and 13, and the same scholars date that sermon to those years. But if we assume, on reasonable grounds, that Sermon 47 was preached fairly soon after Sermon 46, there are strong reasons for dating both of them to some time after 414; see Sermon 46, note 1, for the arguments.

However, the fact that this sermon deals with the same point as a section of Sermon 47 is no indication that it was preached about the same time. It is a typical Augustinian problem, which he would be likely to preach about every time one or other of these texts was read in the liturgy, and even (as in the case of Sermon 47) when it wasn't. The manner here is very different from the treatment of the point in Sermon 47; more involved, more convoluted. On the theory, which I am

- inclined to favor, that Augustine grew simpler in his style the older he got, I would date this sermon much earlier than the other—say, 400 to 405.

2. See Mt 6:24.

3. See Rom 1:1.

4. A very free quotation—as indeed it is also in Sermon 47.

5. See Mt 7:7; 5:10. The hungry are hungry for justice, and consequently they are the ones who are puzzled by this problem, and asking these awkward questions.

6. See Rom 4:5.

7. See, as well as the text he is about to quote, Rom 1:17.

b1v07

SERMON 55

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 5:22: WHOEVER SAYS TO HIS BROTHER, "FOOL," SHALL BE LIABLE TO THE GEHENNA OF FIRE, ETC.

Date: 405 or 409¹

Fear and security

1. The passage of the holy gospel, which we heard when it was read just now, really frightened us—if we have faith; the ones it didn't frighten are those who don't have faith. And because it doesn't frighten them, they are quite content with their wrongheaded sense of security, not knowing how to distinguish and to assign the proper time for fear and the proper time for security. So let those be afraid who lead their lives now with the end in view of being able to enjoy security in that other life without end.

So, we were afraid. Who wouldn't be afraid, after all, of the Word speaking and saying, *Whoever says to his brother, Fool, shall be liable to the gehenna of fire* (Mt 5:22)? *But no human being can tame the tongue* (Jas 3:8). Human beings tame wild animals, they don't tame the tongue: they tame lions, and they don't bridle their speech; they are good at taming, and they don't tame themselves. They tame what they used to be afraid of, and they are not afraid of what they ought to fear, in order to tame themselves. Well, what's the situation, then? It's a true saying, and it proceeds from the mouthpiece of Truth: *But no human being can tame the tongue*.

God tames the tongue

2. So what are we to do, my brothers? I see I'm talking to a big crowd; but because we are all one in Christ, let us take counsel together as though it were in the strictest confidence. No outsider is listening to us, we are all one because we all have one aim.² What are we to do? *Whoever says to his brother, Fool, shall be liable to the gehenna of fire. But no human being can tame the tongue.* So are they all going to go into the gehenna of fire? Perish the thought! *Lord, you have become a refuge for us, from generation to generation* (Ps 90:1). Your anger is just; you don't send anyone to gehenna unjustly. *Where shall I go from your Spirit, and where shall I flee from you* (Ps 139:7), except to you?

So we should realize, beloved, that if no human being can tame the tongue, we must flee to God for refuge, for him to tame our tongues. If you yourself want to tame it, you can't, because you are a human being, aren't you? *No human being can tame the tongue.* Compare the case of the animals which we tame. Horses don't tame themselves, camels don't tame themselves, elephants don't tame themselves, snakes don't tame themselves, lions don't tame themselves, so too neither do human beings tame themselves. But to tame horses, oxen, camels, elephants, lions, snakes, you look for a human being. So, to tame human beings you should look for God.

God tames his own image

3. So, *Lord, you have become a refuge for us.* We betake ourselves to you, and it will go well with us at your hand. It goes badly with us at our hand. Because we have left you, you have left us to ourselves. So, let us find ourselves in you, because we in ourselves had lost ourselves. *Lord, you have become a refuge for us.*

So why, my brothers, should we doubt that the Lord will make us tame and mild, if we offer ourselves to him for breaking in? You have tamed the lion, which you didn't make; is he who made *you* unable to tame *you*? How is it, after all, that you have been able to tame such monstrous beasts? Are you their equal in bodily strength? So by what power have you been able to tame these huge beasts? The very draught animals, so called, are beasts. They are never allowed to be wild, of course. But just because we are only accustomed to seeing them owned by human beings, harnessed by human beings, under the authority of human beings, do you suppose they could have been born tame? Anyway, look at the savage wild animals. The lion roars, who will not fear? And yet why is it you know you are the stronger? It isn't in bodily strength, but in the reasoning power of your mind that you are stronger than the lion, there where you were made after the image of God. The image of God tames a wild animal; and is God not going to tame his own image?

God will be everything for you

4. In him is our hope, let us submit to him and beg for his mercy. Let us place all our hope in him, and until we are tamed and tamed all through, that is until we are made perfect, let us bear with our tamer. Often enough, you see, our tamer wields the whip. Surely if you, in taming your draught animals, wield a stick, wield a whip, is God not going to wield one in taming his draught animals, which is what we are, seeing that he is going to make his draught animals into his sons?

You tame and train your horse; what are you going to give your horse when it begins meekly to carry you, to put up with your training, to obey your commands, to be your beast of burden, that is to bear the burden of your weakness?³ What reward are you going to give it, seeing that you don't even

bury it when it's dead, but throw it out to be torn to pieces by vultures? But for you when you are broken in and tamed, God is keeping an inheritance, which is God himself; and after you have been dead for a time, he will raise you up; he will give you back your flesh, to the very last hair of it; and he will set you up with the angels for ever, where you will no longer need to be tamed, but only to be possessed by the most loving of owners. For then, you see, God will be everything in everyone; and there will be no misfortune to plague us, but only good fortune to cherish us. As for our shepherd, it will be our God; our very drink, it will be our God; our glory, it will be our God; our riches, they will be our God. Whatever different sorts of things you set your heart on here, he alone will be all of them for you there.

Your God is training you

5. This is the hope for which we human beings are tamed, and are we going to regard the tamer as intolerable? This is the hope for which we are being tamed, and are we going to mutter and complain against this handy trainer, if he happens to wield a whip? You heard the apostle's words of encouragement, *If you separate yourselves from chastisement, you are bastards and not sons* (Heb 12:8). Bastards are born of adultery.⁴ *For what son is there to whom his father does not give chastisement?* (Heb 12:7). Indeed, he said, *we had fathers of our flesh as our correctors, and we respected them; shall we not much more submit ourselves to the Father of spirits, and live* (Heb 12:9)?

After all, what could your father bestow on you, for the sake of which he corrected you, thrashed you, brought out the whip and beat you? Could he grant you the gift of living for ever? He couldn't grant it to himself, so when could he ever grant it to you? For the sake of his little bit of capital, which he scraped together from his investments and his work, he trained you with whips, to make sure that when the fruit of his labors was left to you it wouldn't be squandered by your riotous living. And he beat his son, for fear that all his work would be wasted, since what he left to you was what he could neither hold on to here, nor take away with him. After all, he didn't leave you anything here that could go on being his; he bowed out, so that you could come into the property.

But your God, your redeemer, your tamer, your chastiser, your Father, he's training you too. What for? To receive an inheritance for which you don't have to bury your father, but where you have the Father himself as the inheritance. That's the hope you are being trained for, and are you going to grumble? And if something nasty happens, are you going to blaspheme, perhaps? Where will you go from his Spirit?⁵ All right, he leaves you alone, he stops thrashing you; he is turning away from a blasphemer—does this mean you won't feel his judgment? Isn't it better that he should thrash you and receive you,⁶ than that he should spare you and forsake you?

God is our refuge

6. So let us say to the Lord our God, *Lord, you have become a refuge for us, generation after generation.* You became a refuge for us in generation the first time and in generation the next time;⁷ you were a refuge for us to be born into, we who were not; you were a refuge for us to be born again into, we who were bad; you were a refuge, where you fed those who strayed from you; you are a refuge where you pick up and straighten up your children; you indeed have become a refuge for us. We will not depart from you when you have set us free from all our ills, and filled us with your good things. You give us good things, you beguile us, in case we should grow tired on the way. You correct us, beat us, strike us, drill us, in case we should wander from the way. *Lord, you have become a refuge for us.*

NOTES

1. The sermon is as much on the text from James about taming the tongue, and the text from the psalm about God being a refuge for us, as about this text from the gospel. One scholar dates the sermon to the year 405 and another to 409, I do not know on what evidence; perhaps the conjunction of these texts makes some such deduction possible. Nobody has any ideas about where it was preached. His going into a kind of intimate huddle with his congregation in section 2: does it suggest that they were his own people of Hippo, or that they were people with whom he could relax a little, just because he wasn't their bishop? Take your choice; clearly there's no certainty in such a matter.

2. *Quia in unum sumus.* This cannot be echoing the *in Christo* of the previous sentence (though that is what one would expect) because he doesn't say *in uno* but *in unum*, and that does not mean "in one," or "in the one," but "into one." It is possible, I suppose, that in colloquial Latin *in unum* was used to mean the same as *in uno*—perhaps in African pronunciation they were scarcely distinguished anymore. So if readers prefer to think that Augustine meant "in the one," that is, in Christ, they are at liberty so to translate.

3. "to be your *jumentum* (your yoke-animal), that is, the *adjumentum* (the prop or aid) of your weakness"—a better word-play in Latin than I have managed in English.

4. *Nothi sunt adulteri.* This, on the face of it, means bastards are adulterers, which is hardly a fair generalization. It could be construed, to give the sense of my translation, as "Bastards are adulterous (products)." But I suggest that *adulteri* should be read as *adulterii*, "of adultery."

5. See Ps 139:7.

6. See Heb 12:6; Prv 3:13.

7. He is playing on the word "generation," making it mean here what it primarily does mean, the act of generating.

SERMON 56

ON THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 6:7-13: ON THE LORD'S PRAYER TO THOSE SEEKING BAPTISM

Date: 410-412¹

The creed and the prayer

1. The blessed apostle showed that these times, in which it was going to happen that all the nations believed in God, were foretold by the prophets, by quoting this evidence from scripture: *And it shall come to pass, that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved* (Rom 10:13; Jl 2:32). Previously, you see, it was only among the Israelites that the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth,² had been called upon; the other nations used to call upon deaf and dumb idols, by which they were not heard, or upon demons, by whom they were heard to their own harm. But when the fullness of time had come,³ what had been foretold was fulfilled: *And it shall come to pass, that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

Well, then the Jews, even those who believed in Christ, started begrudging the gospel to the Gentiles, and saying that the gospel of Christ should only be preached to people who had been circumcised. So it was against these that the apostle Paul brought this documentary evidence: *And it shall come to pass, that everyone at all who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.* Then to convince those who didn't want the Gentiles to be evangelized, he added immediately, *But how are they to call upon one in whom they have not believed? Or how are they to believe in one of whom they have not heard? Or how are they to hear without someone preaching? Or how are they to preach, if they are not sent?* (Rom 10:14-15).

So it's because he said, *How are they to call upon one in whom they have not believed*, that you didn't first receive the prayer and afterward the creed; but it was first the creed, where you would learn what you were to believe, and afterward the prayer, in which you would come to know whom you were to call upon. So the creed is a matter of faith, the prayer, of course, is a matter of praying,⁴ because it's the one who believes whose appeals are heard.

What you should avoid in asking

2. Now many people ask for what they shouldn't, being ignorant of what's good for them. So when you make your appeal, there are two things to beware of: asking for what you shouldn't ask and asking for it from someone you shouldn't ask it from. From the devil, from idols, from demons you mustn't ask for anything that is properly asked for. From the Lord our God, from the Lord Jesus Christ, from God the Father of the prophets, apostles, and martyrs, from the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from the God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them,⁵ it's from him that you must ask for anything that it is right to ask for. But you must take care not to ask for anything, even from him, that we ought not to ask for.

It's true, human life is something we are right to ask for, but if you ask deaf and dumb idols for it, what good does it do you? Again, if you demand the death of your enemies from God the Father who is in heaven, what good does it do you? Haven't you heard or read in the psalm, in which the damnable traitor Judas is foretold, how the prophet said about him, *May his prayer become a sin for him* (Ps 109:7)? So if you stand up and start praying for harm to befall your enemies, your prayer will become a sin.

The prophetic utterances of the psalms

3. In the holy psalms, though, you have read how the one who is speaking in the psalms⁶ appears to call down many evils upon the heads of his enemies. "And of course," someone will say, "the one who speaks in the psalms is just; why does he demand such dreadful things for his enemies?" He's not demanding them, he's foreseeing them; it's the prophetic utterance of a seer, not the malignant curse of ill-will. In the spirit, you see, they knew to whom evil had to come and to whom good; and they prophesied it, as though they were demanding what they foresaw.

But how do you know that the one you are wishing and praying evil upon today is not going to be better than you in the future? "But I know his evil disposition." And you know your evil disposition. You may, if you like, have the nerve to judge the disposition of the other person, which in fact you don't know; but you actually know your own evil disposition. Don't you hear the apostle saying, *I was previously a blasphemer and persecutor and a doer of injuries; but I obtained mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief* (1 Tm 1:13)? When the apostle Paul was persecuting Christians, binding them wherever he found them, and dragging them off to the high priests for trial and punishment,⁷ what do you think, brothers: was the Church praying against him or for him? Surely, surely, the Church of God had learned the lesson from its Lord who said as he hung on the cross, *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing* (Lk 23:34). So it was praying like that for Paul, or rather for Saul as he still was, that something might happen with him like what did in fact happen. He says, you remember, *But I was not known by sight to the Churches of Judaea which are in Christ; they were only being told that the one*

who used to persecute us once upon a time is now preaching the faith he was once ravaging; and they began glorifying God through me (Gal 1:22-24). Why should they be glorifying God about it, unless they had been praying to God about it before it happened?

When you pray, it's devotedness you need, not wordiness

4. So the first thing our Lord did was to cut out long-windedness, to stop you presenting God with a flood of words, as though you were keen on teaching God something with your flood of words. So when you pray, it's devotedness you need, not wordiness. *But your Father knows what is necessary for you, before you ask him for it* (Mt 6:7-8). So don't talk much, because he knows what is necessary for you. Here though, I suppose, someone may say, "If he knows what is necessary for us, why should we say even a few words? Why pray at all? He knows; let him give us what he knows we need." Yes, but the reason he wanted you to pray is so that he can give to an eager recipient, not to one who is bored with what he has given. This eager desire, you see, is something he himself has slipped into our bosoms. So then, the words our Lord Jesus Christ has taught us in his prayer give us the framework of true desires.⁸ You are not allowed to ask for anything else, but what is written here.⁹

Attention from the one who prays will bring action from the one who listens

5. *You therefore, he says, must say, Our Father who art in heaven* (Mt 6:9). With these words, you, as you can see, have begun to have God as your Father. You certainly will have him as such, when you have been born—although even now, before you are born, you have already been conceived by his seed, to be duly brought forth from the womb of the Church, so to say, in the font.¹⁰ *Our Father, who art in heaven.* Remember that you have a Father in heaven. Remember that you were born from your father Adam for death, that you are to be reborn from your Father God for life. When you say this, make sure that you also say it from the heart. Affection from the one who prays will bring action from the one who listens.

Hallowed be thy name (Mt 6:9). The name of God, which you are asking to be hallowed, is holy anyway.¹¹ Why ask, seeing it's already holy? And then, when you ask for his name to be hallowed, isn't it as if you were asking him to do himself a favor, not you? Understand it correctly, and you are indeed asking for a favor for yourself. What you are asking for, you see, is that what is always holy in itself should be hallowed by¹² you. What does "hallowed be" mean? May it be treated as holy, not disdained. So you can see that when you ask for this, you are asking for something good for yourself. It's bad for you, after all, if you treat God's name with disdain, not for God.

May we belong to your kingdom

6. *Thy kingdom come* (Mt 6:10). Who are we saying this for? Even if we didn't ask, God's kingdom is going to come, isn't it? The kingdom, or reign, it's talking about, after all, is the one that will come about after the end of the world. I mean, God always has a kingdom, and he's never without a kingdom, served as he is by the whole of creation. But what kingdom are you asking for? The one about which it is written in the gospel, *Come, blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the beginning of the world* (Mt 25:34). There you are, then, that's the one we mean when we say, *Thy kingdom come*. We are requesting it to come in us; we are requesting to be found in it. I mean, look—it's going to come; but what good will it do you, if it finds you on the left hand?

So in this case too you are requesting something good for yourself, you are praying for yourself. What you are longing for, what you are setting your heart on by this prayer, is that you may live in such a way as to belong to the kingdom of God, which is to be given to all the saints. So you are praying for yourself, that you may live a good life, when you say, *Thy kingdom come*. May we belong to your kingdom; may it also come to us, the kingdom that is going to come to your holy ones and just ones.

May your will be done in me, so that I don't resist your will

7. *Thy will be done* (Mt 6:10). And won't God do his will if you, my friend, don't happen to say this? Remember what you gave back in the creed:¹³ "I believe in God the Father almighty." If he's almighty, who are you to pray that his will should be done? So what does it mean, *Thy will be done*? May it be done in me, so that I don't resist your will. So here too you are praying for yourself and not for God. God's will, after all, will certainly be done in you, even if it isn't done by you. Yes, God's will is going to be done, both in those to whom he will be saying, *Come, blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the beginning of the world*, by their receiving the kingdom for their holiness and justice; and also in those to whom he will be saying, *Go into the everlasting fire, which has been prepared for the devil and his angels* (Mt 25:41); in them too the will of God will be done by the wicked being condemned to everlasting fire.

It's another matter, that it should be done by you. So you have good reason to pray that it may be done in you—it's so that it may be for your good. In any case, whether it's for your good or for your undoing, it will be done in you; but let it also be done *by* you. So why do I say, *Thy will be done in heaven and on earth*,¹⁴ instead of saying, "Thy will be done by heaven and by earth? Because whatever is done by you, he does in you. Nothing is ever done by you which he doesn't do in you. But sometimes he does in you what isn't being done by you; never, though, is anything done by you if he doesn't do it in you."¹⁵

May our enemies become heaven

8. What does it mean, though, *in heaven and on earth*, or *as in heaven, so also on earth*? The angels do your will, may we do it too. *Thy will be done, as in heaven, also on earth.*¹⁶ Heaven is the mind, earth is the flesh. When you say, if of course you ever do say, what the apostle said, *With the mind I serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin* (Rom 7:25), God's will is being done in heaven, but not yet on earth. But when flesh has given its consent to mind, and death is swallowed up in victory,¹⁷ so that no fleshly desires remain with which the mind can be in conflict, when wrangling on earth has ceased, when the war in the heart has ceased, when the situation has ceased of which it is written, *The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, so that you are unable to do what you would* (Gal 5:17); so when this war has ceased, and all lust has been changed into love, nothing will remain in the body to resist, nothing needing to be tamed, nothing to be curbed, nothing to be kicked,¹⁸ but everything will contribute harmoniously to justice—then is done *thy will in heaven and on earth*. We are demanding perfection when we make this prayer.

Again, *thy will be done in heaven and on earth*. In the Church heaven is spiritual people, earth worldly people. So, *thy will be done in heaven and on earth*: just as the spiritual people serve you, so too may the worldly people change for the better and serve you. *Thy will be done in heaven and on earth*. There is yet another meaning, a very, very gracious one. We have been urged, you see, to pray for our enemies.¹⁹ Heaven is the Church, earth the Church's enemies. So what is *Thy will be done in heaven and on earth*? May our enemies believe as we too believe in you; may they become friends, and put a stop to hostilities. They are earth, that's why they are opposed to us; may they become heaven, and they will be with us.

We are all beggars of God

9. *Give us this day our daily bread* (Mt 6:11). Here it's now obvious that we are praying for ourselves. When you say, *Hallowed be thy name*, it has to be explained to you that you are praying for yourself, not for God. When you say, *Thy will be done*, this too has to be explained to you, in case you should suppose you are requesting a favor for God that his will may be done, and not rather praying for yourself. When you say, *Thy kingdom come*, this too has to be explained, in case you should suppose you are requesting a favor for God, that he may reign. But from this place on, until the end of the prayer, it's clear that we are asking God for things for ourselves.

When you say, *Give us this day our daily bread*, you are admitting that you are begging from God. But don't be ashamed about it; however rich anyone may be on earth, he has to beg from God. The beggar stands at the rich man's door; but the rich man himself is standing at the door of the great millionaire. People beg from him, and he begs himself. If he had no needs, he wouldn't be dinging his prayers into God's ears. And what does the rich man stand in need of? I make

bold to say, the rich man stands in need of his daily bread. After all, why has he got all this plenty? Where does it come from, if God hasn't given it? What will he still have, if God withdraws his hand? Haven't many people gone to bed rich and got up poor? And that he doesn't feel the pinch is the result of God's forbearance, not of his own power.

Our daily food on this earth is the word of God

10. But now this bread, dearly beloved, which fills our bellies and every day restores our tissues; you can see that God gives this bread not only to those who praise him but also to people who blaspheme him, just as he makes his sun rise on the good and the bad, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.²⁰ You praise him, he feeds you; you blaspheme him, he feeds you. He is waiting for you to repent, but if you don't change your ways, he condemns you.

So because both good and bad people receive this bread from God, do you assume there isn't any other kind of bread, which the children ask for, about which the Lord said in the gospel, *It is not good to take the children's bread away, and throw it to the dogs* (Mt 15:26)? Well, there certainly is. What is this other kind of bread, and why is it too said to be daily? It's absolutely necessary, you see; we can't live without it, not without bread. It's just shameless to beg for riches from God; it isn't shameless to beg for your daily bread. The one provides you with the stuff of pride, the other provides you with the staff of life. And yet, because this visible, tangible bread is given to both good and bad alike, there is also a daily bread which the children ask for; the very word of God, which is doled out to us every day. That's our daily bread; it's not our bellies, gents, that live on it, but our intelligence.

It's absolutely necessary for us right now, as workers in the vineyard; it's our food, not our wages. Whoever hires a worker for his vineyard, you see, owes him two things: both food so that he doesn't faint, and wages for him to enjoy.²¹ Our daily food on this earth is the word of God, which is always being served up in the Churches; our wages when the work is finished is called eternal life. Again, by this daily bread of ours you can understand what the faithful receive, what you are going to receive when you have been baptized; for this too we do well to ask, and say, *Give us this day our daily bread*, that we may live in such a way as not to be excluded from the altar.²²

We are in debt not over money but over sins

11. *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors* (Mt 6:12). Neither about this petition do I have to explain that we are making it for ourselves. It's our own debts we are requesting the forgiveness of. We are in debt, you see, not over money, but over sins. Now you say, perhaps, "You too?" We answer, "We too." "You too, holy bishops, you're in debt?" We too are in debt. "Really, you too? No, no, my lord, don't do yourself an injustice." I'm not doing myself an injustice, I'm telling the truth; we too are in debt. *If we say that we have no sin,*

we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 Jn 1:8). Yes, we've been baptized, and yes, we are in debt.

Not that anything was left over that wasn't forgiven us in baptism; but that by going on living we have contracted debts that need to be forgiven every day. Those who are baptized and depart this life come up from the font without any debts and go off on their way without any debts. But those who are baptized and held in this life pick up something through the weakness of their mortal flesh, which even if it doesn't lead to their being shipwrecked, still needs to be pumped out; because if it isn't pumped out, the level in the bilges gradually rises until the whole ship is swamped. Well, praying this prayer is pumping out the bilgewater.

Not only ought we to pray, but also to give in charity, because when the ship's bilges are being pumped out to stop its being swamped, hands as well as voices are engaged.²³ We engage our voices in the work when we say, *Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors*; we engage our hands when we carry out, *Break your bread to the hungry, and bring into your house the destitute without shelter* (Is 58:7); *Lock up an almsdeed in the heart of a poor man, and it will pray for you to the Lord* (Sir 29:12).²⁴

Daily purification of the Lord's Prayer

12. So with all our sins forgiven *through the bath of regeneration* (Tit 3:5), we would have been thrust into a very awkward corner, if we hadn't been given the daily purification of this holy prayer. Almsgiving and prayer clean out sins—provided such ones are not committed as require us to be excluded from the daily bread,²⁵ provided we avoid the sort of debts that deserve sure and severe condemnation. Don't call yourselves just, as though you had no cause to say, *Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors*. Keep yourselves, of course, from idolatry, from consulting astrologers, from relying on spells for cures; avoid heretical errors and schismatical divisions; refrain, naturally, from murder, from adultery and fornication, from theft and robbery, from bearing false witness, and any other sins I don't actually mention, which have fatal results, so that you have to be cut off from the altar, and to be bound on earth so as to be bound in heaven²⁶—all very dangerous and deadly, unless it's loosed on earth so as to be loosed in heaven.

But quite apart from sins like that, there's no lack of opportunity for people to sin. By seeing with pleasure what you ought not to see, you sin. And who can check the eye's swift glance?²⁷ Can anyone check ears or eyes? Yes, yes, you can shut them when you like, and they are shut very quickly. You have to make an effort to shut your ears. You lift up your hands and put them over your ears; and if someone snatches your hands away, your ears remain open, and you can't shut them against accursed words of impurity, of seduction, of deception. When you hear something you ought not, even if you don't do it, aren't you sinning? You take a certain pleasure in hearing something bad. And the death-dealing tongue—how many sins it commits! Sometimes they are such as exclude a

person from the altar. The whole business of blasphemy is its province; and we say so many silly, idle things to no purpose.

Fine: let's suppose your hands do nothing bad; your feet don't run off to anything bad; your eyes don't stray to any lewdness; your ears are not willingly open to any dirtiness; your tongue doesn't wag in any way that's improper. Tell me:²⁸ can you control your thoughts?

My brothers, we are often praying and thinking of something else, as though we had forgotten in whose presence we are standing, or indeed in whose presence we are lying prostrate.²⁹ If all these things are piled up on top of us, are we to say they don't weigh us down, just because they are so tiny? What's the difference, whether lead is pressing down on you, or sand? The lead is one big lump, the sand is tiny grains, but there are plenty of them to weigh you down. These sins are tiny; have you never seen rivers filled with tiny drops, and farms swept away? They are tiny, but they are many.

A bargain with God

13. So let's say it every day, and let's mean what we say, and let's do what we say: *Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors*. We are making a bargain with God, an agreement and a contract. This is what the Lord your God says to you: "Forgive, and I will forgive. You haven't forgiven? It's you, in that case, who are holding your sins against yourself, not me." Really and truly, my dearest children, believe me, I know what you can get out of the Lord's Prayer, and above all from this sentence in the whole prayer, *Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors*; so listen to me. You are due to be baptized, so forgive everything; and of you who have anything against anyone in your heart, forgive it with all your heart. Enter the baptismal font³⁰ in that frame of mind, and you can be quite certain that absolutely all your sins are forgiven, both what you have contracted by being born of your parents in line from Adam with original sin (that's the sin that has you running with your baby to the grace of the Savior), and what you have added in your life in thought, word, and deed—they are all forgiven, and you will come up out from there, as from the presence of your Lord, with the assurance that all your debts have been cancelled.³¹

Love your enemies

14. So now then, about these daily sins, for which I have told you that you have to say, as a kind of daily wash and brush up, *Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors*—what are you going to do about them?³² You've got enemies; is there anyone living on this earth who doesn't have an enemy? Watch yourselves; love them. In no way at all can your raving enemy do you more harm than you do to yourself, if you don't love your enemy. He, after all, can do damage to your house in the country, or your cattle, or your household, or your manservant or maidservant, or your son or your wife, or at most, if he's given that much authority,³³ to your person; can we, as you yourself can, do any damage to your soul?

Exert yourselves, my dearest friends, to attain this perfection, I implore you. But is it I who have given you the capacity to do so? He has given it to you, the one to whom you say, *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*. However, you mustn't assume it's impossible; I know, I have learned, I have satisfied myself that there are Christian people who love their enemies. If it seemed impossible to you, you would never do it. First of all believe that it can be done, and pray, that God's will may be done in you.

After all, what good do you get from things going wrong with your enemy? If he had nothing wrong with him, he wouldn't be your enemy. Wish him well, he stops being wrong, and he won't be an enemy. I mean, it's not the human nature in him that is hostile to you, is it, but the fault in it. Is the reason for his hostility to you the fact that he has a soul and flesh? In this he's the same as you; you have a soul, he has a soul; you have flesh, he has flesh. He's of the same stuff as you are;³⁴ you were both made together from earth by the Lord, both quickened by him.³⁵ He is exactly what you are too; look on him as your brother. In the beginning our two parents were Adam and Eve, he our father, she our mother; so we are brothers. Forget about the original beginning: God is our father, the Church our mother; so we are brothers.

"But my enemy's a pagan, he's a Jew, he's a heretic." And why do you suppose I just said a moment ago, *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*? Oh, Church!³⁶ Your enemy is a pagan, a Jew, a heretic; he's earth. If you are heaven, call upon the Father who is in heaven, and pray for your enemies. Because Saul too was an enemy of the Church; they prayed for him to such effect that he became a friend. Not only did he stop being a persecutor, but he worked hard to be a cooperator.

Actually, if you want to know the truth, they did pray against him—but against his ill-nature, not against his real nature. You, too, pray against your enemy's ill-nature; may that die, and he live. You see, if your enemy dies, you are going without an enemy, I suppose, but you haven't found a friend, but if it's his ill-nature that dies, then you have both lost an enemy and found a friend.³⁷

Pray that you may love your enemies

15. All right; go on saying, "Who is able to? Who ever did it?"³⁸ May God do it in your hearts. I too know this: spiritual people do it. Are all the faithful in the Church like that, as they approach the altar, and receive the body and blood of Christ? And yet they all say, *Forgive us our debts as we too forgive our debtors*. Suppose God answers them, "Why are you asking me to do what I promised, when you people don't do what I told you to? What did I promise? To forgive your debts. What were my orders? That you too should forgive your debtors. How can you do that, if you don't love your enemies?"

So what are we to do, brothers? Is Christ's flock reduced to such a small number? If only those who love their enemies are in a position to say, *Forgive us our debts as we too forgive our debtors*, I don't know what to do, I don't know what to say. I mean, am I to tell you, "If you don't love your enemies,

don't pray"? I daren't do that; on the contrary, pray that you may love them. But what am I going to tell you? "If you don't love your enemies, don't say the Lord's prayer, *Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors*"? Suppose I do tell you, "Don't say it." If you don't say it, they are not forgiven. If you do say it and don't do it, they are not forgiven. So it has to be said, and it has to be done, for them to be forgiven.

You must forgive straighaway

16. I see a way, though, by which I can give comfort, not to a small number but to the vast mass of Christians, and I know that you are longing to hear this. *Forgive, that you may be forgiven* (Lk 6:37), said Christ. And what do you all say in the prayer we are dealing with now? Forgive, Lord, in the same way as we forgive. That's what you are saying: "Forgive our debts, Father who art in heaven, in the same way as we too forgive our debtors." That's what you've got to do, and if you don't do it, you will perish.

So now, what? When you are told, "Your enemy is asking your pardon," you must forgive straighaway. Is that also asking too much of you? It seemed too much to ask you to love your enemy while he was raving against you; is it too much to ask you to forgive a man on his knees before you? What do you say to that? He was raging against you, and you hated him. I'd rather you didn't hate him even then; I'd rather you remembered, even then as you endured his ravings, the Lord saying, *Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing* (Lk 23:34). So that's what I would really like, that even at the moment when your enemy was raging against you, you should turn eyes to the Lord your God uttering such words.

But perhaps you will say, "He did that, but as the Lord, because he's the Christ, because he's the Son of God, because he's the Only begotten one, because he's the Word made flesh; how can I do it, a mere human being, warped and sickly into the bargain?" Well, if you think it's too much for you to set your sights on your Lord, turn your thoughts to your fellow servant. Saint Stephen was being stoned; and under the hail of stones he knelt down and started praying for his enemies and said, *Lord, do not hold this crime against them* (Acts 7:60). They were hurling stones, not asking pardon, and he was praying for them. That's what I want you to be like. Exert yourself, stretch yourself a little. Why always drag your heart along the ground? Listen; lift up your heart, stretch it; love your enemies. If you can't love him while he's raging, love him at least while he's begging. Love the man who says to you, "Brother, I have done you wrong; forgive me." If you don't forgive him then, I don't say, "You are deleting the Lord's Prayer from your heart," but "You are deleting yourself from God's book."

Get rid of the hate from your heart

17. But if you do forgive him then at any rate, then at any rate get rid of the hate from your heart; get rid of the hate, I say, from your heart, not the severity.

"What if the one who is asking pardon has to be punished by me?" Do what you will;³⁹ I imagine, after all, that you love your son even when you are beating him. You pay no attention to his tears under the strokes of the cane, because you are keeping an inheritance for him. All I'm saying is, you must rid your heart of hatred when your enemy begs you to pardon him. But you will say, perhaps, "He's lying, he's pretending." O Mr. Judge-of-the-heart, tell me your father's thoughts,⁴⁰ tell me your own thoughts of yesterday. He's begging, he's imploring your pardon; forgive him, forgive him totally. If you don't forgive him, you harm yourself, not him. Because he knows what he is going to do.

Are you, a fellow servant, unwilling to forgive your fellow servant? He will go to the Lord of you both and say to him, "Lord, I asked my fellow servant to forgive me, and he wouldn't; please forgive me yourself." Is a master not allowed to discharge his servant's debts? So that one gets his pardon and leaves the Lord's presence absolved; you, however, remain bound. How are you bound? The time for prayer is going to come, the time for you to say, *Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors*. The Lord will answer you, "Not on your life!"⁴¹ When you owed me such a huge amount, you begged for mercy and I forgave you the lot. Oughtn't you also to have mercy on your fellow servant, as I for my part had mercy on you?"⁴² These words come from the gospel, not from my imagination. If, however, when you are asked for pardon, you forgive the suppliant, then you can say this prayer. And even if you are not yet capable of loving someone who is raging against you, you can say this prayer all the same: *Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors*. Let's pass on to the rest.

Deliver us from temptation

18. *Bring us not into temptation* (Mt 6:13). We say *Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors*, on account of our past sins, which we can't undo. You can so act as not to do what you have done; how can you act so that what you have done hasn't been done? So it's because of the things that have already been done that this passage of the Lord's Prayer comes to your help: *Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors*. What will you do about those that you can still fall into? *Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*. *Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*—that is, from temptation.

Three petitions

19. There will always be those three petitions, *Hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done in heaven and on earth*. These last three petitions are about human life now.⁴³ God's name, after all, ought always to be hallowed in us, we ought always to be in his kingdom, we ought to do his will; this will last forever. But daily bread is needed now; from this article onward, the other things we pray for belong to the needs of this present life. Daily bread is needed in this life, having debts forgiven is needed in this life, because when we come

to that life we shall have finished with debts. Temptation occurs on this earth, it's on this earth that we are sailing on a dangerous voyage, on this earth that stuff seeps in through the seams of our weakness which has to be pumped out.

But when we have become the equals of the angels of God, heaven forbid we should say, heaven forbid we should ask God to forgive our debts, which will be non-existent. So here it's a matter of daily bread, here a matter of debts being forgiven, here a matter of our not entering into temptation, because in that life temptation cannot enter; here a matter of our being delivered from evil, because in that life there will be no evil, but good will abide for ever and ever.

NOTES

1. Those seeking baptism were called *competentes* in Latin. They were those catechumens who had been enrolled at the beginning of Lent as candidates for baptism at the paschal vigil. During Lent they underwent two or three "scrutinies" or examinations. The first of these was on the creed; in the first or second week of Lent they were "given" the Apostles' Creed: it was "handed over" to them (*traditio*), that is to say, they were taught it and had to learn it by heart. It was not supposed to be written down. One or two weeks later they had to "give it back" (*redditio*), that is, recite it by heart. This scrutiny was then followed by a similar *traditio* of the Lord's Prayer, and its subsequent *redditio*. I don't think there is anything to tell us whether this sermon was preached at the *traditio* or the *redditio* of the Lord's Prayer. I think it is more likely to have been the former occasion.

The Italian edition says rather surprisingly of this and the next three sermons on the same topic that they were preached in the Easter season. I think this must be a mistake for Lent. People were, it is true, also baptized during the vigil of Pentecost, and I imagine went through the same preparatory procedures. But I can see nothing in this sermon to suggest that it was preached after Easter rather than before. Some propose the year 410 for the date, others less definitely any of the three years 410 to 412. The same date is indeed proposed for the next three sermons, by some scholars at least. I suppose the bishop could have gone round, preaching on the same topic at different churches in Hippo, during the appropriate week of Lent. But I would have thought it more likely they were preached in different years. So some scholars in fact extend the time range up to the year 416. Which of the four was preached first there is really no telling. They seem to be arranged here in order of diminishing length.

2. See Ps 121:2; 145:6.

3. See Gal 4:4.

4. Two words in Latin, *oratio* and *preces*; but it is equally tautological and banal!

5. Ps 146:6.

6. For Augustine this is nearly always Christ, either in his own person (through the prophet David, of course), or in the person of his body, the whole Christ, the Church.

7. Acts 9:1-2.

8. A thought developed in the famous saying of Saint Catherine of Siena, that God does not require of us a perfect work, but infinite desire. Desire is expressed by requests, petitions. Augustine never makes the mistake of downgrading the prayer of petition in comparison with the prayer of praise or thanksgiving, as some more recent manuals of spirituality have done.

9. This idea is put less starkly, and expanded at some length in a letter to the lady Proba (Letter 130, PL 32, 494ff). There he assimilates other prayers, such as those contained in the psalms, to the "headings" of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer. This letter provides the second reading in the Office of Readings in the breviary for the 29th week in Ordinary Time.

10. Notice that all baptized Christians are born-again Christians. Baptism is the sacrament of

regeneration, or rebirth. But we may also observe that Augustine doesn't talk here about being born *again* in baptism—just about being born. The newly baptized were known and addressed as *infantes*, new-born babies.

11. Following the reading proposed by the edition in the *Revue Bénédictine* (RB) 68, 1958. The Maurist's read, "Why ask for God's name to be hallowed? It's holy anyway"; a difference of punctuation and one letter—*Quid* instead of *Quod*.

12. *In te*. The way he continues shows that this must mean "by you." I suspect it was a semitic idiom that had crept into African Latin from Punic.

13. See note 1 for the practice of *redditio*.

14. This is the old Latin reading, leaving out *sicut* (as). But he will quote the correct Latin reading, followed in the Vulgate, in the next section.

15. A head-spinning way of saying what is tersely put in the scholastic maxim, *Deus operatur in omni operante*: God is acting in every agent.

16. So he gives altogether three versions of this phrase, the last being the Latin in current liturgical use; but to judge from the rest of this section, the first seems to be the one his catechumens learned.

17. See 1 Cor 15:54.

18. Perhaps an inadmissible translation of *calcetur*, which normally means to tread or trample on. But as the image is one of dealing with a large animal like a horse, I am just guessing that *calco* was sometimes used colloquially for *calcitro*, to kick. You can kick a horse, after all (with your heels or spurs), but hardly trample on one.

19. See Mt 5:44.

20. See Mt 5:45.

21. Augustine would have made a hopelessly unsuccessful employer in a capitalist free market economy.

22. Here we have a threadbare observation of the "discipline of the secret," according to which the eucharistic mystery was not divulged to any except the baptized. Here he says "what the faithful receive"; in other sermons he will talk of "what the faithful know about." There had been some point in it during the times of persecution. But now it was just a venerable custom which had ceased to have much meaning, since Catholic rites and eucharistic beliefs were, in outline, public knowledge.

23. Hands, obviously; voices, I suppose, by the singing of chanties, or the shouting of "Heave, ho!" etc.

24. The Latin text here differs widely from the Greek, and hence from the RSV translation.

25. Here, obviously, the eucharist.

26. See Mt 16:19; 18:18.

27. Here he gives an etymology of *oculus* (eye) from *velocitas* (speed) which, apart from being wholly fanciful, is so remote from the English that I leave it out; "Indeed it is said that *oculus* gets its name from that, from *velocitas*."

28. Reading *Dic* with the Maurists instead of *Dicis*, "You say," with RB.

29. Does this indicate that prostration on the floor was sometimes accepted liturgical gesture? Perhaps it already was in monastic communities.

30. Baptism was by immersion—stepping down naked into the baptismal font or pool, being immersed three times, and then stepping out.

31. There is an apt allusion in the phrase "as from the presence of your Lord" to Mt 28:27.28, in the parable of the unforgiving servant.

32. The suggestion seems to be that, while it is necessary to say this prayer as a kind of daily clean up, that is not enough. He is going to concentrate now on "as we forgive our debtors," mainly in the sense of loving our enemies.

33. *Potestas*; the proper translation of this word is nearly always "authority," not just "power." So the kind of enemy Augustine is picturing here, I suggest, is an enemy at law, one who is doing all the harm he can by legal processes against your property, and as a last resort may even receive authorization against your person—to have you sold into slavery for debt, perhaps, or possibly even imprisoned or beaten.

34. *Consubstantialis*, but I doubt if an allusion to the Nicene Creed was intended.

35. See Gn 2:7.

36. Notice that a) he identifies "Church" with the people he is addressing, though they haven't even been baptized yet; b) he is attacking that perverse group loyalty which can affect churches as much as nations or other groupings, and which would justify hating enemies because "they are enemies of my people."

37. Reading with the Maurists *et inimicum amisisti et amicum invenisti*. The RB leaves out *inimicum amisisti et*; words that a copyist could also easily have jumped over by haplography.

38. Reading *fecit* with the Maurists instead of *facit*, "Who ever does it," with the RB.

39. Compare his famous and "scandalous" remark, "Love, and do what you will," in *Homilies on the First Letter of John* 8, 8 (PL 35, 2033). Sermon 5, 4, of the same work may also be compared, with its references to the two texts, from Luke and Acts, just cited.

40. I cannot really follow him here; is he referring to your father's thoughts when he beat you as a boy—or perhaps to God the Father's thoughts? In either case, the point of the question is obscure.

41. Or perhaps "Not bloody likely!"—*Nequaquam*. But there is a slight crux here. The whole reference is to the parable of the unforgiving servant, and there, when the servant is brought before his master, the master says to him, "Wicked servant," *Serve nequam* in the Latin. And that is what the Maurists read here. I doubt if Augustine actually quoted those words here; they do not quite fit the context of a backhanded answer to the prayer. But did he have them in mind when he said *Nequaquam*, or did he even say, perhaps, *Nequaquam, serve nequam?*

42. See Mt 18:32-33.

43. The Latin is much more obscure; it doesn't include the explanatory words I have inserted, "always," "last" and "now." So "these three petitions" of the second sentence could refer to "those three petitions" quoted in the first.

SERMON 57

AGAIN ON MATTHEW 6:9-13: ON THE LORD'S PRAYER TO THOSE SEEKING BAPTISM

Date: 410-412¹

What you should believe, what you should pray for

1. The right order for your formation and for building you up in the Christian community is for you first to learn what you should believe, and afterward what you should pray for. This, you see, is what the apostle says: *It shall come to pass, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved* (Rom 10:13; Jl 2:32). The blessed Paul here appealed to the authority of the prophet, because these times, when all would be calling upon God, were foretold through the prophet: *Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*. And he went on to say, *But how shall they call upon one in whom they have not believed? Or how shall they believe in one of whom they have not heard? How, though, shall they hear without someone preaching? Or how shall they preach if they are not sent?* (Rom 10:13-15). So preachers were sent, they preached Christ. By their preaching the peoples heard, by hearing they came to believe, by believing they called upon God's name. So because it's absolutely right and true to say *How shall they call upon one in whom they have not believed?* that's why you first learned what you should believe. Today you have learned to call upon him in whom you have believed.

Our creator has agreed to be God our Father

2. The Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, taught us the prayer; and while he, the Lord, as you received and gave back in the creed,² is the only Son of God, still for all that he didn't want to be "the one and only." He's the only Son, and he didn't want to be the one and only; he thought it proper to have brothers and sisters. Who, after all, are the ones he tells, *Say, Our Father, who art in heaven* (Mt 6:9)?³ And who did he want us to call our Father, if not his own Father? Was he in the least jealous of us? Parents sometimes, when they have had one son, or two or three, are afraid to produce any more, in case they condemn them to live by begging. But the inheritance which *he* promises us is such that many

can obtain it without any of them suffering straitened circumstances; that's why he invited the gentile peoples into his family brotherhood,⁴ and why the only Son has innumerable brothers and sisters, who can say, *Our Father, who art in heaven.*

Those who came before us said this; those who come after us will be saying this. See how many brothers and sisters the only Son has in his grace, sharing his inheritance with those for whom he endured death. We all had our fathers and mothers on earth, of whom we were born to a life of toil and ultimately death; we have found other parents, God our Father and the Church our mother, of whom we may be born to eternal life. Let us reflect, beloved, on whose children we have begun to be, and let us live in a way that befits those who have such a Father. Remember that our creator has agreed to be our Father.

What we should ask for

3. We have heard whom we ought to call upon, with what expectation of an eternal inheritance we have begun to have a Father in heaven; let's hear what we should ask him for. What are we going to ask such a Father for? Haven't we all been asking him for rain, today and yesterday and the day before?⁵ That's not a big thing we have been requesting from this kind of Father; and yet you can see for yourselves with what groaning and longing we ask for rain when the fear of death is on us, and this is the fear of something that nobody can escape. Everyone, after all, is going to die sooner or later; and we groan, we beg, we are in labor, we cry out to God, just in order to die a little later. How much should we cry out to him, in order to come to the place where we can never die!

First petition

4. That's why it says, *Hallowed be thy name* (Mt 6:9). We also ask him for this, that his name should be hallowed in us; in itself it is always holy. And how can his name be hallowed in us, except by his making us holy? We, you see, have been not holy, and through his name we are made holy; he, however, is always holy, and his name is always holy. We are begging a favor for ourselves, not for God. After all, we can't wish God well, since nothing bad can ever happen to him. But we are wishing ourselves well, that his name be hallowed; may what is always holy be hallowed in us.

Second petition

5. *Thy kingdom come* (Mt 6:10). Whether we ask or whether we don't, it has to come. God, of course, has an everlasting kingdom. When did he ever not reign? When did he ever begin to reign, seeing that his reign or kingdom has no beginning and will have no end? But to show you that here too we are praying for ourselves and not for God (you see, we don't say *Thy kingdom come* as though we were desiring that God may reign), we ourselves shall be his

kingdom, if by believing in him we make progress in him.⁶ All the faithful redeemed by the blood of his Only Son will be his kingdom. His kingdom is going to come, when the resurrection of the dead has happened; then, you see, he will come himself.

And when the dead have risen, as he himself says, he will divide them and place some on his right hand, others on his left. He will say to those who will be on the right, *Come, blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom* (Mt 25:34). That's what we are desiring and begging for when we say, *Thy kingdom come*: that it may come to us. Because if we turn out rotten, that kingdom is going to come for others, not for us. But if we are numbered among those who belong to the members of his Only begotten Son, his kingdom will come for us, and it will not delay (Heb 2:3).⁷ I mean I ask you, are there as many ages, as many centuries left as have already passed? The apostle John said, *Little children, it is the last hour* (1 Jn 2:18). Sure, it's a very long hour as we wait for that great day; just think how many years this last hour is lasting. Nonetheless, try to treat it like one who wakes, sleeps, rises and reigns. Now we are awake, at death we shall sleep, at the end we shall rise, without end we shall reign.

Third petition

6. *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth* (Mt 6:10).⁸ This is the third petition we make: *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*. Here again we are desiring something good for ourselves. God's will, after all, cannot help being done. It's God's will that the good should reign, and the evil be condemned. Is it possible for this will not to be done? But what is the good we desire for ourselves, when we say, *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*? Listen. There are many ways in which this petition can be understood, and many things to be thought about in this petition, when we ask God, *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*. Just as your angels don't offend you, so may we too not offend you.

Again, how are we to understand *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*? All the holy patriarchs, all the prophets, all the apostles, all the spiritual people are like heaven for God; while we, compared with them, are earth. *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*: as in them, so also in us.

Again, *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*. The Church of God is heaven, its enemies are earth. We do well to desire for our enemies that they too may believe, and become Christians, and that God's will may be done, as in heaven, so also on earth.

Again, *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*. Our spirit is heaven, our flesh earth; just as our spirit is renewed by believing, so may our flesh be renewed by rising, and God's will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth.

Again, our mind, with which we see the truth and delight in the truth, is heaven. Here's heaven for you: *I delight in the law of God according to the inner self* (Rom 7:22). What's earth? *I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind* (Rom 7:22). When this fighting is over, and full

harmony has been achieved between flesh and spirit, God's will shall be done, as in heaven, so also on earth.

When we make this petition, let us think of all these things, and ask for all these things from the Father. But all this, beloved, the three we have mentioned, these three petitions, are concerned with eternal life. That the name of our God is hallowed in us, that will be something eternal. That his kingdom will come, where we shall live for ever, that will be something eternal. That his will is done, as in heaven, so also on earth, in all the ways I have explained, that will be something eternal.

Give us temporal provisions on earth

7. There remain some petitions for this life of our pilgrimage; that's why it goes on, *Give us this day our daily bread* (Mt 6:11). Give us eternal things, give us the things of time. You have promised us the kingdom; don't deny us support on the way there. You will give us everlasting honors in your home; give us temporal provisions on earth. That's why it says "daily," that's why it says "this day," that is, "at this time." When there will be no talk about "daily," for the bread. Then there will be no talk about "daily," but only about "today." We talk about "daily" now, when one day passes and another day comes. Will there be any talk about "daily," when there will be just one eternal day?

I agree, there are two ways of understanding this petition about daily bread, either with reference to our need for bodily victuals, or our need for spiritual nourishment. We obviously need material food for our daily victuals, and without it we can't live. Our needs include clothing, but we are to understand the whole from the part. When we ask for bread, we receive everything with it.

The faithful also know a spiritual sustenance, which you too are going to know, and to receive from the altar of God.⁹ That too will be a daily bread, necessary for this life. I mean, are we going to go on receiving the eucharist when we have come to Christ himself, and when we have begun to reign with him for ever? So the eucharist is our daily bread; but we should receive it in such a way that our minds and not just our bellies find refreshment. You see, the special property to be understood in it is unity, so that by being digested into his body and turned into his members we may be what we receive. Then it will really be our daily bread.

And the fact that I am dealing with this subject for you, and that you hear readings in the Church every day, is daily bread; and that you hear and sing hymns is daily bread. These are things we need on our pilgrimage. But when we finally get there, do you imagine we shall be listening to a book? We shall be seeing the Word itself, listening to the Word itself, eating it, drinking it, as the angels do now.¹⁰ Do the angels need books, or lectures, or readers? Of course not. They read by seeing, since they see Truth itself, and drink their fill from that fountain, spray from which sprinkles us. So much, then, for our daily bread, to show that this petition is necessary for us in this life.

Forgive exactly as you are forgiven

8. *Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors* (Mt 6:12). Is this necessary anywhere but here? There, after all, we shan't have any debts. I mean, the debts mentioned here are sins, aren't they? Here you are, soon to be baptized, all your sins will then be blotted out; nothing whatsoever will remain. If you have ever behaved very badly, or done or said, desired or thought anything evil, it will all be blotted out. And yet if we could be guaranteed moral security for the rest of this life, we wouldn't be learning a prayer like this, in which we say *Forgive us our debts*.

But let's make absolutely sure we do what follows: *as we too forgive our debtors*. So you especially, then, who will soon be entering the baptismal font¹¹ to receive a total cancellation of your debts, don't keep anything in your hearts against someone else; don't come up from it, the load taken off your minds, as being free now and released from all your debts, and then start wanting to avenge yourselves on your enemies, who had previously wronged you. Forgive exactly as you are forgiven. God never did anyone wrong, and yet he forgives, though he doesn't owe anyone anything. Just think how someone who is forgiven ought to forgive, seeing how the one, who owes nothing which he could be forgiven, himself forgives everything.

Two kinds of temptation

9. *Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil* (Mt 6:13). Will this too be necessary in that life? You don't say *Bring us not into temptation* except where it is possible to be tempted. In the book of holy Job we read, *Is not human life on earth a temptation?* (Job 7:1).¹² So what are we pleading for? Listen, I'll tell you what. The apostle James says, *No one when he is tempted should say that he is tempted by God* (Jas 1:13). By temptation here he meant the bad sort by which one is deceived and subjugated to the devil; that's what he called temptation. There is another kind of temptation, which is called testing; about this kind of temptation it is written, *The Lord your God is tempting you, to know whether you love him* (Dt 13:3). What does it mean, "to know"? To make you know; he himself knows already.

With the sort of temptation by which people are deceived and led astray, God tempts nobody, but he does, certainly, according to his deep and inscrutable judgment, forsake some. When he has forsaken a person, the tempter discovers what he can do. He doesn't find anyone struggling against him, you see, but immediately presents himself to the person as his owner-occupier—if God forsakes him. So it's in order that God may not forsake us that we say, *Bring us not into temptation. For each one*, says the same apostle James, *is tempted when he is pulled awry and enticed by his covetousness; then after covetousness has conceived, it brings forth sin, and sin, when it is completed, generates death* (Jas 1:14-15).

What was he teaching us? To fight against our covetous desires. It's true that in holy baptism you are going to shed your sins; desires will remain, which

you've got to fight against when you are reborn. The conflict continues, you see, in your own selves. You needn't dread any foe outside; conquer yourself, and you've conquered the world. What is an external tempter going to do, whether it's the devil or the devil's agent? Suppose someone wants to corrupt you by making a profitable proposal; let him only find no avarice in you, and what can the proposer of profit do to you? But if avarice is found in you, you are excited by the prospect of profit, you are caught by the lure of the cruel bait. But if he doesn't find any avarice in you, the mousetrap is set for you in vain. The tempter presents you with a very beautiful woman; chastity is present inside, and iniquity is conquered outside. So to stop him catching you with the offered chance of enjoying the beauty of another man's wife, fight inside with your own lust.

You are not aware of this foe of yours, but you are aware of your desires. You can't see the devil, but you can see what gives you pleasure. Conquer what you are aware of inside you. Fight, fight, because the one to whom you owe your rebirth is the judge. He has instituted the contest, he is preparing the prize.¹³ But because you will most certainly be beaten if you don't have him to help you, if he forsakes you, that's why you offer this prayer, *Bring us not into temptation*. The wrath of the judge has given some over to their desires; even the apostle says so: *God handed them over to the desire of their hearts* (Rom 1:24). How did he hand them over? Not by forcing, but by forsaking them.

Freedom from evil

10. *Deliver us from evil* (Mt 6:13). This can be taken as part of the same sentence. In fact it's so put that you should understand one sentence: *Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*. How? Let me spell out each part: *Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*. By delivering us from evil he brings us not into temptation; by not bringing us into temptation he delivers us from evil.

Vengeance, a fearful temptation

11. But there is a great temptation, beloved, a great temptation in this life, when we are tempted at the very point where we can earn pardon, if ever we have given in to temptation and fallen. It's a frightful temptation, which deprives us of the possibility of being healed of the wounds inflicted by other temptations. I see you don't yet understand; give me your minds, so that you may understand.

Suppose, for example, there is a temptation to avarice, and someone is overcome by some particular temptation (because even the wrestler or the good warrior is sometimes wounded); avarice overpowers a person, even a good wrestler, and he does something or other mean and avaricious. Or else there has been an impulse of lust; though it hasn't led to dishonorable conduct, it hasn't gone as far as adultery. Even when a man has felt such an impulse, he is still forbidden to commit adultery. But he has seen a woman as desirable, he has

thought of pleasures he should not have done, he has been in a fight, he has been smitten, doughty warrior though he is; but he didn't consent, he beat back the wanton impulse, he chastised it with the bitterness of regret, he beat it back and conquered it. All the same, insofar as he did slip up, he has something he can say about it: *Forgive us our debts*. So with all other temptations, it is difficult not to have something about which we should say, *Forgive us our debts*.

So what is that frightful temptation I referred to, so grievous that it is to be dreaded, to be shunned with all your strength and all your might? What is it? When we are being incited to avenge ourselves. A man is wild with anger, and straining at the leash for vengeance: a fearful temptation. Thereby, you see, you forfeit the means by which you were going to win pardon for your other offenses. If you had sinned through other senses, other cravings, this is how it was to be remedied, because you were going to say, *Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors*. The fellow who eggs you on to avenge yourself will rob you of what you were going to say—*as we also forgive our debtors*. When you have forfeited that, all your sins will be held against you; absolutely nothing is forgiven.

Forgive our debts

12. The Lord, our Master and Savior, was well aware of the danger of such a temptation in this life, and that's why, after teaching us the six or seven petitions of this prayer, the only one he chose to comment on and to impress upon us more forcefully was this one. Haven't we recited *Our Father who art in heaven*, and the rest of it that came after? After finishing the prayer, why didn't he comment for us on any other points in it, whether on what he put at the head of it, or on the way he concluded it, or on what he put in the middle? I mean to say, if the name of God is not hallowed in you, or if you don't belong to the kingdom of God, or if God's will is not done in you as it is in heaven, or if God does not keep you from entering into temptation . . . why nothing about these points? But what, instead, did he hammer home? *Amen I tell you, if you forgive people their sins . . .*¹⁴ referring to *Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors*. He passes over all the petitions he taught us, to concentrate above all on teaching this one.

The others didn't have to be pressed home very much, where, if you are a sinner, you can recognize the remedy; what had to be pressed home was the sin which deprives you, if you commit it, of the remedy for all the rest. After all, you've simply got to say, *Forgive us our debts*. What debts? There's no lack of them; we are human. I have talked rather more than I ought, I have said something I should not have said, I have laughed more than I ought, I've drunk more than I ought, I've eaten more than I ought, I have enjoyed hearing what I shouldn't have done, I have enjoyed seeing what I shouldn't have done, I have enjoyed imagining what I shouldn't have done. *Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors*. You've had it, if you've forfeited this.

Put your heart into the light

13. See to it, my brothers and sisters; see to it, my children; see to it, children of God; see to it, because I'm telling you. Put your heart into the fight, as much as ever you can. And if you see your anger standing up to challenge you, plead to God to help you against it; may God make you the conqueror of yourself; may God make you the conqueror, not of some enemy outside, but of your own temper inside. He will be there, and he'll do it, you know. He would much rather we asked him for this than for rain.

You can see, dearly beloved, how many petitions Christ the Lord has taught us, and among them there is barely one to be found which mentions daily bread; the point is that everything we think about, we should be thinking about in relation to the future life. After all, why should we be afraid he won't make provision for us, seeing that he promised and said, *Seek first the kingdom and justice of God, and all these things will be placed before you; for your Father knows that these things are needed by you, before you ask him for them* (Mt 6:33, 32)? *Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be placed before you.* Many people, you see, have been tried by famine, and have turned out to be gold, and have not been forsaken by God. They would really perish of hunger, if the inner daily bread were to forsake their hearts. That's what we should above all be hungry for. *Blessed, after all, are those who are hungry and thirsty for justice, because they shall be satisfied* (Mt 5:6). In any case, he is able to look kindly on our weakness, and see what we really are, as it says, *Remember that we are dust.*¹⁵ The one who made man from the dust and breathed into him (Gn 2:7), for the sake of this piece of pottery gave up his only Son to death. Who can possibly explain how much he loves us, who can even think about it worthily?

NOTES

1. See Sermon 56, note 1.

2. *Ibid.*

3. It is worth noting how he goes on to say quite unambiguously that we address the Our Father to God the Father, the first person of the Trinity, not to God the Trinity indifferently. In *The Trinity* V, 11, 2 he does suggest the latter, and since the time of Saint Thomas Aquinas it has become the more common opinion that the Our Father is addressed simply to God the Trinity, without distinction of persons, and *not* to God the Father as such. This has always seemed to me a regrettable theological stance; for one thing it flies in the face of traditional liturgical practice; the eucharistic prayers are plainly addressed to the Father, through the Son, and there is no reason to suppose otherwise for the Lord's Prayer as it follows immediately upon the great doxology of the Mass. But more than that, it effectively deprives the mystery of the Trinity of all relevance to our Christian life. For the scholastic references, where this unfortunate theologoumenon is set in intellectual cement, see Peter Lombard's *Sentences* I, 26, 5 (PL 192, 597), and Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* Ia, 33, 3, obj. 1 (ET vol 7), and IIIa, 23, 2, ad 2 & 3 (ET vol 50).

4. Thus we can infer that the Church is *essentially* a brotherhood rather than a hierarchy; that is, its fundamental structure hierarchy is a variable superstructure.

5. Could this climatic observation, I wonder, help us to date the sermon, either to a year of known drought, or at least to a season in which prayers for rain would be more likely? Would they be more urgent before Easter, in March or early April, rather than after Easter in late April or May? I can only ask these questions, but lack the particular knowledge to answer them.

6. Or "in it," in the kingdom, in recognizing and furthering God's dominion.

7. See Heb 10:37.

8. In this sermon he keeps consistently to this version (differing from the current liturgical Latin only by the addition of *ita*, "so"). Thus it would appear that this is the version the catechumens received and gave back, whereas in Sermon 56 it looks as if they were taught *Thy will be done in heaven and on earth*. Sermon 58 agrees with Sermon 57 here; in Sermon 59 we finally get the exact version of our current Latin liturgy, *sicut in caelo et in terra*, "as in heaven, also on earth."

All this suggests to me that a minor liturgical reform was going on in Africa, or at least in Hippo; or rather a revision of texts to bring them into line with the best contemporary biblical scholarship, that of Saint Jerome. It would follow that 56 is the earliest of these sermons, 59 the latest. My inclination would be to date them, one a year, from 412 to 415.

The way in which Augustine repeats the petition, no less than eight times in this short section, with three other allusions almost repeating it in so many words, reinforces the suggestion that a liturgical revision was in progress; he wanted to din the new version into people's heads.

9. See Sermon 56, note 22. In this paragraph he blows the secret pretty massively, by implicitly identifying Christ with the eucharist, and stating its essential significance as being the unity of the body of Christ, the Church.

10. He pursues the relationship of angels to the Word with immense intricacy in his analysis of Gn 1 in his *Literal Commentary on Genesis*.

11. See Sermon 56, note 29.

12. The Latin *tentatio* means a trial of testing as much as temptation in the ordinary English sense. Some modern translations of the Our Father render "Do not put us to the test."

13. The image is that of the games: of athletic, or gladiatorial, contests. It is to the judge of such events that Christ is being compared, not to the trial judge in a court of law.

14. The text continues, . . . *your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive people their sins, neither will your Father forgive your sins.*

15. See Ps 103:14.

SERMON 58

AGAIN ON MATTHEW 6:9-13: ON THE LORD'S PRAYER TO THOSE SEEKING BAPTISM

Date: 4/10-4/12¹

The Creed and the Lord's Prayer

1. You have given back the creed,² which contains a brief summary of the faith. I have already told you before what the apostle Paul says: *How shall they call upon one in whom they have not believed?* (Rom 10:14). Well then, you have both received, and retained, and given back how you are to believe in God; be ready to receive today how you are to call upon God. As you heard when the gospel was read, the Son himself taught this prayer to his disciples and his faithful followers. We have a real hope of winning our suit, when a lawyer of that class has dictated the petition for us. He is the Father's assessor, as you have just professed in the creed, who is seated at the right hand of the Father; well, he is our advocate, and he is going to be our judge: "from there he is going to come to judge the living and the dead." So fix this prayer as well firmly in your minds, because you are to give it back in a week's time. As for those of you who didn't give back the creed very well, you've got a breathing space, get it by heart; because on Saturday, with everyone present listening, you are going to give it back again—that's the last Saturday, on which you are to be baptized. But in a week from today you are going to give back this prayer, which you have been given today.³

One Father

2. Its opening words are, *Our Father who art in heaven* (Mt 6:9). We have found a Father in heaven; let's pay attention to how we live on earth. People who have found such a Father, surely, should live in such a way that they deserve to come into the inheritance he has in store for them. Now we say *Our Father* all together; what all-embracing generosity! The emperor says it, the beggar says it; the slave says it, his master says it. They all say together, *Our Father who art in heaven*. So they must realize that they are brothers, since they all have one Father. The master must not scorn to have as a brother the slave of his, whom the Lord Christ was willing to have as a brother.

That the kingdom may find us good people

3. *Hallowed be thy name, we say, thy kingdom come* (Mt 6:10). The hallowing of God's name is anything that makes us holy. His name, after all, is always holy. We also desire his kingdom to come. It will come, even if we don't want it to; but to desire and pray for his kingdom to come is nothing more than to desire him to make us worthy of his kingdom, in case perhaps, which God forbid, it comes, and doesn't come for us. There are many, you see, it's not going to come for, and yet it's going to come. The ones it's going to come for are those who will be told, *Come, blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the origin of the world* (Mt 25:34). The ones it's not coming for are those who will be told, *Depart from me, accursed ones, into eternal fire* (Mt 25:41). So when we say *Thy kingdom come*, we are praying that it may come for us. What does that mean, come for us? That it may find us good people. So that's what we are praying for, that he may make us good, because then his kingdom will come for us.

That all may become heaven

4. We add, *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth* (Mt 6:10). Angels serve you in heaven; may we serve you on earth. The angels don't offend you in heaven, may we not offend you on earth. Just as they do your will, so may we also do your will. Here too what are we praying for, if not that we may be good? When we do the will of God, you see (he himself obviously does it), that's when his will is done in us.

There is also another good way of understanding *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*. We are given a commandment of God and we approve of it, our minds approve of it. *For we delight in the law of God according to the inner self* (Rom 7:22). That's when his will is done in heaven, because our spirit can be compared to heaven, our flesh to earth. So what's the meaning of *Thy will be done, as it is in heaven, so also on earth*? That just as our mind approves of your command, so too our flesh may; and that an end may be put to that quarreling which the apostle describes: *For the flesh lusts against the spirit, the spirit against the flesh* (Gal 5:17). When the spirit lusts against the flesh, his will has already been done in heaven; when the flesh no longer lusts against the spirit, his will has already been done on earth.⁴ But perfect harmony will only be achieved when he wishes; in the world the fight must go on, if victory is to be won.

Here's another good way too of understanding *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*. We can take the Church as heaven, because it is the bearer of God; unbelievers as earth, seeing they are told, *Earth you are, and into the earth you shall go* (Gn 3:19).⁵ So when we pray for our enemies, the enemies of the Church, those hostile to the name of Christian, this is what we are praying for, that his will may be done, as in heaven, so also on earth; that is, as in those who believe in you, so also in those who blaspheme you: that all may become heaven.

May he give us our daily bread

5. It goes on, *Give us today our daily bread* (Mt 6:11). It can be taken quite simply that we pour out this prayer for our daily sustenance, that we may have plenty of it; and if we don't have plenty, that we may not lack it entirely. He called it "daily," *for as long as it is called "today"* (Heb 3:13). Daily we live, daily we get up, daily we take our fill, daily we get hungry. May he give us our daily bread. Why didn't he also mention shelter? Our sustenance consists of food and drink, our shelter of clothing and roof. People should desire nothing else, seeing that the apostle says, *We brought nothing into this world, and we can certainly take nothing out of it; but having sustenance and shelter, with these let us be content* (1 Tm 6:7-8). Eliminate greed, and nature is rich.

So it's a reasonable way of understanding our words, *Give us today our daily bread*, as referring to our daily sustenance in general; we shouldn't be surprised, then, if the mention of bread covers all our other necessities. As when Joseph invited his brothers: *Those men*, he said, *shall eat bread with me today* (Gn 43:16). Why? Were they only going to eat bread? But all the rest was understood under the heading of bread. So when we beg for our daily bread, we are requesting whatever we need for our material existence on earth. But what did the Lord Jesus say? *Seek first God's kingdom and justice, and all these things shall be placed before you* (Mt 6:33).

There is also another very good way of understanding *Give us today our daily bread*; your eucharist, daily food. The faithful know what they are receiving, and it is good for them to receive the daily bread that is so necessary for this time on earth.⁶ They are begging for themselves, that they may become good, that they may persevere in goodness and in faith and in a good life. That's what they desire, that's what they pray for, because if they don't persevere in a good life, they will be cut off from that bread. So, *Give us today our daily bread*, and what does it mean? May we live in such a way that we are not cut off from the altar.

And the word of God, which is opened up for you every day, and in a manner of speaking broken for you, is daily bread. And just as bellies hunger for that sort of bread, so minds do for this sort. So this we ask for with simplicity, and whatever is necessary for our souls and bodies in this life is included under daily bread.

The forgiveness of sins

6. *Forgive us our debts* (Mt 6:12), we say, and so we should, because we are saying the truth. Does anybody live in the flesh, and not have debts? Is there anybody living, for whom this prayer is not necessary? You can preen yourself, of course, but you can't justify yourself. It's good to imitate the tax collector, and not to be self-satisfied like the Pharisee, who went up to the temple, and boasted of his merits, and covered up his wounds. But the other one knew very well why he was going up, and he said, *Lord, be gracious to me, a sinner* (Lk 18:10-13). This prayer the Lord Jesus—just think, my dear brothers—this prayer

the Lord Jesus taught his disciples to pray, those great first apostles of his, our rams.⁷ So if the rams pray for their sins to be forgiven, what ought the lambs to be doing, of whom it is said, *Bring to the Lord the sons of rams* (Ps 29:1)?

Well, you know this from the creed you have given back, that among the other things you mentioned was the forgiveness of sins. There is one forgiveness of sins that is given only once; another that is given daily. There is one forgiveness of sins that is given only once in holy baptism; another which, as long as we live here, is given in the Lord's Prayer. That's why we say, *Forgive us our debts.*

The sun ought not to have set upon your anger

7. And God has struck a bargain with us, an agreement and a definite contract, that we should say, *as we too forgive our debtors* (Mt 6:12). If you want to say effectively, *Forgive us our debts*, you must say honestly, *as we too forgive our debtors*. If you don't say this second half, or say it dishonestly, then you say the first half in vain. I say to you above all, who are approaching holy baptism, forgive everything from the bottom of your hearts. And you, the faithful, who are using this occasion to hear this prayer and my commentary on it, forgive totally whatever you have against anybody from the bottom of your hearts; forgive precisely from the place into which God can see.

Sometimes, eh, a person forgives in words, and nurses a grudge in the heart; forgives in words because of other people, and nurses a grudge in the heart, quite unafraid of the eyes of God. Forgive absolutely; whatever grudges and grievances you have nursed up till these days, at least let go of them and forgive during these days. The sun ought not to have set upon your anger,⁸ and many suns have passed. Let your anger pass too, at last; we are celebrating the days of the great sun, of that sun about which scripture says, *The sun of justice shall rise for you, and healing in his wings.*⁹ What does *in his wings* mean? Under his protection. That's why it says in the psalm, *Under the shadow of your wings protect me* (Ps 17-9).

But there are others, foretold by Wisdom, who are going to be too late repenting on the day of judgment, and grieving to no avail; what are they going to say then, as they repent, and groan for anguish of spirit? *What has pride profited us, and what good has ostentatious wealth brought us? All those have passed by like a shadow* (Wis 5:8-9); and among other things, *So we have strayed from the way of truth, and the light of justice has not shone upon us, and the sun has not risen upon us* (Wis 5:6). This sun rises for the just, while God makes that other visible sun rise every day on the good and the wicked.¹⁰ To see this sun, on the other hand, is the privilege of the just; let this sun dwell in your hearts now by faith. So if you are angry, don't let this sun go down in your heart upon your anger; *do not let the sun go down upon your anger* (Eph 4:26), or you may find yourself being angry, and the sun or justice setting on you, and you remaining in darkness.

Conquer anger and hatred

8. But don't imagine that anger doesn't matter very much. *My eye*, says the prophet, *is troubled for anger* (Ps 6:7). When his eye is troubled, of course, he can't see the sun; if he tries to, it gives him pain, not pleasure. What is anger? Lust for revenge. Man is eager to avenge himself, and Christ hasn't yet been avenged, the holy martyrs haven't yet been avenged! God's patience is still waiting for Christ's enemies to be converted, for the enemies of the martyrs to be converted. Who are we to insist on vengeance? If God insisted on it from us, where would that leave us? He never did us any harm, and he doesn't want to avenge himself on us; and we, who offend God practically every day, we insist on vengeance! So forgive; forgive from the bottom of your hearts. You've been angry, do not sin: *Be angry and do not sin* (Ps 4:4). *Be angry*, like human beings, if it gets the better of you, *and do not sin*, by nursing the anger in your hearts (because if you do, you are nursing it against yourselves), and denying yourselves entry into that light. So, forgive.

What is anger? Lust for revenge. What is hatred? Anger grown old. If anger has grown old and become inveterate, it is already called hatred. That man, in fact, seems to confess as much, because after saying *My eye is troubled for anger*, he adds, *I have grown old among all my foes* (Ps 6:7). What was anger when it was new has become hatred, because it has turned old and musty. Anger is a speck, hatred a beam. Sometimes we rebuke someone for getting angry, and we are nursing hatred in our hearts; and Christ says to us, *You see the speck in your brother's eye, and you do not see the beam in your own eye* (Lk 6:41; Mt 7:3). How has the speck managed to grow, to make a beam? Because it wasn't immediately plucked out. Because you allowed the sun to go out and come in so many times upon your anger, you made it old; you raked up evil suspicions, and you watered the speck, and by watering it you reared it, and by rearing it you made it into a beam.

At least tremble with terror when you are told, *Whoever hates his brother is a murderer* (1 Jn 3:15). You haven't drawn a sword, you haven't wounded him in the flesh, you haven't cut down his body with any stroke; there is only the brooding of hate in your heart, and you are held for murder; you are guilty in the eyes of God. He is still alive, and you have killed him. As far as you're concerned, you have killed the person you hate. Amend your ways, straighten yourself out. If there were scorpions or vipers in your houses, what trouble you would go to in order to clear your houses of them, so that you could live in them without anxiety! You are always getting angry, and these rages grow old in your hearts, they turn into so many hates, so many beams, so many scorpions, so many snakes, and aren't you prepared to clear the house of God, your hearts, of these pests?

So do what it says, *as we too forgive our debtors*, and then say confidently, *Forgive us our debts*. But those great crimes, which it is good for you to have forgiven in baptism, and to which you should always be strangers, are one thing; quite another are the daily sins without which one cannot live here, and because of which this daily prayer is so necessary—with its bargain, with its agree-

ment—so that as you cheerfully say *Forgive us our debts*, you must also honestly say, *as we too forgive our debtors*. Well, that's all we've got to say about past sins; what about the rest?

Do not be enticed by covetousness

9. *Do not bring us into temptation* (Mt 6:13); forgive what we have done, and don't let us commit any more. Anyone, after all, who is overcome by temptation, commits sin. That's what the apostle James says: *No one, when tempted, must say that he is being tempted by God. For God is not a tempter to evil deeds; he himself tempts nobody. But each one is tempted when he is pulled awry and enticed by his covetousness. Then after covetousness has conceived, it brings forth sin; but sin, when it is completed, generates death* (Jas 1:13-15). So in order not to be pulled awry by covetousness, do not consent to your covetousness. The only one it can conceive by is you. You have consented; it's as though you have lain together in your heart. A covetous desire has been roused in you. Don't give yourself to it, don't follow it. It's unlawful, it's wanton, it's shameful, it estranges you from God. Don't give it the embrace of consent, lest what it brings forth should give you cause to lament; because if you consent, if you embrace it, that is, it conceives. *After covetousness has conceived, it brings forth sin.* Aren't you frightened yet? *Sin generates death;* at least be frightened of death. If you are not afraid of sin, be afraid of where sin leads. Sin is sweet, but death is bitter. This is the wretchedness of men: as they die, they leave here what they sin for, and carry their sins with them. You sin for money; it has to be left behind here. You sin for a woman; she has to be left behind here. And whatever you sin for, when you close your eyes in death, you leave it behind here, and the sin you commit you carry with you.

Don't ignore minor sins

10. May our sins be forgiven; may past ones be forgiven, may they cease for the future. But you can't live without them here; at least let them be minor or minute ones, let them be slight ones. But these slight and minute ones shouldn't be simply ignored. From minute drops of rain rivers are filled. Don't just ignore even minor sins. Through the tiniest seams in the ship water seeps in, the bilges fill up, and if the bilges are ignored the ship sinks. But the sailors don't stop; their hands walk;¹¹ they walk to pump out the bilges every day. That's how your hands too should walk, to pump your bilges every day. What does that mean, your hands walking? They should be giving; do good deeds, let your hands walk. *Break your bread to the hungry, bring the needy without shelter into your house; if you see someone naked, clothe him* (Is 58:7). Do as much as you can, do it with what you can, do it cheerfully, and confidently send out your prayer. It will have two wings, twin acts of kindness. What do I mean by twin acts of kindness? *Forgive, and you shall be forgiven; give, and you shall be given* (Lk 6:37-38). One act of kindness is the one that is done with the heart, when you forgive your

brother a sin; the other act of kindness is the one that is done with your substance, when you offer bread to the poor man. Do them both, or your prayer may be left without one wing.

To want to be delivered from evil is to admit to being in evil

11. So when we have said, *Bring us not into temptation*, it goes on, *but deliver us from evil* (Mt 6:13). To want to be delivered from evil is to admit to being in evil. That's why the apostle says, *Redeeming the time, for the days are evil* (Eph 5:16). But *who is it that wants life, and loves to see good days* (Ps 34:12)? When everybody in this body only has bad days, who wouldn't want this? Do what follows: *Restrain your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit; turn aside from evil and do good; seek peace and follow it* (Ps 34:13-14); then you are short of bad days, and what you have prayed for is accomplished; *Deliver us from evil*.

Pray daily the Lord's Prayer

12. So the three earlier petitions—*Hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done, as in heaven, also on earth*—are forever. The four that follow, though, belong to this life. *Give us today our daily bread*; are we going to go on asking for our daily bread every day, when we arrive at that total satisfaction? *Forgive us our debts*; will we be saying that in that kingdom, when we won't have any debts? *Bring us not into temptation*; will we be able to say it then, when there won't be any temptation? *Deliver us from evil*; will we say it, when there won't be any to be delivered from?

So these four are necessary because of our daily life, the other three because of eternal life. But let us ask for them all, so that we may reach that life; and here let us beg, in order not to be cut off from it. This prayer is to be said by you every day, when you have been baptized. This Lord's Prayer, you see, is said every day in the Church at God's altar, and the faithful hear it.¹² So I'm not afraid of your not remembering it very exactly; even if some of you can't keep hold of it very perfectly, you will keep hold of it by hearing it every day.

Treat your creed as your own personal mirror

13. So, on the Saturday on which we are going to keep vigil in the mercy of God,¹³ you are not going to give back the prayer, but the creed. You see, if you haven't got the creed by heart now, you don't hear the creed every day in church, in the assembled people. But when you have it by heart, say it every day, in order not to forget it. When you get up, when you go to bed, give back your creed, give it back to the Lord, remind yourselves of it, don't be tired of repeating it. Repetition is a good thing, to prevent forgetfulness creeping in. Don't say, "I said it yesterday, I said it today, I say it every day, I know it well and truly by heart." Call your faith to mind, look at yourself; treat your creed as your own

personal mirror. Observe yourself there, if you believe all the things you confess to believing, and rejoice every day in your faith.

Let these be your riches, let them be in a kind of way the everyday clothes of your mind. Don't you dress, when you get up? In the same sort of way, dress your soul by calling your creed to mind, or forgetfulness may strip it naked, and you may be left naked, and what the apostle says may happen, which God preserve you from: *Provided we are found stripped, not naked* (2 Cor 5:3).¹⁴ You see, we shall be dressed in our faith; and this faith is both tunic and shirt of mail; tunic, against shame, shirt of mail, against adversity. But when we come to that place where we are going to reign, there will be no need for us to say the creed. We shall see God, God himself will be our vision; the vision of God will be the reward of this faith.

NOTES

1. See Sermon 56, note 1; also 57, note 8.

2. See Sermon 56.

3. He somewhat confuses the times. He is preaching, I think, a fortnight before Easter. The Saturday he refers to first is not the following Saturday, but, as he explains, the last pre-Easter Saturday, Holy Saturday, the Easter vigil. The following week, probably the day before what we now call Palm Sunday, is when they will be "giving back" the Lord's Prayer.

4. So the Maurists and older editors. But they admit that the manuscripts read, "When the flesh lusts against the spirit, his will has not yet been done on earth; when the spirit lusts against the flesh, his will has already been done in heaven." This doesn't fit the context quite so well. It is possible that the Maurist reading, given in the text, has some support from some MS that the Maurists did not have access to.

5. All the children of Adam are unbelievers, until they are born again in the second Adam, Christ.

6. See Sermon 56, note 40.

7. This sounds funny in English, no longer for most of us a pastoral language. Our rams are the leaders of us, the Lord's flock of sheep.

8. See Eph 4:26.

9. The reference can only be to Easter, not to Pentecost.

10. See Mt 5:45.

11. That's what he says. Here he must surely have illustrated the point by going through the motions of working a two-handed pump, which could be described as walking with the hands, though the movement more resembles cycling than walking—but then Augustine wasn't to know that. Perhaps this was a common idiom on the Hippo waterfront; or perhaps it was his own vivid imagination, recollecting what he had seen on his voyages to Rome and back.

12. This seems to indicate that the Lord's Prayer was said or sung by the celebrant alone, not recited by the congregation.

13. The Easter vigil.

14. The text really reads "Provided we are found clothed, not naked," which would indeed, one would think, have suited Augustine better. But all the MSS read *expoliati*, stripped. It is a variant in the Greek of one letter (*ekdusamenoi* instead of *endusamenoi*), and was the Latin that Tertullian knew. So it was almost certainly Augustine's text. I think he made sense of it by referring faith both to a tunic and to a shirt of mail or breastplate. So we can be stripped of the military garment of faith, and still be found not naked, clothed in the tunic of faith.

SERMON 59

AGAIN ON MATTHEW 6:9-13: ON THE LORD'S PRAYER TO THOSE SEEKING BAPTISM

Date: 410-412¹

The creed

1. You have given back² what you are to believe, you have heard how you are to pray. You would be unable to call upon one in whom you had not believed, as the apostle says: *How shall they call upon one in whom they have not believed?* (Rom 10:14). That's why you first learned the creed, which contains the short and grand rule of your faith: short in the number of its words, grand in the content of its statements. But the prayer which you have received today, to be retained and given back in a week's time, was given over, as you heard when the gospel was read, by the Lord himself to his disciples, and from them has come down to us, *since their sound has gone forth into all the earth* (Ps 19:4).

A Father in heaven

2. So don't cling to things of earth, after finding a Father in heaven. You see, you are going to say³ *Our Father who art in heaven.* You have begun to belong to a huge family. Under this Father rich and poor are brothers; under this Father master and slave are brothers; under this Father emperor and private soldier are brothers.⁴ Christian believers all have different fathers on earth, some aristocrats, some commoners. But they all call upon one Father who is in heaven.

If that's where our Father is, that's where an inheritance is being got ready for us. This Father, however, is such that we can possess what he bequeaths to us with him. Yes, he gives us the inheritance, but he hasn't left it to us on his death; after all, he hasn't passed on for us to succeed him, but he abides for us to accede to him. So having heard who we are to ask for things, let us also learn what we are to ask for, or else perhaps we may offend such a Father by asking for bad things.

First petition

3. So what did the Lord Jesus teach us to ask our Father who is in heaven for? *Hallowed be thy name* (Mt 6:9). What sort of benefit are we asking God for, that his name should be hallowed?⁵ God's name is always holy; so why should we ask for it to be hallowed, unless it meant that we were asking for ourselves to be hallowed through it? So we are praying that what is always holy may be hallowed in us. God's name will be hallowed in you when you are baptized. Why will you be asking for this even when you've been baptized, if not to ask that what you have received may persist in you?

Second petition

4. Another petition follows: *Thy kingdom come* (Mt 6:10). Whether we ask for it or whether we don't, God's kingdom is going to come. So why do we ask, unless it's in order that what is going to come for all the saints may also come for us, that God may count us too among his saints for whom his kingdom is coming?

Third petition

5. In the third petition we say, *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth* (Mt 6:10). What does this mean? That as the angels serve you in heaven, so may we too serve you on earth. His holy angels obey him, they don't offend him; they carry out his orders by loving him. So this is what we are praying for, that we too may carry out God's commands⁶ out of love.

Again, these words can be understood in another way as well. *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*. Heaven in us is the soul, earth in us is the body. So what's the meaning of *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*? Just as we have heard your commands, so may our flesh give its consent to us,⁷ or else while flesh and spirit are competing against each other, we may be less able to fulfill God's commands. All the same, beloved, when the flesh does lust against the spirit,⁸ like earth against heaven, may the spirit also lust against the flesh, and earth not pull down heaven. And if we can't eliminate this competition, let us at least refuse our assent to the flesh.

These words, *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*, can also be understood like this: heaven is the faithful, who have put on the image of the heavenly man, that is, of Christ.⁹ But unbelievers, bearing as they do the image of the earthly man, are called earth. So when we say *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*, this is what we are saying to our good Father: "Just as the faithful have believed in you, so may unbelievers also come to believe." And in this way we learn how to pray for our enemies.¹⁰

Fourth petition

6. The prayer continues, *Give us this day our daily bread* (Mt 6:11). Whether we are asking the Father for the provision our bodies need, including under the heading of "bread" whatever it is we need, or whether we take it to mean that daily bread which you are going to receive from the altar, we do well to ask him to give it to us this day, that is, during this present time. We need it in this present time when we are hungry, but when we find ourselves in the other life and hunger will be no more, shall we have any need to ask for bread? Or if it's this bread I said we receive from the altar, we do well to beg him to give it to us.¹¹ What is it we are begging for, after all, but that we may not allow any such evil into our lives as would cut us off from bread of that sort?

The word of God which is proclaimed every day, that too is bread. The fact that it isn't bread for the belly doesn't mean that it isn't bread for the mind. But when this life is over, we won't be requiring either the bread that hunger demands, nor do we have to receive the sacrament of the altar, because then we shall be with Christ whose body we receive, nor will these words have to be spoken which I am speaking to you, nor will a book have to be read, when we see him who is the Word of God through whom all things were made,¹² on whom the angels feed, by whom the angels are enlightened, by whom the angels are made wise. They don't require the words of a long-drawn-out speech, but they drink their fill of the single Word, and having done so they burst out into praise, and are never wanting for praises to sing. *For blessed are those*, says the psalm, *who dwell in your house; for ever and ever shall they praise you* (Ps 84:4).

Fifth petition

7. So it's about this life too that we also ask for what comes next: *Forgive us our debts*. In baptism all your debts, that is your sins, absolutely all of them will be forgiven you. But because nobody can live here without sin, even if they manage to do so without the kind of grave offense which cuts one off from that bread we've just mentioned, nonetheless no one can be without any sins on this earth, and we can only receive one baptism once. But in this prayer we are given a means of washing ourselves every day, so that our sins may be forgiven every day. But only if we do what follows: *as we too forgive our debtors* (Mt 6:12).

And so, my brothers, I'm warning you: you are going to be children of God, not of some great man or other. I mean, is your governor¹³ prepared to adopt any of you? But divine grace has made everyone into sons and daughters. So because you are going to say this every day even after baptism, and much more so after baptism—in fact, you won't be praying this prayer except after baptism, because in a week's time you are going to be giving it back, not praying it; after baptism you will pray it, but how can someone who isn't born yet say *Our Father*? So because you are going to be saying this prayer every day, I'm warning you, my children in God's grace and my brothers and sisters under that Father, I'm warning you that when someone offends you and sins against you and comes and confesses and asks you to pardon him, you must forgive him

straightaway from the bottom of your hearts, or else you will prevent any pardon coming to you from God. Because if *you* don't forgive, he won't forgive you either.

This is the sort of thing God says to you: "You are right to ask pardon from me, being as I am quite unable to sin. While no sin can be found in me, I pardon others all the same—and *you* are unwilling to pardon. Very well then, I grant you are within your rights—don't pardon. So take very good care that I don't find anything in you for which I am forced to take vengeance." You are within your rights if you avenge yourself on a person who has wronged you. But he's asking for pardon. He was your enemy, but by asking for pardon he is breaching hostilities. "But I won't," you say; "I want revenge." Be careful that vengeance isn't taken on you. You want a sin against you to be avenged, a human being with sins of your own. See to it that the one in whom no sin can be found doesn't take vengeance on you.

So this too is something we ask for in this life, because it's here that sins can be forgiven, as it's here that they can be committed. But in that life they are not forgiven, because they are not to be found.¹⁴

Sixth petition

8. In our next¹⁵ petition we say, *Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil* (Mt 6:13). You are brought into temptation if you give your consent to the tempter. You see, it's useful to be tempted in this life, but it's not a good thing to be brought into temptation. So when someone tempts you by trying to corrupt you with money, to do something bad in exchange for a sum of money, you are being tempted, but in the sense of being tested. If you don't give your consent, you are found to be clean. And I've some advice to give you: despise avarice, and money can't corrupt you. Shut the door against temptation, and bolt it with the love of God. And can any of us do this unless we are helped by the one with whom we are pleading?

People are tempted in different ways: tempted with rewards, tempted with threats; if he can't lead you astray by corrupting you, he tries to lead you astray by frightening you. But if you plant yourself firmly on God, and God hears you saying, *Bring us not into temptation*, then you overcome both evil loves and vain fears.¹⁶

So this too is something we need for this life, to ask not to be brought into temptation, because there are temptations here; and to be delivered from evil, because there is evil here.¹⁷ And thus all these petitions add up to seven, three referring to eternal life, four to the present life. *Hallowed be thy name*; it always will be. *Thy kingdom come*; this kingdom will always exist. *Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth*; it always will be. *Give us this day our daily bread*; this won't always be on the program. *Forgive us our debts*; nor will this. *Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*; and neither will this, but we only have to ask for it as long as there is temptation and as long as there is evil.

This prayer can be a great encouragement to you; in it you may not only learn

to ask God your Father who is in heaven for whatever you desire, but also learn what you ought to desire. Amen.¹⁸

NOTES

1. See Sermon 56, note 1. The text of the Italian edition, from which this translation is made, is taken from one published in *Sources Chrétiennes*. They evidently drew on manuscripts that were not available to the Maurists. As will be seen, these older editors give a much shorter text. The sermon is short enough in any case, by Augustine's standards. This leads me to wonder if all the manuscripts are not ultimately derived from some compilation, for example that of our old friend Saint Caesarius of Arles, in which the originals were shortened and edited. But I have no access to the evidence which would either corroborate or refute this guess.

2. See Sermon 56, note 1.

3. When you give back the Lord's prayer in a week's time; Mt 6:9.

4. The emperor is contrasted with the soldier, because his title, *imperator*, was originally and primarily a military one. He was basically a military dictator, and commander-in-chief.

5. With the Maurists I omit the next question, which runs in the *Sources Chrétiennes* (SC) text: *quare non potest fieri ut nomen ejus sanctum non sit?* "Why can it not happen that his name should not be holy?" While it is true that the Maurists only had two manuscripts to go on, while *Sources Chrétiennes* had more, still this odd question does not really make much sense here. It looks to me like something that began as a scribbled comment in the margin, and from there crept into the text in a later copy.

6. Reading the plural with the Maurists, instead of the singular with *Sources Chrétiennes*.

7. Notice the characteristic Platonist identification of "we, us" with our "souls."

8. See Gal 5:17.

9. See 1 Cor 15:49, with echoes of Rom 13:14 and Gal 3:27.

10. From "All the same" in the previous paragraph to this point is wanting in the Maurists.

11. From "this day," halfway through the previous sentence but one, to this point is wanting in the Maurists.

12. See Jn 1:3.

13. *Comes vester* in the Latin; literally "your count." Most later titles of nobility, like "duke," "marquis," "count," "viscount," are derived from the designations of administrative officials of the Roman empire. *Comes* was perhaps the commonest of these—originally the word simply meant "comrade" or "companion." (Perhaps in the course of the next millennium the Communist designation "Comrade" will turn into an aristocratic title of nobility.) "Governor" seems the most suitable translation here.

The fact that he says "your governor" and not "our governor" makes me wonder if perhaps he was not preaching away from Hippo, his own city; or else if he was not preaching—say—at some military establishment on the outskirts of the city, in which case the *comes* would best be thought of as "your general" or "your commanding officer."

14. The Maurists have a greatly abbreviated version of the whole section 7.

15. Following the Maurists' *Deinde* instead of *Sources Chrétienne's Sed inde*: "But from there we go on to ask . . ."

16. From the second sentence of this section, "You are brought," to this point is wanting in the Maurists.

Love and fear, as the two basic drives both for good and ill, provide Augustine with one of his favorite themes. Good love is called charity, bad love is called greed or lust. Good fear is filial fear,

the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom; bad fear is mere cowardice. What is called servile fear (a kind of cowardice, but with its uses) which restrains us from wrongdoing simply through fear of punishment, he doesn't regard as actually bad, but as very imperfect; something that needs to be cast out by perfect love, which converts it into filial fear; and this is nothing but one aspect of love, which can be called reverence or respect.

17. Following the Maurists' punctuation. The *Source Chrétienne*'s edition's punctuation has gone a little haywire.

18. This last short paragraph is wanting in the Maurists.

SERMON 60

ON THE WORDS OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL: *DO NOT LAY UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES ON EARTH, ETC.*¹

Date: 397

Level-headed advice from Christ

1. All who find themselves in any trouble, and unable to cope with their affairs, look for some level-headed person to get advice from, someone who will know what to do. So let's imagine for a moment the whole of humankind constitutes a single person. This person wants to avoid evil, but can't be bothered to do good; as a result his troubles multiply and he is unable to cope with his affairs; can he hope to find anyone to give him more level-headed advice than Christ? By all means let him find someone better, and then do what he likes. But if in fact a better is nowhere to be found, let him come to this adviser who is to be found everywhere and consult him and get really good advice, let him follow his good instructions and thus avoid the most destructive evil.

You see, the evils of this present time which people dread so much,² about which they never stop grumbling, and by grumbling offend the one who is trying to correct them, and so fail to find in him the one to save them—these present evils, then, are undoubtedly going to pass. Either they pass by us, or else they are left behind when we die. No trial is all that great, which only lasts for a short time. When you are thinking of tomorrow, you don't dwell on yesterday; well, when the day after that comes, even tomorrow will be yesterday. But anyway, if people take such anxious care to avoid temporal troubles that are passing, not to say flashing, by, what thought should be given to avoiding those that stay put and continue without end?

The drinks Adam poured out have to be drunk

2. It's a hard business, the life of mortals. What else does being born here mean, but entry into a wearisome life? Witness to the greater toils that lie ahead is borne by the very wails of the newborn child. Nobody can get out of attending this irksome party; the drinks Adam poured out have to be drunk. We were made by the hands of truth, but because of sin we were cast out into the days of vanity.³

We were made after the image of God, but we have rubbed it off by our sinful transgression.⁴

That's why the psalm reminds us how we were made, and where we have got to. It says, *Although man walks in the image*—there you have what he was made. Where has he got to? Listen to what follows: *yet he is disturbed in vain*. He walks in the image of truth, and he is disturbed by the suggestions of vanity. Finally, take a look at the nature of his disturbance; take a look at it, and as though you were looking in a mirror, be displeased with yourself. *Although man walks*, it says, *in the image*—and that's why man is something great—*yet he is disturbed in vain*. And as though we were to ask, "Why, please tell me, why he is disturbed in vain?"—*He stores up, and does not know for whom he may be collecting them* (Ps 39:6).

There you are, this man is the whole human race, like a single man who has failed to cope with his affairs, who has thrown good sense to the winds, has strayed from the path of sanity. *He stores up, and does not know for whom he is collecting them*. Could anything be crazier, anything more calamitous? "Well, for himself, of course." No. Why not for himself? Because he's going to die, because a man's life is short, because the hoard lasts, and the one who collects it passes quickly away. That's why he's sorry for the man who walks in the image, acknowledges the truth, chases after vanity, and why he says *he is disturbed in vain*. I feel really sorry for him; *he stores up, and does not know for whom he is collecting them*. Could it be for himself, then? No, because the man dies, while the hoard remains. Who for, then? Got any suggestions? Let me have them too. You've no suggestions for me? So you haven't got a clue either. In that case, if neither of us has a clue, let us seek advice together, and receive it together.

You store up for whom?

3. So let's put our heads together. You are disturbed, you are storing up, you're cudgelling your brains, you're toiling away, you're losing sleep. In the day time you are plagued with business, at night you are haunted by fear. As your purse fills up with coin, your soul grows feverish with care. I observe it, I feel very sorry for you; you are disturbed, and as the one says who cannot be mistaken, you are disturbed in vain.⁵

You are storing up, you see, accumulating wealth. Assuming that whatever you are about turns out well, and keeping quiet about losses, and leaving aside all those dangers, and the particular death that accompanies every gain (I don't mean the death of bodies, but of evil thoughts; gold comes in at the door, faith flies out at the window; you are splendidly dressed outwardly, stripped to the buff inwardly)—so leaving all that aside, making no mention of other things, passing over bad luck, thinking only about good luck, here you are accumulating wealth, here are your profits streaming in from all sides, cash gushing like fountains, poverty shriveling up everywhere,⁶ plenty flowing in from all directions. Haven't you heard the words, *If riches abound, do not set your heart on*

them (Ps 26:10)? So here you are, busy getting; it is not without profit that you are disturbed, but all the same you are disturbed in vain.

"Why," you ask, "is my being disturbed in vain? Look how I'm filling my money-bags, how my walls are bulging with what I'm amassing. Why is my being disturbed in vain?" Because you are accumulating wealth, and you don't know who you are piling it up for. Or if you do know for whom, please, I implore you, tell me too. I'm listening. Who is it? If you are not being disturbed in vain, tell us who you are accumulating wealth for. "Myself," did you say? You have the nerve to say that, doomed to die as you are? "My children," did you say? You have the nerve to say that about those who are doomed to die? Remarkable family loyalty, a father making a fortune for his children; or rather, remarkable absurdity: one doomed to die making a fortune for others doomed to die.

If the reason you are not doing it for yourself is that you are going to die and leave behind whatever you amass, it's exactly the same case with your children; they are going to succeed you, but they are not going to stay forever. I won't raise the question what your children are like, the possibility of what has been amassed by avarice living squanders what your drudgery has amassed. But I leave that aside. It's quite possible your children will turn out well, they won't be dissolute; they will keep what you've left them, they will increase what you have kept for them, they won't squander what you have amassed. Your children are equally absurd if they do this, if in this matter they imitate you, their father. I'm telling them what I was telling you, I'm telling your son for whom you are keeping it all, I'm telling him: You store up, and you do not know for whom you are collecting them. After all, just as you didn't know, so too he doesn't know. If this absurdity is perpetuated in him, does that mean that the truth no longer applies to him?

Storing up for a thief

4. I forbear to mention the possibility that while you are still alive, you may be storing up for a thief. He comes along one night, and finds goods amassed over so many days and nights. Perhaps you are storing up for a brigand, perhaps for a pirate. I don't want to say any more, or I may be scratching at old wounds, and receiving painful memories in those who have suffered such wrongs. How much wealth, amassed by futile vanity, has fallen like ripe fruit into the hands of a cruel enemy! It's not for me to welcome such a thing, but it's for everyone to fear it. May God preserve us from it. Let his scourges be enough.⁷ Let us all pray together, may God preserve us from this. May he spare us when we implore him to.

But if he asks us who we are doing it for, how are we to answer? You then, O man, O Everyman, you that are vainly storing up, how will you answer me as I tackle this problem with you, and with you seek advice in our common cause? You see, in your answer just now you were saying, "I am storing up for my son, for my children, for my descendants." I mentioned all the things there are to fear as regards the children themselves. But let's grant that the children are going to live otherwise than an unfriendly critic would expect; let them live

just as their father would wish. I reminded you plainly how often things have gone wrong for so many people in such cases; you were shocked—and did nothing about changing your ways. What else, after all, are you going to answer me but, "Perhaps it won't happen"? And what I said was, "Perhaps you are storing up for a thief, perhaps for a robber, perhaps for a pirate." I didn't say "Certainly," I said "Perhaps." Between "perhaps it will happen," "perhaps it won't," well you don't know what may happen, you are disturbed in vain. You see how true is what Truth has said, how futile is the disturbance felt by vanity. You've heard it all, at last you've begun to see some sense, because the very fact of your saying, "Perhaps it's for my children," means you dare not say "I'm certain that it's for my children." So you don't know who you are collecting them for. So, as I see it, and as I have said already, you have been unable to cope with your affairs; you have no answer you can give me; but neither have I any to give you.

Let's both listen to Christ

5. Let's look for an answer together, let's both seek advice together. We have ready to hand, not just a wise adviser, but Wisdom itself. Let's both listen to *Christ, for the Jews a scandal, for the Gentiles foolishness; but for those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God* (1 Cor 1:23-24). Why plan a strong-room for your wealth? Listen to the power of God; there is nothing stronger than that. Why think up arguments in justification of your wealth? Listen to the wisdom of God; there is nothing more judicious than that. Perhaps you will be scandalized⁸ when I tell you what he says: you will be a Jew, because Christ is a scandal for the Jews. Perhaps it will strike you as foolish when I tell you what he says: you will be a Gentile, because Christ is foolishness for the Gentiles. You are a Christian, you have been called; *but for those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*. Don't be depressed when I tell you, don't be scandalized, don't turn up your nose and sneer at my apparent unwisdom. Let's listen. You see, what I am going to say is what Christ has said. Are you contemptuous of the spokesman? Have a healthy respect for the judge.⁹

So what am I going to say? Just now, a few minutes ago, the reader of the gospel relieved me of this problem. I'm not reading it, I'm simply recalling what was read. You were looking for advice in your affairs which you can't cope with; see what the source of all straight advice has to say, the fountain from which, whatever vessel you fill at it, you need fear no poison: *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and corrosion spoil, and where thieves dig up and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where no thief comes along, nor moth can ruin. Where your treasure is, there too will be your heart* (Mt 6:19-21).¹⁰ What more do you want? The thing's out in the open. The advice is plain, greed lurks in hiding; or rather, what's even worse, it isn't hidden, but it too is plain for all to see. I mean robbery does not cease to prowl; I mean, avarice does not cease to defraud; I mean, malice does not cease to perjure itself. And all for what? To lay up treasure. And where is it to be put?

In the earth. And very rightly put by earth in earth. The man, you see, by whom I said we have been given all this toil to drink, was told when he sinned, *Earth you are, and into the earth shall you go* (Gn 2:19). Treasure is very properly put in the earth, when your heart is in the earth. So where is the one which we lift up to the Lord?¹¹ Be ashamed, you that have understood, and mend your ways, if you are ashamed. How long to go on praising, and doing nothing? It's true, nothing could be more so. Let it be done, since it's true. We sing praises to the one God, and we don't change our ways, so that even in this respect we are disturbed in vain.

The calamities of the world have provided you with plenty of porters

6. So: *Do not lay up for yourselves treasure on earth*, whether you have experienced how what is hoarded in the earth can be lost, or whether you haven't but are afraid to do so as a result of the experience of others. If words won't teach you sense in this matter, experience may. You never get up and go out without hearing everybody say, almost with one voice, "Alas, we've had it! The world is going to rack and ruin." If it's going to rack and ruin, why don't you move on? If an architect told you your house was about to fall down, wouldn't you move first and grumble afterward? The builder of the world tells you the world is about to fall down, and won't you believe him?¹² He isn't someone you can contradict. Listen to his voice as he foretells it, listen to his advice as he warns you. Here's his voice foretelling it: *Heaven and earth will pass away* (Mt 24:35). Here's his voice advising you: *Do not lay up for yourselves treasure on earth*. So then, if you believe his forecast, if you do not pooh-pooh his advice, let what he says be done.

You see, the one who gave this sort of advice didn't want you to lose what you have, but was in fact giving you timely warning to save you from losing it. Why not listen to him about moving it all on to heaven? You see, it's not going to be moved into the kind of heaven of which it is said, *Heaven and earth will pass away*; would anyone listen, in that case, to advice urging a move from one ruin to another? There is also *the heaven of heavens* (Dt 10:14, 1 Kgs 8:27), like *the holy of holies* (Ex 26:34, 1 Kgs 6:16), like *ages of ages* (Tob 8:9).¹³ Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven. *The heavens proclaim the glory of God* (Ps 19:1). Perhaps when you give something to a just person, you are giving it to heaven. If though you give it to an unjust person—because *if your enemy is hungry, give him food* (Rom 12:20, Prov 25:21)—even in that case you are not going wrong; in fact you are obeying the one who made heaven and earth. So look sharp about moving on your goods. Is it a great deal that you have loyalty to lose what has been amassed by vanity? You have got just what's required to provide plenty for Christ's poor. The calamities of the world have provided you with plenty of porters.¹⁴

I have spoken, and you have listened—or rather he has spoken and we have all listened together. May he who has given us this advice on how to mend our ways also grant us the assistance we need in order to do so. Turning to the Lord, etc. Amen.¹⁵

NOTES

1. There are two versions of this sermon which differ considerably from each other, mostly in matters of detail, occasionally in a big way; one published by the Maurists in the seventeenth century, the other by Dom C. Lambot in the *Revue Bénédictine* in 1948. This translation is made from Dom Lambot's text; on those few occasions on which I prefer the Maurists, I mention it in the notes. The first of these occasions is in the title. Dom Lambot's reads, "Discussion of Ps 39" (38 in Latin) where it says, "Although man walks in the image, yet he is disturbed in vain. He stores up and does not know for whom he is collecting them." That is indeed an accurate enough description of the sermon, but since the sermons are here arranged in the same order as in the Maurist edition, and according to that order Sermon 60 is among those on texts from Matthew, I thought it made better sense to follow the Maurists' title, only omitting the last part of it which refers to a final section not included in this version: see note 15.

According to D. de Bruyne, *Revue Bénédictine* 43 (1931), and C. Lambot, *Revue Bénédictine* 47 (1935), the sermon can be dated to a day between Ascension and Pentecost, 14 and 24 May 397, as it forms a group of 32 sermons listed in chronological order by Possidius in his *Index to Augustine's works*; these for a variety of reasons can be dated to the summer of 397. The conclusions of these two scholars, and their arguments, are summarized by O. Perler in *Les Voyages de Saint Augustine*, pages 215-218.

2. Following the Maurists, and omitting the *et dolent* of Lambot—dread and grieve about. The added words seem to me to spoil the natural rhetorical development of the idea.

3. See Eccl 7:15.

4. See Gn 1:26-28, and Gn 3 *passim*. Augustine's analogy here for the image of God in man is the image of Caesar's head on a coin, which can be almost obliterated by constant handling.

5. The one who cannot be mistaken is Christ, whom Augustine thinks of as speaking in the psalms.

6. The meaning is not quite certain: *ubique ardet inopia*, literally "everywhere poverty (want) is burning." I wondered if it could mean poverty (that is, the poor) burning with envy everywhere. But that would not balance the plenty of the next phrase, which can hardly stand for those endowed with plenty.

7. Meaning natural disasters, such as drought, earthquakes, and plagues. See for example 2 Sm 24:12-14. Perhaps this passage conveys some indications of the date of the sermon, but in isolation they can hardly be said to be precise.

8. Reading *scandalizaberis* with the Maurists, instead of the present tense *scandalizaris* of Lambot.

9. The judgments of Roman judges were proclaimed in open court by the court herald or spokesman, performing the same sort of task (well, roughly) as nowadays falls to "a White House spokesman," or "a spokesperson for the State Department."

10. See Sermon 36, 5, note 17.

11. From the opening dialogue of the preface at Mass.

12. Reading *et non credis?* with the Maurists; it is omitted by Lambot.

13. In the Latin text only. But it is the conventional liturgical phrase for concluding prayers, the English equivalent being "for ever and ever."

14. See Sermons 18, 4; 38, 9; 53A, 6 for this image of the poor as the porters who carry the treasure of the rich to heaven.

15. The Maurists have quite a different text for the whole of this last paragraph. It then continues the sermon with four more sections (8-11), which in this edition will appear as the conclusion of Sermon 389. The Maurists in their edition of that sermon refer the reader back to their edition of Sermon 60.

✓ SERMON 60A

HERE BEGINS THE SERMON ON THE GOSPEL WHERE THE LORD SAYS: *DO NOT GIVE WHAT IS HOLY TO THE DOGS, NOR TOSS YOUR PEARLS IN FRONT OF PIGS, AND THE REST THAT FOLLOWS*

Date: unknown¹

Who asks and seeks and knocks is neither dog nor pig

1. Your graces know, seeing that you are sons and daughters of the Church of Christ, rooted and grounded in the Catholic faith,² that God doesn't conceal his mysteries because he grudges them to any who may learn them, but because
 - he only wants to open them up to those who are prepared to look for them. That's
 - why we have obscure passages read from the scriptures, to spur us on, heart and soul, to the search. Just now a passage from the gospel was read to us, where the Lord tells us not to throw pearls down in front of pigs.

The Lord warned his servants and disciples about this when he said, *Do not give what is holy to dogs, nor throw your pearls down in front of pigs*. He was, of course, giving them this warning in advance, but because they wouldn't find it easy to tell who were the dogs and the pigs, who were to be avoided and not have pearls thrown down to them or what is holy given to them, and in case these things should be kept even from those who are worthy of them, he immediately went on to say, *Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it shall be opened* (Mt 7:7). So, *Do not give what is holy to dogs, nor throw your pearls down in front of pigs*, is a command to the stewards, to his disciples, whom he was appointing preachers of the gospel, but when he added *Ask, and you shall receive, seek, and you shall find, knock, and it shall be opened to you*, he was telling the people that when it asks and seeks and knocks, then it must be understood no longer to be a dog and a pig which pearls ought not be thrown down to.

The example of the Canaanite woman

2. The gospel makes this point crystal clear in another place, when the Lord took himself off to the borders of Tyre and Sidon.³ A Canaanite woman who

came from those parts ventured to ask him to cure her daughter. The Lord wouldn't listen to her; he was giving the impression of ignoring her, so that her faith might show all the better. He concealed from her the gift, which he certainly intended to give, in order to wring from her heart the saying which would make her worthy to receive it. Even the disciples, you see, were saying to the Lord, *Send her away, she is crying after us* (Mt 15:23). But the Lord said, *It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs* (Mt 15:26).⁴ (You can see how similar it is to that command, *Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor toss your pearls in front of pigs.*) *I was sent only to the sheep that were lost of the house of Israel* (Mt 15:24).⁵ The woman, you see, was a Gentile. It was going to happen that the gospel would also be preached to the Gentiles; the apostle Paul was sent to the Gentiles, he above all was sent to them. But it was after the Lord's passion and resurrection that the preaching of the gospel among the Gentiles was to be undertaken.

The Lord, however, had come in his own personal presence to those sheep that were lost of the house of Israel, because there were many from there too who believed. Of that number, after all, were the apostles; of that number the one hundred and twenty on whom the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, as the Lord had promised when he said in the gospel, *I will send you the Spirit of truth* (Jn 15:26).⁶ And everything he promised about the Spirit, he carried out after his passion and ascension on the day of Pentecost. There were a hundred and twenty there, on whom the Holy Spirit came, and they were filled with it, and they were of course from among the Jews.

What I am trying to explain to your graces is how the sheep that were lost of the house of Israel are among the chosen, the elect. The apostle Paul also says that the risen Lord was seen by more than five hundred brethren;⁷ they too were of that number. And again, when the Lord was being preached after his ascension, many thousands of Jews believed. The very people⁸ who crucified the Lord were made a present of the blood of the Lord. In their rage they shed their own price; they were bought by the very blood they shed.⁹ His words as he hung on the cross were not ineffective: *Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing* (Lk 23:34); and that's why they first shed their price, and afterward drank it.¹⁰

So these are the sheep he said he was sent to. And yet he had foretold that the Gentiles too were going to believe. It wasn't, you see, anything absolutely new happening which hadn't been foretold beforehand. The prophets too, after all, had announced the faith to the nations, and he had himself said, when he was still here, before his passion, *I have other sheep who are not of this fold; I must bring them in too, that there may be one flock and one shepherd* (Jn 10:16). That's also why he is called the cornerstone; a corner is where two walls join together, and you can't make a corner without two walls, coming, what's more, from different directions. If both come from the same direction, they don't make a corner. So the people coming from the Jews, that is from circumcision, and the nations coming from a different direction, that is from idols and uncircumcision, they all come from different directions, but are bonded together in the

one stone. *The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner* (Ps 118:22; Mk 12:10).¹¹

So the nations hadn't yet come, and here already was this one Canaanite woman from the nations, representing in advance the Church of the nations.

The quest of the Canaanite woman

3. So she makes her request, and is told, *It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs* (Mt 15:26). When she asked insistently, she was called a dog. Now suppose she had been nettled on receiving an insult like that, coming straight from the mouth of Truth, and had gone off in a huff at being so rudely abused, saying to herself, "Here am I, coming to ask for a favor; if he can do it for me, let him do it; if he can't, why am I a dog? What have I done wrong? I only asked, I only came to receive a favor." But she knew who she was asking for a favor; she accepted what came from his mouth, she didn't reject it, she went on asking more urgently than ever, admitting she was what he said she was. "*Quite so, Lord,*" she said; that is, "*It's quite true what you've said, I am a dog.*" And it wasn't enough for her to admit to being a dog; he had talked about the children's bread, and so she admitted that the ones he called children were her masters. "*The children's bread*"—that's what he said, isn't it?—"No, it's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." "*Quite so, Lord,*" she replied; "*though as a matter of fact the dogs do eat from the scraps that fall from the table of their masters*" (Mt 15:27).

What do you see here, brothers? A case of a woman urgently asking, urgently seeking, insistently knocking. So now, because she asked, sought, knocked, she is not a dog. So now the Lord is not giving what is holy to a dog. You see, he has shown she isn't a dog, because she sought, she knocked with such feeling, thus confirming what he had said elsewhere. After instructing the stewards, remember, *Do not give what is holy to dogs, nor throw down your pearls in front of pigs*, he then admonished those who wanted to receive these things not to be dogs, if they had been dogs hitherto, and told them "*Ask, seek, knock.*"¹² So this is what he illustrated in the case of the Canaanite woman, whom he himself had at first called a dog. But when she didn't get angry on hearing such abuse, but accepted the taunt and admitted she didn't count at all, then the Lord himself took back the abusive taunt. He had called her a dog; he had given the command *Do not give what is holy to the dogs;* why did he take back the insult he had himself uttered? Surely it was only because she took the insult so well, and was transformed by her humility, and what's more by admitting she was what he called her, she ceased to be what he had called her.

The triumph of the Canaanite woman

4. What does that mean, the thing I've just said? By admitting she was what he called her she ceased to be what he had called her? It's like that tax collector who was in the temple, and the Pharisee who was boasting of what a fine fellow he was himself, and being scathing about the other man who, as a sinner, was

standing right at the back. Well, he kept his eyes downcast on the ground and wouldn't presume to lift up his face to heaven, but went on beating his breast and saying, *Be gracious to me, a sinner* (Lk 18:13). And what did the Lord say? *Amen, I tell you, that tax collector went away justified rather than the Pharisee; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted* (Lk 18:14). If he is justified by calling himself a sinner, then by calling himself a sinner, he already ceased to be a sinner. Why? Because the tax collector went away justified rather than the Pharisee. So just as he, by admitting he was a sinner, was quit of being what he had been, in the same way she, by admitting she was a dog, was quit of being what she had been. What does she hear from the Lord? No longer "dog," but what? *O woman, great is your faith; let it be done for you as you wish* (Mt 15:28). He threw down bread; no, no—he gave it, he didn't throw it down, because now he was giving it, not to a dog but to a human being. He gave it, you see, to the faith with which she asked, the faith with which she sought, the faith with which she knocked, and he was able to praise her faith precisely because she had not scorned humility.

I hope your graces will pay attention to the Lord when he says, *Do not give what is holy to dogs, nor toss your pearls in front of pigs*. And whom does he want us to understand by "dogs"? Dogs are the cynics and twisters and fault-finders, always barking; pigs are those fouled with the mire of carnal pleasures. So then, let us not be dogs and pigs, but deserve instead to be called children by the Lord; just as that Canaanite woman, from being a dog, deserved to be called woman by the Lord, as he said, *O woman, great is your faith; let it be done for you as you wish*.

(Here ends the sermon on the place where he says to his disciples, *Do not give what is holy to dogs*, etc.)

NOTES

1. The heading given to the sermon is found in the only manuscript in which it survives, which was not known to the Maurist editors. There is no evidence to suggest where or when this sermon was preached, and none of the scholars has made any suggestions.

2. See Eph 3:17.

3. See Mt 15:21ff.

4. This was not his answer to the disciples, but to the woman when she repeated her request.

5. This was the answer to the disciples.

6. See Acts 1:15, 2:1-4.

7. See 1 Cor 15:66.

8. Reading *Idem ipsis* with the first editor, and presumably the manuscript, instead of *Item ipsis* (Again, those who . . .) as emended by the Italian edition.

9. See Acts 2:36-41; 4:4; 6:14 etc.

10. When, as believers, they took part in the Lord's supper or eucharist.

11. These texts interpreted in the light of Eph 2:4-18.

12. See Mt 7:6, 7.

SERMON 61

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 7:7-11:
ASK AND YOU WILL BE GIVEN, ETC.;
AN EXHORTATION TO ALMSGIVING

Date: 412 - 416
8.12.1976 (2.)

God is our Father

1. In the reading from the holy gospel the Lord urged us to pray: *Ask, he said, and you shall be given; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; and the seeker finds, and to the one who knocks it shall be opened. Or who is the man among you of whom his son asks for a loaf, will he hand him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he hand him a snake? Or when he asks for an egg, will he hand him a scorpion? If you therefore, he says, bad though you are, 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 7:7-11). *Bad though you are, he says, you know how to give good gifts to your children.* It's a wonderful thing, brothers; we are bad, and we have a good Father. What could be clearer? We have heard ourselves mentioned: *Bad, he says, though you are, you know how to give good gifts to your children.* And after calling them bad, see what sort of Father he shows them. *How much more will your Father . . . ? Whose Father? Bad people's, of course. And what kind of Father? No one is good but God alone* (Lk 18:19).

God makes people good

2. So, brothers, the reason that we, being bad, have a good Father is in order that we may not always remain bad. No bad person can make a good one. If no bad person can make a good one, how can a bad man make himself good? The only one who can make a good person out of a bad one is the one who is always good. *Heal me, Lord, he says, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved* (Jer 17:14). Why do they say to me, silly people saying silly things, "You can save yourself if you want to" ^{Q2} *Heal me, Lord, and I shall be healed.* We were created good by the good God, seeing that *God made man upright* (Eccl 7:29); but by our own decision we became bad. We were able to change from

good to bad, and we shall be able to change from bad to good. But it's the one who is always good that can change bad to good, because man, by his own will, cannot heal himself. You don't look for a doctor to wound you; but when you have wounded yourself, you look for one to heal you.

So things that are good for a time, temporal goods, bodily, material goods, these we know how to give to our children, even though we are bad. That such things too are good, after all, who can deny? Fishes, eggs, bread, apples, corn, this light, this air we breathe, they are all good. The very riches which make people so proud, so that they don't recognize other people as their equals; which make people proud, I repeat, more in love with their splendid clothes than aware of their common skin—these very riches, then, are good. But all these good things I have mentioned can be possessed by good and bad alike, and while indeed they are good, yet they cannot for all that make people good.

Increase your justice

3. So there is a good that can make good, and there's a good with which you can do good. The good that makes good is God, for only the one who is always good can make man good. In order that you, therefore, may be good, call upon God. There is, however, another good with which you can do good, anything, that is, that you may have. It's gold, it's silver, it's good, not such that can make you good, but such that you can do good with it.

You've got gold, you've got silver, and you are lustng for gold and you are lustng for silver. You've got it, and you are lustng for it; you are full, and you are still thirsty. It's a disease you've got, not prosperity. There are people with a disease which makes them full of moisture and yet always thirsty; they are full of moisture, and they are thirstng for moisture! So how can you enjoy your prosperity, when your lust for money suggests a bad case of dropsy?

So you've got gold, it's good; you've got something to do good with, but not something to be good with. "What good," you ask, "am I going to do with gold?" Haven't you heard the psalm, *He has distributed*, it says, *he has given to the poor; his justice abides for ever and ever* (Ps 112:9)? This is the good, this is the good you are good with, justice. If you have the good you can be good with, do good with the good you are not good with. You've got some money, disburse it. By disbursing your money you increase your justice. *He has distributed*, you see, he has disbursed, *he has given to the poor; his justice abides for ever and ever*. Notice what gets less, and what increases; what gets less is money, what increases is justice. It's what you are going to say goodbye to that gets less, what you are going to leave behind that gets less; what increases is what you are going to possess for ever.

Disburse money in order to get justice

4. I'm advising you how to make a profit; learn the tricks of trading. After all, you admire a trader who sells lead and acquires gold; won't you admire a

trader who disburses money and acquires justice? "But I," you say, "don't disburse money because I haven't got any justice. Let the fellow who has got some justice disburse money. I haven't got any justice. At least let me have some money." So it's because you haven't got any justice that you don't wish to disburse any money? Rather, I'm telling you, disburse money in order to get justice. After all, whom will you get justice from if not from God the fountain of justice? So if you want to get some justice, be a beggar to God, who a little while ago was advising you in the gospel to ask, to seek, to knock. He knew his beggar, and here he is, a great householder and rich, rich, that is, in spiritual and eternal riches, and he's urging you and telling you, "Ask, seek, knock. *Whoever asks receives; the seeker finds; to the one who knocks it is opened* (Mt 7:7)." He urges you to ask; will he refuse you what you ask?

The unjust judge

5. Now by way of contrast³ look at a parable or comparison, like the one about that unjust judge, designed to urge us on to prayer, when the Lord said, *There was a certain judge in a city who neither feared God nor respected man. A certain widow used to plead with him every day and say, Give me justice. For a time, he wouldn't do so* (Lk 18:1-8). She never stopped pleading, and he did out of weariness what he wouldn't do out of kindness. Thus by way of contrast he has urged us in this parable to ask.

Importunity

6. *He came to his friend*, he said—someone a guest had just landed on—and he began to knock and say, *A guest has come to me, lend me three loaves. The other answered, I am already taking my rest, and my servants⁴ are at rest with me.* The other one doesn't give up, he stands his ground, he insists, he goes on knocking, and like a friend goes on begging from a friend. And what does he say? *I tell you that he gets up, and not because of friendship but because of his importunity he gives him as much as he wanted* (Lk 11:5-8). Not for friendship's sake, though he is a friend, but on account of his importunity. What does importunity mean? Because he didn't give up knocking; because even when he was refused, he didn't turn away. The one who was reluctant to give did what he was asked to, because the other didn't falter in asking.

How much more readily will the good God give to us, seeing that he is urging us to ask, seeing that it annoys him if we don't ask. But when he is sometimes rather slow in giving, he is upping the value of his gifts, not refusing them. Things long desired are obtained with greater pleasure; if they are given at once, they lose their value. Ask, seek, insist. By asking and seeking you grow in your capacity to receive. God is keeping for you what he doesn't wish to give you straightforwardly, so that you for your part may learn to have a great desire for great things. That's why it is necessary always to pray and not to falter (Lk 18:1).

We ask the good God

7. So then, my brothers, if God has made us his beggars by advising us and urging and ordering us to ask, to seek, to knock, we too should take some notice of those who ask us for things. We do some asking ourselves. Who are we, asking for things? Who are we, that are doing the asking? What are we asking for?⁵ We are asking the good God for things; we that are doing the asking are bad people, but we are asking for justice, by which we may become good. So we are asking for something we can keep forever; something, once we are sated with it, that will put an end to all further needs.

But in order to be sated with it, we must be hungry and thirsty; by being hungry and thirsty we must ask, we must seek, we must knock. *Blessed*, you see, *are those who are hungry and thirsty for justice*. Why blessed? Hungry and thirsty, and they are blessed? Can dire want ever be blessed? It's not because they are hungry and thirsty that they are blessed, but *because they shall be satisfied* (Mt 5:6). Over there, bliss will be found in satisfaction, not in hunger. But hunger must precede satisfaction, or else by being too persnickety you may not get to the refection.

We are God's beggars

8. So we have said who we must ask for things from, who we are that must do the asking, what we must ask for. But we too are asked for things. We are God's beggars, remember; for him to take notice of his beggars, we in our turn must take notice of ours. In this case too we should consider, when we are asked for something, who they are that are doing the asking, from whom they are asking for it, what they are asking for. Who are doing the asking? Human beings. From whom are they asking for it? From human beings. Who are doing the asking? Mortals. From whom are they asking for it? From mortals. Who are doing the asking? Fragile creatures. From whom are they asking for it? From fragile creatures. Who are doing the asking? Poor wretches. From whom are they asking for it? From poor wretches.

Apart from the extent of their assets, those who are doing the asking are exactly like those who are being asked. How can you have the face to ask your God for something, if you don't take any notice of your equal? "I'm not like him," he says; "heaven preserve me from being like him!" Some puffed-up poodle swathed in silk speaks like that about the fellow in rags. But I'm asking questions about you both when you are naked. I'm not asking what you are like in your clothes, but what you were like when you were born. You were both naked, both feeble, both beginning a miserable life, and so both crying.

Poor and rich alike at birth and death

9. Come on, then, rich man, call to mind your beginnings; see whether you brought anything here. Now that you have come, you have found so much here.

But tell me, please, what did you bring with you? Tell me what you brought. Or if you are ashamed to say, listen to the apostle: *We brought nothing into this world.* Nothing, he says, did we bring into this world. But perhaps because you brought nothing, and found much when you were here, you are going to take something away with you from here? This too, perhaps, so fond you are of riches, you are frightened to admit; so listen to this as well. Let the apostle say this also, since he is in no mind to flatter you: *We brought nothing into this world*, when we were born, of course, *but neither can we take anything out* (1 Tm 6:7),⁶ of course, when we leave the world. You brought nothing, you will take nothing away from here, why preen yourself against the poor?

When babies are born, put aside the parents, the slaves, the hangers-on;⁷ put aside the press of servile flatterers, and just take note of the rich babies crying. Let a rich woman and a poor woman give birth together; let's suppose they don't observe what they have given birth to; let them withdraw for a while and then come back, and see if they can tell which is whose. So there you are, rich man, you brought nothing into this world, but neither can you take anything out. What I have just said about newborn babies, I can say equally about the dead. Sure, when by some chance ancient tombs are broken open, tell the rich man's bones apart, if you can.⁸ So, rich man, listen to the apostle: *We brought nothing into this world*; admit it, it's true. *But neither can we take anything out*; admit it, this too is the truth.

*It's one thing to be rich,
another to wish to become rich*

10. So how does it go on? *If we have food and clothing, let us be content with that. For those who wish to become rich fall into temptation and many desires, harmful ones too, which plunge a man into ruin and destruction. For avarice is the root of all evils, and some people by chasing after it have gone completely astray from the faith.* Notice what they have let go. You are sorry that they have let it go; now see what they have involved themselves in: *they have gone completely astray from the faith, and involved themselves in many sorrows* (1 Tm 6:8-10).

But who? *Those who wish to become rich.* It's one thing to be rich, another to wish to become rich. A person is rich who was born of rich parents; he's not rich because he wished to be, but because he is the heir of many generations. I note his possessions, I don't ask questions about his wishes.⁹ In this text it's greed that is being rebuked, not gold, not silver, not riches, but greed. As for those who don't wish to be rich, or who don't care, or who aren't burnt up with greedy desires, not catching fire from the matches of avarice, but who are rich all the same, they should listen to the apostle. It was read today. *Command the rich of this world.* Command them. What? Command them, above all, *not to be haughty in their ideas.* You see, there is nothing riches are so likely to breed as pride. Every fruit, every grain, every kind of corn, every tree, has its own proper worm. There's one worm for apples, another for pears, another for beans, another for wheat. The worm in riches is pride.

True riches, eternal life

11. So, command the rich of this world not to be haughty in their ideas. He has cut out the vice, let him indicate now the use. Not to be haughty in their ideas. Not to be haughty about what in their ideas? About what follows: *not to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches*. Those who don't set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches are not haughty in their ideas. If they haven't got big ideas, let them be afraid. If they are afraid, they don't have big ideas. How many people, rich yesterday, are poor today? How many people go to sleep rich, and with bandits coming and taking everything away, wake up poor? So, *not to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on the living God, who bestows all things on us abundantly for our enjoyment* (1 Tm 6:17); things both temporal and eternal, but for enjoyment rather eternal things, and for use, temporal ones. Temporal things for our use as travelers, eternal ones for our enjoyment as settled at home.¹⁰ Temporal things with which we may do good, eternal ones with which we may be made good.

So this is what the rich should do: not be haughty in their ideas, nor set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on the living God, who bestows all things on us abundantly for our enjoyment; that's what they must do. But what are they to do with what they have? Let me tell you what: *Let them be rich in good works, let them be easy givers*. After all, they've got the wherewithal. Poverty is difficult and grim. *Let them be easy givers*; they've got the wherewithal. *Let them share*, that is, take some notice of their fellow mortals. *Let them share, let them store up for themselves a good foundation for the future*. "You see," he says, "just because I say *Let them be easy givers, let them share*, it doesn't mean I want them looted, want them stripped naked, want them left empty. I am teaching them how to make a profit, when I point out, *Let them store up for themselves*. I'm not telling them to do this so that they can lose it; I'm showing them where to transfer the account. *Let them store up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they lay hold of true life* (1 Tm 6:18-19)." So this one is a false life; let them lay hold of true life. After all, *Vanity of vanitators, and all is vanity. What is this great abundance for man in all his toil, at which he toils under the sun?* (Eccl 1:2-3).¹¹ So true life is to be laid hold of, our investments are to be transferred to the place of true life, so that we may find there what we give here. The one who transforms us also transforms those investments.

Let your superfluities provide the poor with their necessities

12. So give to the poor, my brothers. *If we have food and clothing, let us be content with that* (1 Tm 6:8). The rich man gets nothing more with his riches than what the poor man is pleading for from him, food and clothing. What more do you get from all the things you have? You've got your food, you've got your necessary clothing; necessary, I say, not vain, not superfluous. What else can you get from your riches? Tell me. For sure, it will all be your superfluities. Well, let your superfluities provide the poor with their necessities.

"But I," you say, "have expensive meals, I eat expensive food." What about the poor man? "Cheap stuff; the poor eat cheap food. I," he says, "eat expensive food." I've a question for you both, when you have both had your fill: the expensive food goes into you; what happens when it's gone in? If we had mirrors in our stomachs, wouldn't we be disgusted by all the expensive foods you have stuffed yourself with?¹² The poor man's hungry, the rich man's hungry; the poor man wants to eat his fill, the rich man wants to eat his fill. The poor man eats his fill of cheap food, the rich man eats his fill of expensive food. Repletion is the same in each case; it's the same goal they both want to reach, but one gets there directly, the other in a roundabout way.¹³

"But my expensive dishes," you say, "taste nicer." You're so nice, so persnickety, you can scarcely eat your fill. You don't know what food tastes like when real hunger drives you on. But I haven't been speaking like this in order to force the rich to eat the meals and food of the poor. Let the rich keep to the habits their delicacy requires, but let them be sad that they cannot do otherwise. They would do better, surely, if they could do otherwise. So if the poor man isn't proud of his beggary, why should you be proud of your delicacy? Go on making use of your special, expensive foods, because you have got into the habit of them, because you cannot do otherwise, because if you change your habits you get sick. Go on making use of your superfluities, but give the poor their necessities. Go on using expensive things, but give the poor their cheap things.¹⁴

He looks to you, you look to God. He looks to a hand that was made as he was, you look to a hand that made you. But it didn't only make you, it also made the poor man with you. He gave you both this life as a single road to travel along. You have found yourselves companions, walking along the same road; he's carrying nothing, you have an excessive load; he's carrying nothing with him, you are carrying more with you than you need. You are overloaded; give him some of what you've got; at a stroke, you feed him and lessen your own load.

Looking for fruit

13. So give to the poor; I'm begging you, I'm warning you, I'm commanding you, I'm ordering you. Give to the poor whatever you like. You see, I won't conceal from your graces why I thought it necessary to preach this sermon to you. Ever since I got back here, every time I come to the church and go back again, the poor plead with me and tell me to tell you that they need to get something from you. They have urged me to speak to you; and when they see they are not getting anything from you, they come to the conclusion that I am laboring among you to no purpose.

They also expect to get something from me. I give as much as I have, I give what I can, but I'm hardly in a position, am I, to meet all their needs. So because I am not in a position to meet all their needs, I am at least their ambassador to you.

You have heard me, you have applauded; thanks be to God. You have

received the seed, you have given back words. I find your applause more of a burden than a gratification, it's putting me in danger.¹³ I put up with it, and I tremble at it. All the same, my brothers, these plaudits of yours are no more than the leaves of trees; what we are looking for is fruit.¹⁶

NOTES

1. The scholars are all agreed that this sermon was preached in Hippo, between 412 and 416. The date I presume is deduced from an oblique reference to Pelagian ideas, note 5 below; the place, above all from the tone of the concluding section, very much that of the bishop reminding his own flock of their responsibilities, and aware of his own responsibilities to the poorer members of the flock.

2. This is the sort of thing Pelagians would say, at least in Augustine's estimation. His controversy with Pelagius and his supporters only began in 411 or 412.

3. The contrast is between the reluctance of the unjust judge and the willingness of God to answer a petition. We would call it, rather, an *a fortiori* illustration.

4. We are surprised to find Augustine paraphrasing the man's servants as being at rest with him. The Latin text, which was also his text, has *pueri*, "boys." He takes it in what we might call the South African sense (see "garden boy" etc.), and paraphrases *servi*, "servants" or "slaves." Why? I am sure he must have known this was not the real meaning of the text, but he is adjusting it to his audience. He is preaching to the well-to-do, who have more servants than children, and who would rouse one of their servants to get the bread asked for.

5. He repeats these three questions in one succinct and compendious question *A quo, vel qui, vel quid petimus?*— which I find it impossible to put into succinct English. So I thought it better to leave it out.

6. This and the whole following passage provides a frequent subject for his sermons. See Sermons 36, 39, 53A; *Expositions of the Psalms* 45, 73, 137. Sermon 177 is devoted almost entirely to this passage.

7. *Clients*. "Clients" were the dependents of great senatorial families, whom they would regard as their patrons.

8. A good point in principle, but in practice archaeologists often manage to do this very convincingly.

9. Reading *voluntates* with two manuscripts, instead of the *voluptates* (pleasures) with the others. It is wishes, not pleasures, that are at issue here.

10. The distinction between use and enjoyment is a favorite one with Augustine; see his *Teaching Christianity*. The other distinction between the journey (through the desert) and its goal (the promised land) is a traditional commonplace. What is interesting is that he does not place this latter entirely in the future; in some mysterious sense we are already there.

11. I must explain the non-word "vanitators." Augustine too has a non-word, *vanitantium*. This is not just a misprint for *vanitatum*, the proper reading of the text. In his *Revisions* 1, 7, 3 he discusses the reading, and says that the best codices have *vanitatum*, which is true to the Greek, and only inferior ones have *vanitantium*. Well, it seems that the inferior reading was the one better known in Hippo.

12. I am simply following Augustine in changing the person from "we" to "you" (singular).

13. The poor man eats one big, simple dish; the rich man many dainty, expensive dishes.

14. He states the same principle in his Rule, Letter 211:6.

15. In danger of getting a swollen head; see *Confessions* 10, 37, 60-62.

16. Leaves are fine words; fruit is actual deeds. This is the way he usually interprets the story of the barren figtree, Mk 11:14. 20.

SERMON 61A

ON THE LORD'S WORDS, *ASK, AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE*

Date: 425¹

1. Since the Lord didn't want me to leave here with a debt unpaid, I acknowledge that this is the time for me to render what I promised. And that's why I gave instructions for the same chapter of the gospel to be read again today as was read when I excused myself. So what necessity forced me to deprive you of then, charity obliges me to render you now. Well of course, the time is not available, nor are my powers sufficient, to consider and discuss all the words of that chapter. However, with the Lord's help, I will say as best I can what most needs to be said about it.

Ask, seek, knock

2. The Lord urges us to ask, to seek, to knock when he says, *Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and who seeks shall find, and to the one who knocks it shall be opened* (Mt 7:7-8). These words first and foremost confront us with the following question, which we must solve as best we can. We know that many people ask and don't receive, seek and don't find, knock and are not opened to. So how can everyone who asks receive? All this, you see, though it seems to be said three times and in three words, boils down to one petition: "Ask, seek, knock," it all amounts to "Ask." We can tell this from the conclusion of the passage, where he says, *If you, bad though you are, 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). He doesn't say "to those who seek and knock," but he includes all three in one when he says "to those who ask."

*Paul didn't receive,
the demons received their wish*

3. So why do many people ask and not receive, if *everyone who asks receives?* Or are we wrong in thinking that we ask and don't receive? Apart from the daily examples we all know about, scripture itself testifies that the apostle Paul asked

that the angel of Satan should depart from him, and didn't receive.² And we discover that the bad asked and received, while the good asked and didn't receive. What, after all, could be worse than demons? And yet they asked for the pigs and got them.³ And thus God is shown not to have granted the desires of apostles, and to have accomplished the desires of demons. Or aren't we quite certain that the former belong to God and are going to reign in the chief places with Christ,⁴ while the demons are going to burn for ever with their chieftain the devil?⁵ So what are we to say, except that *The Lord knows who are his* (2 Tm 2:19),⁶ and that of them *everyone who asks receives*?

Trust the doctor

4. But we are still left with a nagging difficulty about the apostle. Presumably he is not excluded from the number of those "who are his," seeing that he is the one who made this statement, *The Lord knows who are his*. So, all those who are his ask and receive, and not one of them asks and doesn't receive. But the question I want to ask is, "Receive what?" I mean, the things we request on account of this temporal life are sometimes good for us and sometimes bad for us. And when God knows they are bad for those who are his, he doesn't give them to them, however much they desire and ask for them, just as a doctor doesn't give his patient whatever he asks for, and because he cares for him refuses him what he might allow him if he didn't care for him.

So he listens to all those who are his as far as eternal life is concerned. He doesn't listen to them all as far as temporal longings are concerned. I mean, take the patient whom I've just given as an example; when he asks the doctor for something the doctor knows is harmful, what he really wants from the doctor is a return to health.⁷ So the doctor, in order to pay attention to his patient in the matter of his health, pays no attention to him in the matter of his wishes.

Finally, just ponder the very words of the passage. When he hadn't received what he had three times asked the Lord for, he told him, "*My grace is sufficient for you; strength is made perfect in weakness* (2 Cor 12:9).⁸ Why do you want me to take away from you the sting in your flesh, which you received to prevent you from getting a swollen head about your revelations? Obviously, the reason you are making the request is that you don't know what's good for you. Trust the doctor. What he has prescribed is painful, but useful; it hurts, but it heals. See how it ends, and be glad about what was denied you, and realize what was supplied you." "How does it end?" "*Strength is made perfect in weakness*. So put up with the weakness if you want the fitness. Put up with the weakness, if you want perfection, because *strength is made perfect in weakness*. And just to assure you I haven't deserted you, *my grace is sufficient for you*."

Eternal life is the promise

5. There is an obvious reason why I have to warn your graces first and foremost about this; I know, and we all know and we can't pretend otherwise

(after all, it strikes the eyes even of those who would rather not see), what miracles of healing occur here every day at the shrine of the blessed and glorious martyr present in this place;⁹ still there's no doubt that some people ask and don't receive. Now these people mustn't assume that they have been forsaken by God.

The first thing they must do is examine their own hearts, to see whether they are asking in faith. Any who ask in faith receive for their own good, and sometimes don't receive for their own good. When he doesn't cure the body he wants to cure the soul. So trust him, and believe that since he has called you to an eternal kingdom, whatever he wishes is to your advantage. After all, what is this thing that you long for as though it mattered so enormously? Eternal life is what he has promised you, to reign with the angels is what he has promised you, rest without end is what he has promised you. And what, in comparison, is it that he doesn't give here and now? Isn't it true that *the health of human beings is vain* (Ps 60:11; 108:12)?¹⁰ Isn't it absolutely certain that all those who do get cured will eventually die? And when death comes, all those past events vanish like smoke. But when that other life that he has promised us comes, it will of course have no end. By denying you something here and now he is equipping you for that life, he is preparing you for it, he is training you for it.

If, on the other hand, you are one of those who have received a cure, because you have believed and asked (and it doesn't mean you are asking in the wrong way, even if sometimes for your own good you are not granted your request), then accept it and use it well. I mean, anyone who starts leading a loose kind of life on being healed, would surely have been better off remaining sick. So when you are restored to temporal health, put it to good use, to serve God who gave it to you with what he has given you.

And don't start fancying yourself above someone else, who may have asked and not received, and say to yourself, "I've got more faith than he has." That's why you heard the words in the gospel just now, *Do not judge, that you be not judged* (Mt 7:1). What else does *Do not judge* refer to, but hidden matters? Is anyone, after all, forbidden to judge about open matters, seeing that scripture says somewhere else, *Things that are open pertain to you; while things that are hidden pertain to God* (Dt 29:29)? Which means, allow yourselves to judge open matters; leave hidden matters to the judgment of your God.

So then, how do you know whether perhaps the reason why the person, who asked and did not receive, was refused this temporal health, is that he is stronger than you are? He asked and he didn't receive. But what did he ask for? Health of body. Perhaps his faith is stronger than yours, and the reason you did receive is that if you hadn't, you would have given up. I haven't asserted this. I said "perhaps," to stop myself from doing what I am forbidding, because I dare not pass judgment about hidden matters. Sometimes, you see, the reason he didn't receive is that he made his request without faith; sometimes the reason he didn't receive is that he is stronger than you are, and can do with some training in fortitude, as we said about the apostle. He was stronger, and yet he wasn't yet perfect, so that he was told, *Strength is made perfect in weakness* (2 Cor 12:9).

Those who have asked and not received

6. We know—their writings proclaim it loud and clear—that they healed the sick at a word. The apostle Paul himself said to someone, *Aeneas, get up and make your bed* (Acts 9:14).¹¹ The man who had been bedridden for years got up, cured immediately, and made his bed. And yet the same apostle says about a disciple of his, *I left Trophimus sick at Miletus* (2 Tm 4:20). You heal a stranger in a place you come to, and you leave a disciple sick in a place you depart from? And what does he say about Epaphras? *He was sad*, he says, *because you had heard he was ill, and indeed he was ill, to the verge of death*. Would it have been such a great thing for Paul the apostle to heal him too with a word, and not allow him to come to the verge of death? *But God*, he says, *had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me too, lest I should have sadness upon sadness* (Phil 2:26-27). It seems he wanted him to get better. If he wanted it, then of course he prayed for it, and yet he didn't immediately obtain it by prayer. Yet scarcely had he obtained it than he gave thanks, because he had obtained it, even though scarcely.¹²

He gives the blessed Timothy advice about medicine. He raised up a paralytic of many years with a word, and he was unable to cure the stomach of his dearest disciple, who shared all his mind and as he says himself was closer to him than a brother,¹³ with the same kind of word. And yet he says, *Don't go on drinking water, but use a little wine for your stomach and your frequent illnesses* (1 Tm 5:23).

That should be enough on the point about which I wanted to warn your graces, to ensure that you don't make fun of those who have perhaps asked and not received, and think poorly of them; or that you don't give up hope when perhaps you ask and don't receive; or that when you ask and do receive, you don't proudly fancy yourselves above those who don't receive.

That God may make us good

7. So what is it then, that absolutely all those who are his ask for and do receive, seek and do find, knock and it shall indeed be opened to them? After all, unless there was something of the sort, Truth would not have said *Everyone who asks receives* (Mt 7:8). What is it? Where is it to be found? Let's have a look in this chapter, and see if we can perhaps find there what we are looking for. There you have it, yes to be sure, that's where you have it. Let us recognize ourselves, in the place where we hear that we are bad. He says, you see, *You, bad though you are, 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). He called our Father good, and us bad. *What?* Is that most high God the good Father of bad people? It seems ridiculous, but we can't deny it. Truth is speaking: *If you, bad though you are—how are we to contradict Truth?—know how to give good gifts to your children.* The good gifts we give to our children don't however make us good. So if we can give good things which don't make us good, but are good all the same, what remains for us to ask God for, but good things by which we can become good?

We were rebuked, you see, when we were told *bad though you are*. And yet at the same time we were shown our Father who is in heaven as supremely good. Aren't we ashamed of being bad, with such a Father? Or would he really wish to be the Father of bad people, if he wished to leave us bad, if he wished us to remain bad for ever? So if we are bad and have a good Father, let this be what we ask for, this what we seek, this at which we knock, that in his goodness he may make us good, and so stop having bad children.

And to what extent does anybody, here and now, become good? To what extent exactly? Whatever progress you make, you are going to be battling with desires, battling with lusts. However much progress you make, even if you have peace at home and abroad, in yourself you will have war, in yourself you are going to be engaged in combat, and you won't stop engaging in combat, watched by him who is ready to help you in the struggle and give you the prize when you win. But when all the discord and all the wrangling that we are is over and done with—because our feebleness and our wrangling are not some other nature opposed to the real us, but somehow or other our feebleness is our usual familiar nature . . .¹⁴ We weren't like that in paradise; there was nothing in us fighting against us. But we airily dismissed the one with whom we were at peace, and began to be at war with ourselves.

And that is our wretchedness. And it's a great thing in this life not to be defeated in this war, because to be without an enemy in this life is quite beyond our powers. But a life is coming, the ultimate, the last word in life, when we shall have no enemies at all, either outside or inside; *for the last enemy to be destroyed will be death* (1 Cor 15:26). Then shall we dwell blissfully in the house of God, and praise him for ever and ever.¹⁵ Amen.

NOTES

1. A sermon on the problem of apparently unanswered prayer and the less considered problem of answered prayer, preached according to the authorities about 425, certainly well after 415, in one of the places mentioned in note 5 below. Which of these is the most likely to have been the scene of the sermon will be discussed there. That it wasn't Augustine's own Church of Hippo Regius is clear from the opening sentence.

2. See 2 Cor 12:7.

3. See Mk 5:12-13.

4. See Lk 22:30; Mt 19:28.

5. See Mt 25:41.

6. This is very much a non-solution to the problem; he offers it, only to demolish it as he proceeds.

7. *Salutem*: this is the same word as is usually translated "salvation." Salvation is our ultimate and our basic return to health.

8. See 2 Cor 12:7.

9. Saint Stephen. In 415 his remains were discovered (no one ever doubted that they were genuine) in Palestine, and immediately relics of the protomartyr began to be taken to Churches all

over the Roman Empire, especially it seems to churches in the west. He became extraordinarily popular in Africa, and in *The City of God* XIII, 8, Augustine names the places where shrines of Saint Stephen were established. Besides the one at Hippo itself, there were shrines dedicated to him, containing relics, at Calama and Uzalis, where his friends Possidius and Evodius respectively were bishops, and also at the smaller episcopal churches of Castellum Sinitense and Aquae Tibilitanæ, and one at an estate or farm called Audurus, possibly in the Hippo diocese. This chapter of *The City of God* is devoted to listing the miracles of healing performed at these and other shrines. Reference is also made to them in Sermons 317-324. So this sermon was presumably preached at one of these places. Dom A. Wilmart, who first published this sermon (unknown to the Maurists), proposes Uzalis, a town near Utica on the road to Carthage, which Augustine would certainly have visited often. But seeing that this sermon did not find its way into any of the big collections, so that it was unknown to the older editors, I suggest it was probably preached at a rather obscure place which Augustine's stenographers and secretaries would not have regarded as important enough for sermons preached there to be put in the main sermon files. And thus I rather like the idea that it was preached in the insignificant country church at Audurus. Furthermore, though the sermon clearly wasn't preached at Hippo, Augustine seems to be speaking as though he exercised authority in the place, giving instructions, for example, about what chapter of the gospel was to be read. This suggests he wasn't preaching in the church of another bishop.

10. "Health" again translates *salus*. In its own context this would better be rendered "salvation from men"; but in the context of the sermon it is being treated as meaning ordinary health.

11. Augustine is making a real mistake in attributing this miracle of Peter to Paul. Both before and after this allusion he is talking about Paul, not Peter, so he couldn't have corrected the mistake without eliminating reference to this incident altogether and substituting another one, for example, Paul's cure of the cripple at Lystra, Acts 14:10. I wonder if he would have made such a mistake in a big city church.

12. If this sentence is obscure, it is because I am not at all sure what it means: *quia vel vix impetravit*. He seems to be playing on the word *vix*, "scarcely."

13. I do not know where Augustine thinks that Paul says this about Timothy. The word is *germanissimus*. *Germanus* only occurs once in the Vulgate of Paul's letter, Phil 4:3, where it is not addressed to Timothy.

14. He forgets to finish the sentence, but he has made the very important point against the Manichees (see Sermon 30, 4) that it is not some alien evil "not-me," which causes the defects in my character and behavior, something for which the real "me" cannot be held responsible, but on the contrary the whole sorry self-contradictory muddled mess is all me, for which I am responsible. Thus he does modify considerably the dualist, neoplatonist model of man which, like nearly all his contemporaries, he habitually works with.

15. See Ps 84:4.

SERMON 62

ON THE GOSPEL, WHERE THE CENTURION ASKS THE LORD FOR HIS SERVANT

Date: 399 or 407⁸¹

Humility of the centurion

1. When the gospel was read, we heard our faith praised in an act of humility. When the Lord Jesus, you remember, promised he would go to the centurion's house to heal his servant, the man replied, *I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and he will be healed* (Mt 8:8; Lk 7:6-7). By calling himself unworthy, he showed he was worthy to have Christ enter, not within his walls, but within his heart. In fact, he wouldn't have said this with such faith and humility, unless he already carried in his heart the one he was afraid of having in his house. There would, after all, have been no great benefit if the Lord Jesus had entered within his walls, and had not been in his bosom. The teacher of humility by both word and example had, you may remember, sat down in the house of a certain proud Pharisee called Simon.² And though he was sitting in his house, there wasn't anywhere in his heart where the Son of man might lay his head.

Preacher of the living word

2. In the same way, you see, as we can gather from the Lord's own words, he dissuaded another proud man, who desired of his own accord to accompany him, from becoming one of his disciples. *I will follow you, Lord*, says he, *wherever you go*. And the Lord, seeing the invisible state of his heart, answered, *Foxes have holes and birds of the sky nests, but the Son of man does not have anywhere to lay his head* (Lk 9:57-58; Mt 8:19-20). That is to say: "There dwell in you trickeries like foxes, pride like the birds of the sky, but the Son of man, who meets trickery with simplicity and pride with humility, has nowhere to lay his head." And the very gesture of laying down the head, instead of holding it high, is a lesson in humility. So he dissuades this man who wants to go with him, and he coaxes along another who is reluctant to go. In the very same place he says to another, *Follow me. And he said, I will follow you, Lord, but let me*

go first and bury my father. It was a dutiful excuse he made, and so he deserved all the more to have his excuse ruled out and his vocation confirmed. What he wanted to do was indeed his duty; but the master taught him what should take priority even over that. He wanted him to be a preacher of the living word, to make people come alive. There were others who could perform that duty; *let the dead*, he said, *bury their dead* (Lk 9:59-60; Mt 8:21-22). When unbelievers bury a corpse, the dead are burying the dead. That body has lost its soul; their souls have lost God. Just as the soul is the life of the body, so God is the life of the soul. Just as the body expires when it lets loose the soul, so the soul expires when it loses God. God lost means the death of the soul; the soul let loose means the death of the body. The death of the body is unavoidable; the death of the soul is a matter of choice.

In his house, but not in his heart

3. So the Lord was sitting at table in the house of a Pharisee. He was in his house, as I said, and he was not in his heart. Into this centurion's house, on the other hand, he never entered, and he took possession of his heart. Zacchaeus, though, received the Lord both in his house and in his affections.³

But this man's faith is discerned and praised in an act of humility. He said, *I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof*, and the Lord said, *Amen I tell you, I have not found such great faith in Israel* (Mt 8:10; Lk 7:9)—according to the flesh, that is. This man, you see, was already an Israelite according to the spirit.⁴ The Lord had come to Israel according to the flesh, that is to the Jews, there first to seek the sheep that were lost;⁵ it was in and from this people, of course, that he had assumed his human body. *I have not there found such great faith.* We, as human beings, can assess the faith of human beings—from the outside; he, who could look inside, whom no one could deceive, bore witness to the faith⁶ of this man, and on hearing his humble words, he gave him a clean bill of health.

Centurion, image of the pagans

4. But what made the centurion so confident? *I too*, he said, *am a man set under authority, having soldiers under me, and I say to this one, Go, and he goes, and to another, Come, and he comes, and to my slave, Do this, and he does it* (Mt 8:9).⁷ To some who are set under me I am authority, being myself set under some authority above me. So if I, he says, a man under authority, have authority to command, what can you not do, seeing that all authorities are subject to you? Now this man was a Gentile—he was, after all, a centurion. The Jewish nation already had troops of the Roman empire among them. This man was in command of troops there, to the extent that a centurion could be in command; he was under authority, and he had authority; as a subordinate, obedient, as having subordinates, commanding.

Now the Lord—and this is a point it is particularly important for your graces

to take note of—although he was among the Jewish people, was already proclaiming the Church that would exist in the whole world, to which he would send the apostles, while he himself was not seen and yet believed in by Gentiles, seen and yet slain by Jews. For just as the Lord did not enter this man's house in the body, and yet though absent in body brought health to both his faith and his house too by his divine presence; so too the same Lord was present in body only among the Jewish people; among the other nations he was neither born of the virgin, nor put to death, nor did he walk about on foot, nor endure human trials, nor perform divine wonders. None of this among the other nations, and yet the prophecy was fulfilled about him, *A people I did not know served me.* How, if it did not know? *The moment it heard, it obeyed me* (Ps 18:43-44). The Jewish people knew him and crucified him; the world heard of him, and believed.⁸

The woman who touched the hem of his garment

5. This kind of bodily absence and powerful presence of his among all the Gentiles was also signified in that woman who had touched the hem of his garment, when he wanted to know and said, *Who touched me?* As though absent, he wants to know; as though present, he heals. *The crowds are crushing you,* say the disciples, *and you can ask, Who touched me?* (Lk 8:45; Mk 5:30-31).⁹ He said *Who touched me?* as though he were walking free touched by nobody at all, and they point out, *The crowds are crushing you.* And it's as though the Lord were saying, "I'm looking for someone who touched me, not for someone who crushed me."

It's the same even now with his body, that is, his Church. She is touched by the faith of a few, jostled by the throng of the many. That the Church is the body of Christ, you as her children have certainly been taught, and if you will, that is what you are yourselves. The apostle says this in several places: *For his body,* he says, *which is the Church* (Col 1:24). And again, *But you are the body of Christ and its members* (1 Cor 12:27). So if we are his body, his Church undergoes now what his body underwent then in the crowd. It is crushed by crowds; it is touched by a few. Flesh crushes it, faith touches it. So lift up your eyes, I beg you, those of you who have eyes to see with. You certainly have something you can see. Lift up the eyes of faith, touch the outer hem of the garment, that will be enough for your salvation.

Summoned from east and west

6. Observe that what you hear in the gospel was going to happen is now actually happening. *Therefore I tell you*, he says, on account of the centurion whose faith he had praised so much, as of a foreigner in the flesh but a member of the household at heart¹⁰—*Therefore*, he says, *many will come from east and west.* Not all, but many; they, though, from east and west, the two points of the compass designating the whole world. *Many will come from east and west, and*

will sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness. The children of the kingdom, namely the Jews. Why are they children of the kingdom? Because they received the law, and the prophets had been sent to them, and with them was the temple and the priesthood, and they were the ones who celebrated the shadows of all the good things to come.¹¹ In fact, after celebrating their shadows, they failed to recognize their reality when they came. *So the children of the kingdom will go*, he says, *into the outer darkness; there shall there be weeping and grinding of teeth* (Mt 8:11-12). We see the Jews rejected, we see Christians from east and west summoned to a kind of heavenly banquet, to sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, where the food is justice and the drink wisdom.

Be the body of Christ

7. So pay attention, brothers; this is what you are, this is the people you belong to, already proclaimed¹² then, realized and acclaimed now. Of course you belong to those who have been summoned from east and west to sit down in the kingdom of heaven—not in the temple of idols. So be the body of Christ, not the crushing of the body of Christ. You have the hem of the garment there for you to touch, in order to be cured of the issue of blood, that is of the flux of carnal pleasures. You have, I repeat, the hem of the garment there for you to touch. Imagine the apostles to be the tunic, the seamless robe of unity,¹³ clinging to the sides of Christ. Among these apostles there was, as the hem, the least and the latest of them, Paul; as he says himself, *I am the least of the apostles* (1 Cor 15:9). The last and the least thing in a tunic is the hem. The hem is given a look of contempt,¹⁴ but it gives a touch of salvation. *Up to this very hour we go hungry and thirsty and naked and are repeatedly knocked about* (1 Cor 4:11)—the very last word, surely, in contemptibility. Touch it, if you are suffering from an issue of blood, power will go out from him whose tunic it is, and heal you. The hem was just now held out to you to touch, when we had the reading from the same apostle: *For if anyone sees the one who has knowledge sitting at table in the idolry,*¹⁵ *will not his conscience, since it is weak, be encouraged to eat idol-sacrifices? And through your knowledge, brother, the weak man for whom Christ died will perish* (1 Cor 8:10-11). Do you ever wonder how people may be led astray by images, which they imagine are being honored by Christians? “God knows my mind,” he says. But your brother doesn’t know your mind. If you are weak yourself, beware of catching a worse illness still; if you are strong, be careful of your brother’s weakness. Those who see this sort of thing are encouraged to do other things, so that they are eager not only to eat but to sacrifice there. And so there you are, *the weak man perishes through your knowledge, brother.* Listen, brother; you may have been prepared to shrug off the weak man, but are you also prepared to shrug off a brother? Wake up. What if you are sinning against Christ himself? Let me assure you that you cannot under any circumstances shrug off anyone at all. *But sinning in this way*, he says,

against your brothers, and wounding their weak consciences, you are sinning against Christ (1 Cor 8:12). Let them go off now, those who shrug all this off, and sit down at table in the idolry; won't they be among those who are crushing the body of Christ, not touching the hem of his garment? And after sitting down in the idolry, let them come and fill the church—it will just be to make a crush, not to receive a healing touch.

◦ *God desires his own creation*

8. "But I'm afraid," you will say, "of offending Mr Big." Oh, certainly be afraid of offending Mr Big—and you won't offend God. You there, afraid of offending Mr Big, see if there isn't perhaps one bigger than the one you are afraid of offending. Certainly, don't offend Mr Big; that's the rule you are given. Isn't it obvious that the one above all not to be offended is the one who is bigger than the rest? Now just add up those who are bigger than you, your seniors. First of all there's your mother and father; if they have brought you up properly, nurtured you to grow in Christ, you must listen to everything they say, obey their every command; let them only command nothing against the one above them, and you must be their servant.

"Who," you ask, "is greater than the one who begot me?" The one who created you. Man begets, God creates. How a man begets, he cannot tell; what he is going to beget, he cannot tell. The one who saw you in order to make you, before what he made even existed, is certainly greater than your father. Your country too may be considered as greater than your parents, so that if ever your parents command you to do something against your country, you shouldn't listen to them. And if ever your country commands you to do something against God, you shouldn't listen to it.

So if you want to be healed, if after the issue of blood, after enduring that disease for twelve years, if after spending everything on doctors and not being restored to health, you still want to be healed some time or other, O woman whom I am addressing as representative of the Church,¹⁶ your father tells you to do this, and your people tell you to do that. But your Lord tells you, *Forget your own people and your father's house*. What for? What's the advantage? What will I get from that? *Because the king*, it says, *has desired your beauty* (Ps 45:10-11). He has desired what he made; because to make you beautiful, he has desired you in your ugliness. He has shed his blood for one unfaithful and ugly, he has made you faithful and beautiful, he has loved his gifts in you. After all, what have you brought to your husband? What have you received as a dowry from your previous father and your previous people? Wasn't it nothing but wantonness and the rags of sin? He has thrown away your rags, torn off your sackcloth; he has taken pity on you and clothed you splendidly; he has clothed you splendidly, and fallen in love with you.

Lounging around in the company of false gods

9. What else is there to say, brothers? As Christians you have heard that *sinning against your brothers, and wounding their weak consciences, you are sinning against Christ* (1 Cor 8:12). Don't shrug that off, if you don't want to be blotted out from the book of life.¹⁷ How long must I go on trying to say to you in fine style and a pleasant manner what my grief compels me to say in any way at all, and does not allow me to keep silent about? Any of you who want to shrug this matter off are sinning against Christ; let them just see what they are doing. We want the rest of the pagans to be brought in, you are rocks in the road; those wishing to come stumble over them, and go back. They say to themselves, you see, "Why should we abandon the gods, whom Christians themselves worship together with us?" "Oh, far be it from me," he says, "to worship the gods of the nations. I know the truth, I understand, I believe."

Well, what are you going to do about the conscience of the weak man, which you are wounding? What are you going to do about the price, if you think so little about what it bought? See how much it was bought for. *The weak person, he says, will perish through your knowledge, the knowledge you say you have, by which you know that an idol is nothing, by which you think about God in your mind, and in this way take your ease in the idolry. That's the knowledge through which the weak person perishes. And in case you don't care tuppence for the weak individual*, he added, *for whom Christ died* (1 Cor 8:11). You won't give more than tuppence for him, eh? Look at the price paid for him, and weigh the whole world against the death of Christ.

And in case you should still think you are only sinning against a weak person, and consider it a trivial sin and make little of it, he said *You are sinning against Christ*. People, you see, are in the habit of saying, "I'm only sinning against a person, aren't I, not against God?" Deny that Christ is God. Do you dare deny that Christ is God? Or did you learn something else, while you were lounging around there in the idolry? The doctrine of Christ does not make room for this doctrine. I want to know where you learned that Christ is not God. It's what the pagans usually say; do you see the result of these bad dinner parties?¹⁸ Do you see how *bad company corrupts good morals* (1 Cor 15:33)? You can't speak about the gospel there, and you listen to them speaking about idols. You lose sight there of the truth that Christ is God, and what you drink there you spew up in the Church. Perhaps you have the nerve to say here, perhaps you have the nerve to mutter in the crowd, "Wasn't Christ a man? Wasn't he crucified?" You learned this from the pagans, you have lost your health and salvation, you haven't touched the hem.¹⁹

Touch the hem in this respect too, get your health restored. Just as I taught you to touch it with respect to the text, *Whoever sees a brother sitting down in an idolry* (1 Cor 8:10), so touch it also with respect to the divinity of Christ. This same hem had this to say about the Jews, *Whose are the fathers, and from whom is Christ according to the flesh, who is God above all things, blessed for ever* (Rom 9:5). There you have the true God against whom you are sinning, while you are lounging around in the company of false gods.

The worship of idols

10. "It isn't a god," he says, "it's the genius of Carthage."²⁰ As though if it were Mars or Mercury, it would be a god. But it's what they regard it as that counts, not what it is. I mean, I know as well as you do that it's only a stone. If a genius is some kind of distinction, then let the citizens of Carthage live well, and they will be the genius of Carthage. But if a genius is a demon, you have also heard in the same letter, *What the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not wish to become the companions of demons* (1 Cor 10:20).

We know it isn't God; if only they themselves knew it too! But because of the weak who do not know this, their conscience ought not to be wounded. That's the advice of the apostle. I mean, that they have a deity there, and take that statue for a deity, is obvious from the evidence of the altar. What's an altar doing there, if that thing isn't regarded as a deity? Don't tell me, any of you, "It isn't a deity, it isn't God." I have already said, if only they knew this, just as we all know it. But what they have there, what thing they take it for, what they do there, is all perfectly obvious from that altar. It is proof of the mind of all who worship there; may it not be damning proof against those who sit down there to eat.

Body of Christ jostled, not touched

11. But even if the pagans are pressing round and jostling, Christians shouldn't be. It's Christ's body. Isn't this what we were saying, that the body of Christ was being jostled, and not touched? He put up with the people jostling him, and was looking for people who were touching him. And if only, brothers, the body of Christ were jostled by pagans, by whom it is used to being jostled, and Christians didn't jostle the body of Christ, brothers, it's my job to talk to you, my job to speak to Christians. *For what business is it of mine to judge outsiders* (1 Cor 5:12), as the apostle himself said. We address them differently, as people who are weak. They have to be coaxed to listen to the truth; you have to have the gangrene cut out. If you want to know how the pagans are to be won over, how they are to be enlightened, how they are to be called to salvation, give up going to their celebrations, give up their frivolities, and if they don't adhere to our truth, let them feel the shame of their falling numbers.²¹

Be gold

12. If the person in authority over you is a good man, he is your trainer; if he's a bad man, he is your tester.²² In the first case, accept his training willingly, in the second make sure you pass the test. Be gold. Look on this world as a goldsmith's furnace; in one narrow space there are three things, gold, straw, fire. Fire is applied to the other two, the straw is burned, the gold is refined. Somebody or other gives way to threats, is taken along to the idolry; woe is me, I mourn the straw, I see the ash. Someone else does not give in to threats, does

not give in to intimidation;²³ is taken along to the judge, stands firm in his confession, does not bow down in the idolry.²⁴ What has the fire done? Refined the gold, hasn't it?

Stand firm in the Lord (Phil 4:1), brothers. The one who called you is mightier than any of them. Don't be afraid of the threats of wicked men. Put up with your enemies; you have someone to pray for; above all, don't let them scare you. This is where health is to be found, draw upon it here in this banquet, drink here what will satisfy you, not there what will drive you mad. Stand firm in the Lord. You are made of silver at the moment, gold is what you will be. This comparison isn't mine, it comes from the divine scripture. You've read it, you've heard it: *Like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like the victim of a holocaust he accepted them* (Wis 3:6). There you have what you shall be in God's treasure chest. Be rich with God, not that you are going to make him rich, but that you are going to be rich with him. Let him fill you, admit nothing else to your hearts.

Respecting authority

13. Am I inciting you to pride, or telling you to adopt an attitude of contempt toward the duly established authorities? That's not what I'm saying. Any of you who are not quite sound on this point should on this point too touch that hem of the garment. The apostle himself says, *Let every soul be subject to the more eminent authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those there are have been established by God. But whoever opposes authority opposes the establishment of God* (Rom 13:1-2). But what if it orders something you ought not to do? In this case certainly make light of authority by respecting authority. Consider the grading of authority in human affairs. If the person in charge gives an order, should it not be carried out? However, if his orders go against the ruling of the governor, you are not, surely, showing contempt for authority when you decide to be at the service of the higher one. Nor should the lower authority be angry if the higher is given preference.

Again, if the governor himself issues one order and the emperor another, do you hesitate to ignore the former and put yourself at the service of the latter? So finally, if the emperor says one thing and God another, what's your decision? "Pay the tax, put yourself at my disposal." "Certainly—but not in an idolry. It's forbidden in an idolry." "Who forbids it?" "A higher authority. Please excuse me, but you threaten me with prison, he with hell."²⁵ In this way you now have to take up your faith as a shield, in which you can quench all the fiery darts of the enemy.²⁶

The razor's edge

14. But the powerful man is scheming against you, and the powerful man is exerting himself against you; he is sharpening his razor, something to shave your hair with, not to cut off your head with. What I've said, you heard just now in the psalm: *Like a sharp razor you have practiced deceit* (Ps 52:2). Why did

he compare the deceitfulness of a "bold, bad baron" to a razor? Because all he can get at with it is our superfluities. Just as the hair on our bodies seems rather superfluous, and can be shaved without damage to the flesh, so whatever an angry neighborhood baron may do to you, count it among your superfluities. He's making off with your poverty; can he make off with your riches? Your poverty is the riches you have set your heart on.²⁷ He can make off with your superfluities, he can do you damage, he may even be permitted to do you grievous bodily harm. Even this life, for those whose minds are on the next—even this life, I say, is to be reckoned among the superfluous things. The martyrs, after all, paid little attention to it. They didn't lose their lives, they won them.

God protects you

15. Be assured, brothers, enemies are not allowed to get at the faithful, except insofar as it is good for them to be tried and tested. You can be absolutely sure about it, brothers, don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Cast all your care upon the Lord,²⁸ indeed throw yourselves wholly upon him. He won't jump out of the way, and let you fall. It's he that created us, and gave us an assurance about our very hairs: *Amen I tell you*, he said, *the very hairs of your head have all been counted* (Mt 10:30). Our hairs have been counted by God; how much more our habits and our behavior, by one who knows our hairs like that?

Just notice how God doesn't despise the smallest thing about us. After all, if he did, he wouldn't have created it. But of course he did create even our hairs, and knows the number of them. "They may be there now," you say, "but perhaps they will disappear." On this point too listen to his words: *Amen I tell you, not a hair of your head shall perish* (Lk 21:18).

Why be afraid of a man, O man snug in the lap of God? You see to it you don't fall out of his lap, and whatever you may suffer there will avail for your salvation, not for your destruction. The martyrs endured the butchery of their limbs, and are Christians going to dread the wrongs of a Christian age?²⁹ The one who does you wrong now does it timidly. He doesn't say openly, "Come to the idol." He doesn't say openly, "Come to my altars, join in the feast there." And if he did say it, and you refused, let him make a formal complaint about it, let him prosecute you and put this complaint in his deposition: "He refused to come to my altars, he refused to come to the temple where I worship."

Let him say that. Well of course, he doesn't dare say it, he has other deceitful tricks up his sleeve. Get your hair ready, he's sharpening his razor, he is going to remove your superfluous, he's going to shave off whatever you are going to leave behind you in any case. Let him take what's going to remain for ever, if he can. What has Mr. Big Bad Baron managed to take? What big haul has he really made? The same as the thief, as the burglar; the same, if he has been peculiarly violent, as the bandit. If he is allowed to go so far as to kill the body, is he taking any more than the bandit? I do him too much honor when I say, "the bandit." After all even the worst of bandits is human. Is he taking any more than a fever, than a scorpion, than a poisonous fungus? That's the sum total of what

violent oppressors can do—the same as a fungus. People eat a poisonous fungus, and die. There you have how very fragile human life is; you are going to leave it behind some time or other, in any case; don't fight for it in such a way that you get left behind yourself.

Cherish eternal life

16. Our life is Christ; look at Christ. He came to suffer, but also to be glorified; to be disdained, but also to be exalted; to die, but also to rise again. The work dismays you, consider the reward. Why do you expect to travel in luxury to what can only be reached by hard labor? But you are afraid of losing your money, because acquiring your money has cost you a great deal of hard labor. If you haven't come into the money, which you are going to lose some time or other, at least when you die, without labor, can you really expect to come into eternal life without labor? What should be dearer to you than anything is what you will reach after all your labors, and never be in danger of losing. If something is dear to you which you have reached after all your labors, and are certainly going to lose sooner or later, how much more should we desire what is everlasting?

Break the idols in their hearts

17. Don't believe their words, don't be afraid of them. They say we are the enemies of their idols. May God grant that they all come into our lawful power in the same way as he gave us that one that has been smashed.³⁰ I am saying this to your graces, to make sure you *don't* do this sort of thing when it is not in your lawful power to do so. It is characteristic of depraved people like the ranting and raving Circumcellions,³¹ to be violent where they have no lawful authority to be so, and they deliberately court death without reasonable cause.

All of you who were present at Mappalia³² the other day heard the text I had read to you there: *When the land is given over to your lawful power* (he first said "to your lawful power," and only then went on to say what was to be done), *you shall pull down their altars*, he said, *cut down their groves, and break in pieces all their signs* (Dt 7:1.5). When you have received lawful authority, do all this. Where authority has not been given to us, we don't do it; where it has been given, we don't fail to do it. Many pagans have these abominations on their estates. Do we march in and smash them? The first thing we try to do is to break the idols in their hearts. When they too become Christians, they either invite us in to perform this good work, or else they get in first with it before us. The thing we have to do now is pray for them, not get angry with them. If we are stirred by any deep feelings of indignation, it is against Christians, against our brothers, who are ready to come to church in such a way that their bodies are here, their hearts somewhere else. The whole of you ought to be here inside the church. If what people can see is here inside, why leave outside that part of you which God can see?

The smashing of idols

18. You should know, beloved, that their mutterings against us chime in with those of the heretics, those of the Jews. The heretics,³³ the Jews, the pagans have united against unity.³⁴ Because it so happens that the Jews, in some places, have been disciplined for their misbehavior,³⁵ they accuse us, and suspect or pretend that we are always getting them treated like that. Because it has happened in some places that the heretics have paid the legal penalties for their irreligion and their frenzied acts of violence,³⁶ they are now saying that we on every possible occasion are procuring their harassment and eventual destruction. Again, because it has been decided to pass laws against the pagans,³⁷ or rather for the pagans, should they come to their senses—like the case of silly little boys in the mud and dirtying their hands, until the pedagogue³⁸ comes up and roughly smacks the mud off their hands and shoves the school book into them; in the same way it was God's will, by means of the rulers who are obedient to him, to scare the heedless, childish minds of the pagans into rubbing the dirt off their hands and doing something useful with them. What are the useful things you can do with your hands? *Break your bread to the hungry, and bring the needy without shelter into your house* (Is 58:7). And yet little boys slip away from the pedagogue's sight, and return stealthily to the mud, and when they are discovered, they hide their hands in order not to be seen.

So because God willed these laws to be passed, they think we are looking for their idols everywhere, and smashing them in every place we find them in. Why should they think so? Aren't these places with idols in them staring us in the face? Are we really ignorant of their whereabouts? And yet we don't do this sort of thing, because God hasn't given them into our lawful power. When does God do that? When the person the thing belongs to becomes a Christian. Now the one it belongs to, in this case, wanted the thing done. If he hadn't wanted to give that place to the Church, and had only given instructions that there were to be no idols on his property, I think it would have been the best kind of piety for Christians to help an absent Christian soul who wishes to show gratitude to God on earth, and doesn't want there to be anything offensive to God in that place.³⁹

But in actual fact, over and above that, he did give those places to the Church. Were idols to continue to stay on Church property? Brothers, that's all it is that is annoying the pagans. It's not enough for them that we don't remove the things from their country houses, that we don't go and smash them there; they want them preserved even in our places. We preach against idols, we remove them from people's hearts, we are persecutors of idols; we don't deny it. Are we supposed to be their preservers? I don't do this sort of thing where I have no authority to; I don't do it where the owner of the property objects. But where he wants it done, and is grateful for it, I would be guilty if I didn't do it.

NOTES

1. The title at the heading of this sermon is given by Possidius, Augustine's friend, who was also, in a sense, his literary executor. The Maurist title is "On the words of the gospel, Mt 8:8, *I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof*, etc.; and also on the words of the apostle, 1 Cor 8:10, *For if anyone sees the one who has knowledge sitting at table in the idolry*, etc." The sermon was clearly preached at Carthage. Four scholars date it to the year 399; one to 407/8. The occasion seems to have been—or shall we say, the circumstances?—a kind of reaction or backlash by influential pagans, after the smashing of an idol on a property in the neighborhood of the city, whose recently converted owner had given it to the Church. The Sermon invites comparison with Sermon 24, dated precisely to 16 June 401. The reader is referred to note 1 on that sermon.

2. See Lk 7:36ff.

3. See Lk 19:6.

4. See Nathanael, Jn 1:47.

5. See Mt 15:24. I would refer the reader back to Sermon 60A, 2, where this text is discussed at greater length, and where the rather disagreeable dismissal of "the Jews" en bloc, which mars this sermon from time to time, is considerably modified. We must realize, of course, that it is vain to look to Augustine or any of his contemporary Christian writers for anything like the ecumenical spirit, or a tolerant acceptance of other religions. The only ancient writer I can think of who exhibited even the glimmerings of such tolerance was Clement of Alexandria, 200 years earlier.

6. Emending *cordi* (to the heart) of the Maurist text, and presumably of their manuscripts, to *fidei*. The whole structure of the passage seems to require it. If Augustine actually said *cordi* instead of *fidei*, then I make bold to suggest it was a slip of the tongue; otherwise, a slip of the stenographer's stylus.

7. A centurion, strictly speaking in command of 100 men, was roughly the equivalent of a senior warrant officer, for example, a regimental sergeant-major in a modern army. Augustine's historical sketch here is good enough for his purposes—the Jews at the time of the New Testament were subjects of the Roman Empire. But it is a little problematic what a Roman detachment was doing in Galilee at the time, since this was not part of a Roman province, but the territory of the tetrarch Herod Antipas, who was an autonomous, though not an independent, ruler.

8. A regrettable piece of rhetorical oversimplification—neither statement being true without enormous qualification.

9. He is right about the woman representing the Gentiles; this is almost certainly the intention of the evangelists. But he forgets to mention the equally plain symbolism of Jairus' daughter, first reported sick, then dead, and then raised to life, whose story enfolds that of the woman with the issue of blood; clearly a type of the Jews, Israel according to the flesh.

10. See Eph 2:19.

11. See Rom 3:2, 9:4; Heb 10:1.

12. Reading *praedicato* with the manuscripts, instead of the *predicto* into which the Maurists rather strangely emended it. That Augustine actually said what the manuscripts report there can scarcely be any doubt at all; it makes such a characteristic Augustinian jingle: *jam tunc praedicato, nunc praesentato*.

13. See Jn 19:23.

14. I suppose because you look down to see it, or because it is often frayed.

15. On the analogy of "hostelry." The Greek *eidoleion*, Latin *idolium*, is a rather contemptuous term which seems to have been invented by the Septuagint translators of Daniel, especially in the tale of Bel and the Dragon (Dn 14).

16. See Mk 5:25-26.

17. See Rv 22:19 (Vulg); see 3:5; 13:8; Ex 32:33.

18. The parties or banquets in the pagan temples to which the Christians Augustine is excoriating went when invited by their pagan "Mr. Big's."

19. It cannot be denied that the general drift of Augustine's theology in his sermons is to em-

phasize the divinity of Christ, even at the expense of his humanity; as here, where the question being muttered by these semi-Christians is treated as a pagan question, and the implication almost is that the answer "Yes" would be heretical. But Augustine, needless to say, did not deny the humanity of Christ. In this context, though, we can interpret him as assuming, surely correctly, that when pagans asserted his humanity like this, they did deny his divinity. They said, in effect, "If he was a man, he can't have been God." So the implicit affirmation behind this question is, "Christ was a man, wasn't he, and crucified? Therefore he cannot have been God."

20. The *genius loci*—an extremely archaic religious concept, or less a concept, perhaps, than a feeling of awe, a sense of the uncanny hovering over a particular place. The *genius loci* was a very impersonal kind of deity, a power, what the Romans called a *nomen*—a word Augustine uses in the next few sentences, which I inadequately translate as "deity." I suspect that the *genius loci*, the genius of the place, was almost by definition nameless, and in that sense "not a god." In classical Latin the word is masculine, *genius*. Here Augustine treats it as neuter, *genium*, no doubt on the analogy of *ingenium*.

21. If Christians don't attend, and the conversion of the pagans proceeds apace, there will be very few left taking part in their festivals.

22. He is returning to the problem of Mr. Big.

23. Reading *terribus* with the Maurists, instead of *tortoribus* with other manuscripts.

24. Reading *idolum* with the Maurists, instead of *idolum* with other manuscripts. The readings of other manuscripts, here and in note 23, are the language of times of persecution. But there was no pagan persecution of Christians at this time; later on the preacher will remind his hearers that these are Christian times, *Christiana tempora*. So there was no question of their being tortured to make them apostatize. All Augustine can have been talking about was pressure from powerful persons to support some traditional pagan festivities, as expressions of local civic patriotism, no doubt. Such pressure could have involved threats to take people to court on some bogus charge, or of course threats of dismissal from employment, or loss of trade and withdrawal of patronage—hardly anything so drastic as torture.

25. Does this suggest what kind of pressure Augustine's congregation was under to attend celebrations in honor of the *genius* of Carthage?

26. See Eph 6:16.

27. Literally, "your riches in your heart." One would be naturally inclined to interpret this as meaning spiritual riches. But that would hardly fit the immediately preceding sentence. That no doubt is why one manuscript adds one word, *foris* (outside), and reads, "Your poverty is outside (= your material possessions), your riches are in your heart." Still, sense can be made of the more difficult text, by taking it in the way I have translated it.

28. See 1 Pt 5:7, quoting Ps 55:22.

29. A common phrase at the time. It expresses the sense of wonder and elation that possessed Christians at the "miracle" of the conversion of Constantine and its effects. At the time he preached this sermon Augustine shared this sense of elation; but as he grew older, he grew more disillusioned with the quality of these *Christiana tempora*, and their representing in any way the kingdom of God.

30. It is possible, but hardly likely, that this was the statue of Hercules mentioned in Sermon 24.

31. The Circumcellions were the strong-arm fanatics of the Donatist party, who terrorized large sections of the rural population.

32. According to a note of the Maurists, quoting a certain Victor, who wrote a book on *The Vandal Persecution* (the Vandals were conquering North Africa at the time of Augustine's death), Mappalia was a suburb of Carthage, where Saint Cyprian was buried. This seems much more likely than the identification of it with a little village near Calama in Numidia (100 miles or more from Carthage) mentioned in Letter 66. The name, presumably Punic, may be equivalent to the Hebrew *mappalah*, *mappelah*, "a ruin" (from the verb *naphal*, to fall), Is 17:1, 23:13, 25:2, and could have been quite common.

33. By heretics he means, at this time, almost exclusively the Donatists.

34. That is, against the Catholic Church. "Unity" is one of his favorite theological names for it.

35. In another sermon he talks disapprovingly about the way they dance and sing on their balconies on the sabbath. So perhaps Jewish "misbehavior" in Africa was more like the high jinx of

the Caribbean carnival in Notting Hill (and greeted with a similar sour disapproval by the more respectable natives) than anything else.

36. There were imperial laws promulgated by the emperor Honorius (who presided over the western empire from Ravenna) about the year 400, particularly against the Donatists.

37. *De idolis deponendis*, perhaps, a law of 399 (Cod. Theod, XVI, x, 18). See Sermon 24, note 1.

38. The pedagogue was a kind of male nanny for little boys, whose chief duty was to escort them to school.

39. I am not sure whether we should infer from this sentence that the newly converted benefactor was also newly deceased, or whether he was just an absentee landlord.

SERMON 62A

ON THE CENTURION'S SERVANT (MT 8:5-13)

Date: unknown¹

The Lord already entered his heart

1. The faith of this centurion presages the faith of the nations, like a grain of mustard seed, a faith both humble and fervent.² His servant, as you heard, was sick, and lay paralyzed at home, and this centurion came and besought the savior to save his servant. The Lord promised he would come himself to cure his servant. But he, being as I said fervently humble and humbly fervent, said, *I am not worthy, Lord, that you should enter under my roof.* The Lord would enter under his roof, he said he was unworthy, and yet he wouldn't have spoken these words, unless the Lord had already entered his heart.

Then he added, *"Only say the word, and my servant will be healed.* I know who I'm talking to; speak, and what I wish will happen." He also added a very telling and true comparison. *"For I too, he said, am a man, you are God; I under authority, you above all authorities; having soldiers under me, while you also have angels; and I say to this one, Go, and he goes; and to this one, Come, and he comes; and to my slave, Do this, and he does it* (Mt 8:8-9). The whole of creation is your slave; only command, and what you command is bound to happen."

The centurion's humility was the door for the Lord to enter by

2. And what does the Lord say? *Amen, I tell you, I have not found such great faith in Israel* (Mt 8:10). As you know, the Lord took flesh from Israel, from the seed of David, from which came the Virgin Mary, who gave birth to Christ; it was to them he came, to them he showed his human face, in their ears that the words from his human mouth resounded, to their eyes that the sight of his body was presented. His presence was owed to the Jews; it had been promised to the fathers, it was paid to the children. And yet this centurion was a foreigner, he was one of the Romans, who was doing his military service there, and his faith was preferred to the faith of the Israelites, to the point of his saying, *Amen I tell you, I have not found such great faith in Israel.*

What do you suppose he praised in this man's faith? Humility. *I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof.* That's what he praised; and because he praised that, he did enter there. The centurion's humility was the door for the Lord to enter by, so that he might possess more fully one whom he possessed already.

Coming is believing

3. So the Lord gave great hope to the Gentiles, the nations on this occasion; we didn't yet exist, and we were already foreseen, already foreknown, already promised. What did he say, after all? *Therefore I tell you, that many will come from east and west* (Mt 8:11). Where will they come? Where they believe. That's where they come; coming is believing. He believed, he came; he apostatized, he left. So they will come from east and west; not to the temple of Jerusalem, not to some central section of the earth, not to climb some mountain—and yet they *are* coming to the temple of Jerusalem, and to some central section, and to some mountain. The temple of Jerusalem—that's now the body of Christ, about which he said, *Pull down this temple, and in three days I shall raise it up* (Jn 2:19). The central place they are coming to is Christ himself; he is at the center, because he is equally related to all; anything placed in the center is common to all. They are coming to the mountain, of which Isaiah said, *In the last times the mountain of the Lord shall be manifest, prepared on the summit of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above all the hills, and all the nations shall come to it* (Is 2:2). This mountain was a small stone, which grew till it filled the world; that's what Daniel says about it.³

Approach the mountain, climb up the mountain, and you that climb it, don't go down it. There you will be safe, there you will be protected; Christ is your mountain of refuge. And where is Christ? At the right hand of the Father, since he has ascended into heaven. "That's a very long way away; who can climb there, who can reach there?" If it's a long way away from you, how can I say with truth "The Lord be with you"? Not only is he seated at the right hand of the Father, but he will also never withdraw from your hearts.

As the centurion believed, so it happened

4. Turning to the centurion he said, *Go; be it done for you as you have believed; and the servant was healed at that very hour* (Mt 8:13). As he believed, so it happened. "Only say the word, and he will be healed." He said the word, and he was healed. *Be it done for as you have believed.* The grievous affliction was lifted from the servant's limbs. With what wonderful ease does the Lord command every creature! It's no trouble to him, you see, to command like that.

Or is he, do you suppose, that kind of Lord of creation, who can command angels, and is not prepared to command men and women? If only they were willing to serve him! But happy indeed is the person whom he commands inwardly, in the ears of the heart, not through the ears on the head. That the Lord

is in fact in command of absolutely everything, you can tell from this, that he hasn't even overlooked the worms in his command structure. He commanded the worm, and it gnawed the root of the gourd, and that was the end of the prophet's shade. *He commanded the morning worm*, says the scripture, *and it gnawed the root of the gourd, and the shade disappeared* (Jn 4:7).⁴

The morning worm is Christ; the twenty-second psalm, which is about his passion, is entitled *For the morning undertaking*.⁵ He rose from the dead early in the morning, and gnawed away the shadow of the Jews. That's why he woos his bride in the Song of Songs with the words, *Until the day breathes, and the shadows disappear* (Song 2:17). Do you still literally observe the sabbath? Do you still abstain from the flesh of certain animals, which do not chew the cud, or do not have cloven hoofs? Do you still offer God victims from the flocks in sacrifice? You don't do any of these things. Why not? Because the gourd has been gnawed away, because the shadow has yielded ground, the sun has appeared openly. Plead for relief, from having to toil away on the heat of the commandments.⁶

NOTES

1. There is nothing definite to tell us where or when this sermon was preached. It strikes me as coming from an older Augustine; I don't think he would have committed the rather glaring inconsequentiality of his final sentence in his prime. But that is a purely subjective judgment. As for place, all I can offer is that there is nothing to suggest that it was not preached on his home ground at Hippo.

2. Because the mustard seed is both tiny (humble) and hot (fervent) (Mk 4:31-32). In this phrase Augustine is clearly referring to the centurion's faith, not to that of the nations, which would rather be compared to the tree into which the mustard seed grows. Yet it is in the accusative case, grammatically agreeing with the faith of the nations.

3. See Dan 2:34.

4. Augustine had a famous disagreement with Jerome over the gourd (*Latin cucurbita*) of this passage. Jerome, translating direct from the Hebrew, in what would become the Vulgate Latin, translated it by *hedera* (ivy). Modern translations consider "castor-oil plant" to be the most likely rendering. But Augustine wasn't arguing about this particular word; he was only concerned for the authority of the Greek Septuagint, as equal to that of the Hebrew original, since the Septuagint had been the bible of the Church from the beginning, and where questions arose, as they did frequently, about the correct Latin rendering, the Greek Septuagint could be easily consulted, unlike the Hebrew. This particular word was mentioned in the argument, because—so Augustine told Jerome—when a bishop of a small city in Libya introduced Jerome's text, and the reader read out Jerome's "ivy" instead of the "gourd" the congregation was familiar with, there was a riot. This whole correspondence, though it dragged on for several years, was finished by the year 406 (Letter 82; see also Letters 72, 75 and 81). Had Augustine conceded victory to Jerome in the argument, this would have given us a latest possible date for this sermon, which still has the gourd. But he didn't; there is no evidence that Augustine ever changed over to the reading of Jerome's Vulgate in his church of Hippo. So it is possible consistently to favor a later date for this sermon.

5. Ps 22, title. He seems to assume that his congregation knows that in verse 6 the psalmist (that is, Christ speaking through him) says, *I am a worm, and no man*.

6. He seems to be getting his symbols very confused. Perhaps he realized it, and stopped suddenly to avoid tying things up in even more hopeless knots.

SERMON 63

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 8:23-27, AND AS HE WENT ABOARD A BOAT, ETC.

Date: 415-425¹

The sleep of Christ is a sign

1. I have something to say to you, if the Lord enables me to do so, about the reading from the holy gospel which we have this moment heard, and in it I want to urge you not to let the faith sleep in your hearts against the storms and waves of this world. After all, it can scarcely be true that Christ the Lord had power over death,² and did not have power over sleep, and that sleep possibly overtook the Almighty against his will, as he was out sailing.³ If you do believe this, he is asleep in you, but if Christ is awake in you, your faith is awake too.

The apostle says, *That Christ may dwell through faith in your hearts* (Eph 3:17). So even the sleep of Christ is a sign and a sacred symbol.⁴ The people sailing in the boat are souls crossing the present age *on a paltry piece of wood* (Wis 10:4).⁵ The boat was also a figure of the Church. We are all of us temples of God, and every one of us is sailing a boat in his heart, and we don't suffer shipwreck if we think good thoughts.

Let Christ stay awake in you

2. You have heard an insult—it's a high wind; you've got angry—it's a wave. So as the wind blows and the waves break, the boat is in peril, your heart is in peril, your heart is tossed about. When you hear the insult, you are eager to avenge it; you do avenge it, and by giving way to someone else's evil,⁶ you suffer shipwreck. And why is that? Because Christ is asleep in you. What does it mean, that Christ is asleep in you? That you have forgotten Christ. So wake Christ up, remember Christ; let Christ stay awake in you, think about him.

What were you wanting? Revenge. It has escaped your memory that he, when he was being crucified, said, *Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing* (Lk 23:34). The one who was asleep there in your heart did not want revenge. Wake him up, call him to mind. The memory of him is his word; the memory of him is his command. And if Christ is awake in you, you

will say to yourself, "What sort of person am I, wanting to get my own back? Who am I, brandishing menaces against another human being? I may well die before I get my own back. And when I depart from the body in a rage, breathing out fire and slaughter, thirsting for revenge, that one who did not wish to be avenged won't receive me. No, he won't receive me, the one who said, *Give, and it will be given you, forgive, and you will be forgiven* (Lk 6:38.37). So I will restrain my anger, and return to calmness of heart."

Christ has commanded the sea, and there has come a great calm.⁷

Wake up Christ and so sail on a calm sea

3. What I have said about anger, you should hold onto as a rule to be followed in all your temptations. A temptation arises, it's a wind; you are troubled by it, it's a wave. Wake Christ up, let him talk to you. *Who is this, when even the winds and the sea obey him?* (Mt 8:27). Who is this, whom the sea obeys? *His is the sea, and he made it* (Ps 95:5). *All things were made through him* (Jn 1:13). Imitate the winds and the sea instead; submit to the creator. At Christ's command the sea hears, and will you be deaf? The sea hears, and the wind drops, and are you still blowing? "What do you mean?" I say things, I do things, I think things up—what else is that but blowing, and not dropping at the word of Christ?

Don't let the waves overwhelm you when your heart is upset by a temptation. And yet because we are human, if the wind has driven us on and shaken our souls with passion, don't let's despair; let's wake up Christ, and so sail on in a calm sea, and reach our home country.

Turning to the Lord, etc.⁸

NOTES

1. Such a short sermon offers no clues about where or when it was preached. The Maurists (late seventeenth century), say they only found it in earlier printed editions published in Paris and Louvain; hence it seems it does not survive in any manuscripts. The style to me smacks a little of the older Augustine. Purely conjecturally, I would suppose it to have been preached to a rather small congregation, in or around Hippo, anytime between 415 and 425.

2. See Jn 10:18.

3. What he is saying is that the incident cannot be treated just as a chance happening; everything takes place by divine design. That being so, Augustine is justified in looking for the deeper meaning of this design—the meaning he proceeds to expound.

4. *Sacramentum.*

5. Augustine just says "on wood." I have expanded what I am sure is his allusion to this text into a fuller quotation—*contemptibile lignum* in the Vulgate. The author of Wisdom is alluding to Noah's ark; Christian commentators saw the *contemptibile lignum* of the text as a figure of the cross.

6. *Malo alieno cedens.* This is the Maurists' reading; the Italian edition emends to *malo alieno gaudens* ("by rejoicing in someone else's evil"—that is, the revenge you inflict on your insulter). The Italian edition gives no authority for this, so I take it to be an emendation to make better sense.

I myself prefer the Maurists' reading, as it is sticking closer to the extended metaphor; the boat yields or gives way to, or is driven by, the wind: you are driven by the insult.

As we observed in note 1, there appear to be no surviving manuscripts of the sermon; perhaps the Italian edition's reading *gaudens* occurs in one of the earlier editions.

7. See Mt 8:26.

8. A common concluding thanksgiving and prayer. The full text, found in Sermons 57 and 183, runs: Turning to the Lord God the Father almighty with pure hearts, let us give him hearty and abundant thanks as much as we can in our littleness, beseeching him in his singular kindness graciously to hear our prayers in his good pleasure; also by his power to drive the enemy away from our actions and our thoughts; to increase our faith, direct our minds, grant us spiritual thoughts, and bring us to his bliss, through Jesus Christ his Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with him in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen. See Sermon 15A, note 22.

SERMON 63A

ON THE WOMAN WHO WAS SUFFERING FROM AN ISSUE OF BLOOD

Date: 400¹

God calls his faithful grain

1. . . . the Church of God, the holy Church which he is the head of. If he is the head, surely, we are the body; provided, that is, we are such as endure being crushed by the crowds, and don't ourselves crush the Lord. Vast multitudes are flowing into the Church spread among all the nations, all nations are believing. And in all nations there is one part that jostles, another that is jostled; the part that is jostled is the one that endures patiently; the one that endures patiently is the one that will receive a reward when it reaches the fruit of patient endurance, about which the Lord says in the gospel, *It brings forth fruit with patience* (Lk 8:15).²

This part, you see, is that of the saints,³ and it is to be found everywhere because it is grain, and the grain had to be sown all over the field, that is, all over the world—the Lord himself said the field is the world.⁴ All his faithful, who draw near to God not with their lips but with their hearts, he calls grain, but all who draw near to him in such a way that they do *not* draw near to him with their hearts, he counts as chaff and tares. All over the field, or all over the threshing floor, you find them both, both wheat and chaff. While the chaff predominates, though, the wheat, less of it, is more solid; there is less of it, but it's heavier, less of it but it's more valuable. That's why it toils away, why it is careful and wary. The granary is waiting for it, not the fire.

So none of us should congratulate ourselves for simply coming within these walls; let us remind ourselves of our intentions in doing so, let us interrogate our hearts. We must be our own sternest judges, in order to experience him as our merciful Father. We mustn't flatter ourselves or show respect of persons toward ourselves. Rather, we must take our seat on the bench of our minds, and apply to our consciences the tortures of fear,⁵ and confess to God who we are. If we see ourselves as wheat, we must put up patiently with being crushed and threshed, we mustn't worry about being mixed up with chaff. Chaff can be there on the threshing floor with the wheat, but it won't be there in the granary.

Inward healing

2. However, dearest brothers, as I said, let us take care to belong to the membership of whatever, or whoever, is represented by this woman. Your graces, of course, can hardly wait to learn who or what is represented by this woman. Well, I say that she stood for the Church that comes from the gentile nations, seeing that the Lord was on his way to revive the daughter of the president of the synagogue. The president's daughter stands for the Jewish nation, because the Lord only came to the Jews, as he said himself: *I have been sent only to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel* (Mt 15:24). He is coming, it seems, to the daughter of the synagogue president. Then this woman came, from heaven knows where, cutting across him as it were, unknown because unknowing, and she touched the Lord with her faith, saying, *If I touch the hem of his garment, I shall be restored to health* (Mk 5:28).⁶ She touched it, and she was restored to health.

She had a horrible disease, an issue of blood. And yet⁷—well yes, people are all horrified even to hear about it, let alone to suffer it; they are horrified by an issue of blood in the body, so they should take care not to suffer one in the heart. It's a disease to be much more avoided in the heart. I mean, I don't know what perversity it is that has driven the indwelling soul to turn to its dwelling and withdraw from itself. The master of the house is keener on getting the bloody flux of the body cured than on getting the one who lives in the house cured—that is, the mind is keener on curing the body than curing itself. What's the use of a house with all marble and fine paneling, where the master of the house is not sane? What am I talking about? What's the use of a hale and hearty body, where the mind living in that body is sick?

So an issue of blood in the mind or spirit is extravagant self-indulgence. Just as misers are like people with dropsy—they are always wanting to drink—so the self-indulgent and extravagant are like the bloody flux. Misers slog away at grasping, the self-indulgent at spending; in the one case it's grabbed in, in the other it flows out; in either case it kills. We need to get hold of the doctor, who came for the diseases of the soul; but he was also willing to heal diseases of the body, precisely to show that he was the savior and healer of the spirit, because he is the creator of each. It's not the case, you see, that he is the creator of the spirit and not of the body;⁸ and that's why he wanted to encourage the soul to get itself healed inwardly. That's why he cured the body: the soul was so intent on the body, that what it saw Jesus achieving outwardly it might perhaps desire him to achieve inwardly.

What *did* God achieve? He healed the issue of blood, he healed the leper,⁹ he healed the paralytic¹⁰ (these are all diseases of the spirit); and the lame and the blind¹¹—because everybody limps who isn't walking straight along the road of life, and everyone is blind who doesn't believe God, and the self-indulgent and extravagant suffer from a bloody flux, and everyone false and fickle is marred by leprosy. And we need him to heal us inwardly, yes him, the one who healed people outwardly precisely to get us to desire his inward healing.

The apostles are the garment, Paul the hem

3. So this woman was suffering from an issue of blood, and she was healed of worldly attachments, because all her strength was trickling away; that's the way the soul, by chasing after worldly desires, wastes all its strength. And this woman had used up all her means on doctors—that's what is written about her.¹² It's the same with the Church of the Gentiles, unhappily looking for happiness, looking for extra strength, or at least looking for some sort of cure—how much it had used up on bogus doctors, on astrologers, on soothsayers, on mediums, on temple seers?¹³ Yes, they all promise health and salvation, but they can't give it, because they themselves haven't got it to give.

So, she had spent everything, and wasn't cured. She said, "I'll touch his hem." She touched it, and she was restored to health. Let's think what the hem of the garment means. Attention, please, your graces. By the Lord's garment are to be understood the apostles, sticking close to him. Ask which apostle was sent to the Gentiles; you will find the apostle Paul was sent; he was by far the most active in the apostolate of the Gentiles. So Paul, the apostle sent to the nations, he is the hem of the Lord's garment, because he was the last of the apostles. Isn't that what the hem of a garment is, the last and the least of it? The apostle says both these things about himself: *But I am the last of the apostles* (1 Cor 15:8); and, *I am the least of the apostles* (1 Cor 15:9). He's the last, he's the least. That's the hem of the garment. And the Church of the Gentiles, like the woman who touched the hem, was suffering from a bloody flux; she touched, and was restored to health. Let us too touch, that is, let us believe, so that we too can be restored to health.

NOTES

1. This is only the fragment of a sermon, unknown to the Maurists. The scholars date it between 393 and 405. The allusion to Manichee beliefs (note 9 below) suggests that it was early, but in my opinion the roughness of the style does not allow us to assign it to the years of Augustine's priesthood, before he was ordained bishop, because then, as a novice and not entirely his own master, he was very meticulous about correctness of style and grammar; the grammar in particular of this sermon is at times rather slovenly. Augustine was ordained bishop as coadjutor to Valerius (at the time a strictly uncanonical proceeding) in 395, and became sole bishop of Hippo on Valerius' death the following year. So I don't think this sermon can have been preached before 396 at the earliest, and I think a more likely date would be about 400. As to the place, it is as likely to have been Hippo as anywhere else.

2. The text actually says "*They bring forth, etc.,*" meaning those who are represented by the seed that falls in good soil. Augustine, quoting from memory, is evidently thinking of the seed as the subject of the verb.

3. By "saints" he doesn't mean the saints in heaven; he means good Christians. I, however, prefer to keep "saints" because Augustine's wider sense of the term (true to its use in the New Testament—see, for example, 2 Cor 1:1, Eph 1:1, Phil 1:1, Col 1:1) deserves to be recalled to our attention.

4. He is mixing together, because of the common image, the parables of the sower and of the wheat and the tares, and the figure of the wheat and the chaff on the threshing floor (Lk 3:17).

5. See Mt 13:38. Roman judicial procedure involved the examination of witnesses, in criminal cases, under torture.

6. Although this sermon is arranged among those on Matthew's gospel, Augustine doesn't seem to have had Matthew's version of this story primarily in mind. Matthew (9:21 for this text), for example, doesn't call the little girl's father a ruler or president of the synagogue, *archisynagoga*, but simply an *archon*—a leading citizen or "alderman." The traditional habit of editors always to give the Matthew reference whenever a story or saying common to the three synoptics is being quoted or discussed, though natural, is in my opinion regrettable.

7. His use of this conjunction here (*tamen*) is very puzzling. What he goes on to say immediately after this "And yet" follows on naturally from her disease being a horrible one; people are horrified by it. It is hardly the best logic to say "It's a horrible disease, *and yet* people are horrified by it." So I construe the "and yet," not with what immediately follows, but with the next sentence but one, or even two; and I take what immediately follows as a suspense of the argument, an interruption of the flow of thought. This is just one instance of a looseness of style that will hardly permit us to assign this sermon to Augustine's four years as a priest.

8. This is aimed at the Manichees, who did allot distinct creators to spirit and to matter. This does suggest a fairly early date for the sermon.

9. See Mk 1:40-42.

10. See Mk 2:3-12.

11. See Mt 11:5.

12. See Mk 5:26.

13. This is "the Church of the Gentiles" before its encounter with Christ, which you may be inclined to think is before it can properly be called Church. But Augustine uses the phrase deliberately, to take the Church, in its sinful as well as its saved aspect, right back to Adam. It's the same woman, after all, both before and after she touched Christ's garments. The various means of divination, or communication with the other world, which he mentions, are to be found almost universally among all peoples and cultures.

SERMON 63B

ON THE DAUGHTER OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE SYNAGOGUE, AND THE WOMAN SUFFERING FROM AN ISSUE OF BLOOD

Date: 391-395¹

Christ is touched by faith

1. Past events, when they are recounted, both enlighten the mind and strengthen hope for good things in the future. Jesus was on his way to raise up the daughter of the president of the synagogue who, he had been informed, had just died, and as he was going along, his path, you could say, was crossed by a woman afflicted with a disease, full of faith, constantly losing blood, destined to be redeemed by blood. And she said to herself, *If I touch just the hem of his garment, I shall be restored to health* (Mk 5:28; Mt 9:21).² The moment she said it, she touched—Christ is touched by faith. She came up and touched, and what she believed actually happened.

But the Lord asked, *Who touched me?* (Lk 8:45). He wants to know, though nothing is hidden from him; he asks who did it, though he himself knew all about it before it was done. So there is a significant mystery here; let us look more closely, and as far as he grants us, let us understand.

Christ was sent to the Jews

2. The daughter of the synagogue president stands for the Jewish people, while this woman stands for the Church of the Gentiles. Christ the Lord, born of the Jews in the flesh, was present among these Jews in the flesh; he sent others to the nations, he didn't go himself. He spent his whole bodily and visible life in Judea.³ That's why the apostle says, *For I say that Christ was a servant of the circumcision on account of the truth of God, to confirm the promises to the fathers—Abraham, in fact, had been told, In your seed shall all the nations be blessed* (Gn 22:18)—but that the nations glorify God for his mercy (Rom 15:8-9).

So Christ was sent to the Jews. He was on his way to raise up the daughter of the synagogue president. The woman breaks in, and is healed. She is first healed by faith, and appears to be unknown to the savior. How else could he

say, *Who touched me?* God's ignorance is a guarantee of a significant mystery; it must surely signify something, when the one who cannot be ignorant is ignorant. So what does it signify? The healing of the Church of the nations, which Christ never saw or visited in person; his voice on this point can be heard in the psalm, *A people which I did not know served me, with the obedience of the ear it obeyed me* (Ps 18:43-44). The world heard and believed; the Jewish people saw and first crucified him, but afterward also came to him. The Jews too believe, but at the end of the world.⁴

The apostles are the garment, Paul the hem

3. Meanwhile, let this woman be healed, let her touch the hem of the garment. Take the garment as being the choir of the apostles.⁵ In it there was one who was the last and the least, a kind of hem, the apostle Paul. He is the one who was sent to the nations, and who says, *I indeed am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle* (1 Cor 15:9). Again he says, *I am the last of the apostles* (1 Cor 15:8). This last and least hem, this was what was needed to restore the unhealthy woman to health.

What we have heard actually happened, what we have heard is actually happening. Every day this woman touches the hem, every day she gets better. This bloody flux, you see, is really the flux of the flesh, of extravagant self-indulgence. When the apostle is heard, when that last and least hem is heard, and he says, *Put to death your members which are on the earth*, the bloody flux is held in check, fornication is held in check, drunkenness is held in check, worldly pleasures are held in check, all the works of the flesh are held in check.

Don't be surprised; the hem has been touched. When the Lord said, *Who touched me?* he knowingly did not know; he was suggesting and indicating the Church, which he did not see in his own person, but redeemed with his own blood.

NOTES

1. This short sermon (which seems to be complete) is much more carefully composed than the fragment 63A. So it is more likely to have been preached when Augustine was still only a priest, or very recently made a bishop, that is to say, between 391 and 395. One editor suggests it may have been preached on a feast of some martyrs, but on what grounds I do not know. Also—or alternatively—its careful composition may indicate that Augustine was preaching away from home in Hippo, where he felt less at liberty to adopt his more casual style, than among his own people.

2. See Sermon 63A, note 6, for my observations on the habit of giving references, for preference, to Matthew's gospel. As a matter of fact, Augustine seems to be drawing on all three gospel accounts. While, as remarked in that note 6 to 63A, Matthew makes no mention of a president of the synagogue, he does begin the story with the news that the girl has just died, whereas in Mark and Luke she is on the point of death, and news that she has died is only brought after the incident with the woman.

Which version of the story had been read it is impossible to tell. In neither, incidentally, does the woman say to herself "If I touch just the hem of his garment," but "If I touch just his garment." We have just been told that she did touch the hem of his garment. Further on, Matthew doesn't mention Jesus' question; both Mark and Luke do, but the words quoted shortly are closer to Luke than to Mark.

3. Not strictly accurate, of course. Besides his ministry in Galilee, Jesus did, according to the gospels, also visit gentile territory: for example, the districts of Tyre and Sidon, and the Decapolis (Mk 7:24.31). It was in the former that he said he was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt 15:24).

4. See Rom 11:15, 25-26, 31. This is all he has to say about the second point of the program suggested in his first sentence, strengthening hope for good things in the future.

5. See *Te Deum*, verse 7. Augustine is employing a traditional phrase from the liturgy, almost certainly from at any rate an early version of the *Te Deum*. There is a sermon of Saint Cyprian, c. 250 AD, which seems at least to paraphrase this first part of the *Te Deum*, so it is likely that this section of the hymn at least goes back very early indeed, and was perhaps a product of the African Church. I am indebted for this information to the very learned, if slightly old-fashioned, article on the *Te Deum* in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, which takes up considerable space earnestly rebutting the charming legend that the *Te Deum* was composed (under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit) by Ambrose and Augustine, each reciting alternate verses, as the latter came out of the font in which he had just been baptized by the former.

SERMON 64

ON THE GOSPEL: **BEHOLD, I AM SENDING YOU LIKE SHEEP IN THE MIDST OF WOLVES, ETC.**

Date: 396 or 411¹

The lot of the good and bad

1. We are celebrating the memory of martyrs. So let us admire the merits of the martyrs and imitate their deeds. Everything you heard when the holy gospel was read, *For they will hand you over to councils and scourge you in synagogues* (Mt 10:17), and what it says further on, *Brother will hand over brother to death, and father son, and a man's enemies will be members of his family* (Mt 10:21.36); this all happens to good and bad alike. The bad things people suffer on this earth are common to good and bad alike, just as the good things which people have on this earth, good and bad alike have together.

So the choir of martyrs, observing that many bad people suffer many bad things on this earth, cried out with one voice to God, *Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause from an unholy nation* (Ps 43:1). I mean, since bad and good are punished alike, what happens to the good if their case is not distinguished? The good are punished here, but receive their medals in the presence of God. The bad are both punished here and tormented by an everlasting condemnation. So if we love the holy martyrs, let us choose ourselves a case in which we may win God's favor.

The wolves were converted and became sheep

2. Notice how our Lord Jesus Christ trains his martyrs with the instructions he gives them. *I am sending you*, he says, *like sheep in the midst of wolves* (Mt 10:16). Just think what happens if one wolf gets in among many sheep. However many thousands of sheep there may be, send just one wolf among them, and they panic, and even if they aren't all savaged they are certainly all terrified. So what an extraordinary idea it was, what a plan, with what a weight of divine authority behind it, not to let the wolf in among the sheep, but to send the sheep to the wolves. *I am sending you*, he said, *like sheep in the midst of wolves*, not to the boundaries of the wolves, but in the midst of the wolves. So there was a

pack of wolves, and only a few sheep, so that many wolves kill a few sheep. The wolves were converted and became sheep.

All nations glorify God's name

3. Mind you, though, it's said to everyone, both to those who were alive then and listening to the Lord, and those who were going to believe in the Lord through them, and to generations that would be born to take their place when they died, right up to us, and after us to the end of the world, to absolutely everyone it's said, *You will be hated by all nations for my name's sake* (Mt 10:22). The Church that would indeed exist among all nations was being foretold. We read about the promise being made, and so too we see it being kept. Yes, all nations are Christian, and again no nations are Christian.² Throughout the whole field there is grain, and throughout the whole field tares.³ So when you hear it said by our Lord Jesus Christ, *You will be hated by all people for my name's sake*, take it in like grain, it is being said to the grain.

Join me in reflecting why none of us should say to ourselves, "This was said to the Lord's disciples when our Lord Jesus Christ sent them—to preach his word among the nations. All nations hated them for his name's sake. But now all nations glorify his name. We mustn't suppose that we are hated by all nations, but rather that we are loved by all nations." O all you Christian nations, O grain crops of the Lord, O Catholic seed scattered throughout the world, look at yourselves, and recognize that all nations do hate you for the sake of the name of Christ! All the pagans still left, all the Jews still left, all those who have turned away and become heretics, don't they all hate us for the sake of Christ's name?

But now let's produce a very, very bad man; let's make him a nobleman, very powerful, glittering with honors, at the peak of his power, and have him full of evil intentions and able to carry them out;⁴ he too is hated by everyone, but not for the sake of the name of Christ. It is indeed the same kind of language, but quite a different case. The Lord Jesus knew that it also happens to extremely bad men to be hated by everyone, so that's why, after saying "Everyone will hate you," he added, "for my name's sake." He had heeded the plea of those who say, *Judge me, O God, and distinguish my case from an ungodly nation* (Ps 43:1).

Life receives the prize

4. So let us hear the advice of the one who has promised us the prize medals. He has put us in for a *luta*, but he isn't only a spectator of our struggles, he also helps us in our difficulties. So what kind of a *luta* did he put us in for? *Luta* in English is a struggle.⁵ So what kind of struggle did the Lord Jesus Christ prescribe for us? This is what he prescribed: *Be as cunning as snakes and as simple as doves* (Mt 7:13). Anyone who understands this, anyone who sticks to this, anyone who observes this, can die without anxiety, because in fact he doesn't die. No one, surely, should die without anxiety, except those who know that as they die, death dies in them, while life receives the prize.

The cunning of a snake

5. Therefore, dearly beloved, I must explain to you—though I have often spoken about it before⁶—what it means to be as simple as doves, as cunning as snakes. If the simplicity of doves has been enjoined on us, what is the cunning of a snake doing in the simplicity of a dove? What I love in a dove is that it hasn't got any gall; what I fear in a snake is that it has plenty of poison.

Imitate the snake

6. You mustn't have an unlimited horror of snakes. They have something about them for you to hate, something about them for you to imitate. You see, when a snake is weighed down by old age, and feels the weight of its years, it squeezes itself through a narrow cleft and strips itself of its old tunic in order to exult at being as good as new. Imitate him, you Christian, who have heard Christ saying *Enter by the narrow gate* (Mt 7:13). And Paul the apostle tells you, *Put off the old self with its practices, and put on the new self which was created as God wanted it* (Col 3:9; Eph 4:24).⁷ So you have something to imitate in the snake: don't die of old age.

Anyone who dies for some temporal advantage dies of old age; anybody who dies for the sake of being admired by others dies of old age. But when you've stripped yourself of all these various forms of old age, you have imitated the cunning of the snake. Imitate it more thoroughly still: preserve your head. What do I mean, preserve your head? Keep Christ with you. Have any of you noticed, perhaps, when you've been killing a snake, how to shield its head it presents its whole body to the blows of the stick? It wants to prevent that part of it being struck where it knows its life is concentrated. And Christ is our life. He said so himself: *I am the way, the truth and the life* (Jn 14:6). Listen also to the apostle: *The head of the man is Christ* (1 Cor 11:3). So all of us who preserve Christ in ourselves are preserving our head for our own sakes.

The simplicity of doves

7. But now, on the other hand, is there much need at all to argue in favor of the simplicity of doves?⁸ Yes, we had to be on our guard against the poison of snakes. In that case there is a risk attached to imitating what you need to beware of. Doves, however, you can imitate without a qualm. Notice how much doves enjoy company. They fly everywhere together, they feed together, they don't want to be alone, they enjoy communion. They are deeply in love, they moan and murmur with love, they beget their young with kisses.

But as long as we are in the body, we are abroad and away from the Lord (2 Cor 5:6). *Blessed are those who mourn.* And if you want to be a dove, say to your Lord, *My moaning is not hidden from you* (Ps 38:9). So when doves—and this is something I have often noticed—when they quarrel with each other about their territories, their dispute gets settled somehow or other. Just because they have quarrels, does that mean they separate? They fly together, they feed together, and the quarrel gets settled.

Here is some quarreling of doves for you. The apostle said, *If anyone fails to obey our word by this letter, mark that person, and do not mix with him.* There's the quarrel. But notice how it's a quarrel of doves, not of wolves. He immediately added, *And do not regard him as an enemy, but rebuke him as a brother* (2 Thess 3:14-15). A dove is loving even when it is beating; a wolf hates even when it is being charming.

The prize

8. So then, showing the simplicity of doves and imitating the cunning of snakes, celebrate the festival of the martyrs by remaining sober and intelligent, not by getting drunk and belligerent.⁹ Utter your praises to God.¹⁰ After all, he is our God just as much as he is the Lord of the martyrs, he is the one who gives us the prize medal if we have fought well, the same one as gave their prizes to those whom we long to imitate.

NOTES

1. The title of this sermon is given by Possidius in his *Indiculus*, his catalogue of Augustine's works. In other editions, following that of Dom Lambot, the title is "Discourse on the birthday of holy martyrs," their birthdays being the anniversaries of their martyrdom. This title is taken from the only manuscript, now in Madrid, which contains the first three sections of the sermon. In the Maurist edition, which uses Possidius' title, the sermon roughly consists of sections 2 and 4-8, with a great many variations in the text. The memory (*memoria*) of the martyrs mentioned in the first sentence, often means concretely their actual shrine, the chapel erected over their tombs, or at least in their memory. This sermon was probably preached during a celebration at such a shrine. I shall be speculating about its date and place in later notes, as we proceed.

2. He goes on to explain the paradox. The sweeping generalization, implying that the Church was established in all nations, perhaps indicates a fairly early date, say 400-405. He is in effect identifying "all nations" with those of the Roman Empire, thought of quite simply as "the world." But in a letter to a Bishop Heraclius of Dalmatia, written in 418 or 419, he says that the end of the world wouldn't happen until the gospel had been preached to all nations (see Mt 24:14), and that this certainly hadn't been done yet; "for there are with us, that is in Africa, innumerable barbarian nations among whom the gospel has not yet been preached" (Letter 199, 12, 46; see also Letter 197, 4).

3. See Mt 13:24-30.

4. His congregation would certainly be able to fit this cap to any number of local magnates. If my guess in note 2 about the date of this sermon should be wrong, Augustine himself could have been thinking of Marinus, Count (that is, C.-in-C.) of Africa in 413, who in that year contrived the judicial murder of Augustine's great friend, the tribune Marcellinus (Letter 151 to Caeclian, who had been a friend of Marinus).

5. *A luta* is Portuguese, and the slogan "A luta continua," the struggle continues, is known to all blacks in South Africa, who otherwise for the most part don't know a word of that language. Augustine used the Greek word *agon*, which was the common word for the contests (primarily wrestling matches) in the games of the amphitheater. He says the Latin for *agon* is *certamen*. Perhaps I should have translated *agon* by something like *karate*—but then I am not at all sure of what the precise English for *karate* is.

6. The Italian edition, presumably following Dom Lambot, here suggests that he is referring to the sermon, among others, mentioned in Possidius' catalogue, which I have identified with this sermon, in note 1 above.

7. He conflates the two texts.

8. As a matter of ethological fact, yes! At least, according to Konrad Lorenz, who declares in his fascinating book *King Solomon's Ring* that doves are much more cruel and savage creatures than snakes. But it is characteristic of Augustine to combine a happily uncritical acceptance of these commonplace interpretations of snakes and doves with his own concrete personal observations in each case. He was an unusually observant man.

9. His jingle is *in sobrietate mentis, non in ebrietate ventris*, "in soberness of mind, not in drunkenness of belly"; so my "belligerent" is more designed to echo the sound than the sense of his Latin but I think it is nearer in tone and feeling than a more literal translation would be. He has employed the *mentis/ventris* jingle in an earlier sermon, but I have been unable to track it down. This admonition, too, may possibly indicate a fairly early date for the sermon, as suggested in note 7. For Augustine had no sooner been ordained priest in 391, than he set himself to eradicate the "popular liturgy" of getting very drunk at the tombs of the martyrs on their feast days, and over the course of the next year or two he seems to have succeeded. So in Hippo at least this admonition would not be needed after he became bishop in 395/6. But of course the custom may have continued to flourish in other churches, so this passage may rather indicate that the sermon was preached away from Hippo, at any date.

10. *Deo laudes dicite. Laus Deo*, or *Deo laudes*, had been a kind of Donatist battle cry, as against the *Deo gratias* that characterized the Catholics. So perhaps Augustine is preaching this sermon to a congregation consisting mainly of converted Donatists somewhere. This, if the case, would indicate a rather later date, after 411.

SERMON 64A

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 10:16: *BEHOLD, I AM SENDING YOU LIKE SHEEP, ETC. ON THE BIRTHDAY OF SOME MARTYRS*

Date: 396-399¹

The last day

1. The festivals of martyrs, dearly beloved, on which we celebrate the memory of them, are given us to encourage imitation, so that if any severe trial should happen to overtake us, we might persevere to the end in order to be saved, as we have just now together read from the gospel: *Whoever perseveres to the end, that person shall be saved* (Mt 10:22). And perhaps the end of this world, this age,² is a long way off, perhaps it is close. But the Lord wanted the date when it would happen to be unknown, so that people would always be prepared as they wait for something that will happen they don't know when.

But whether the end of the age is close at hand or a long way off, as I said, the end of each of us as individuals, which constrains us to pass, according to our deserts, from this life to another one, cannot be a long way off, given the briefness of this mortal existence. We should all, surely, be prepared for our own end. The last day will certainly do no harm to any who always think of every day as possibly their last, and so live in such a way that they die without a qualm and so die in such a way that they don't die an eternal death.

With how much strength must thoughts such as these have stiffened the holy martyrs as they heard the voice of the Lord saying, *Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves* (Mt 10:16), if they were not to be afraid of such a mission! This makes it clear, you see, how many wolves there were, and how few sheep, because the wolves weren't sent in the midst of sheep but sheep in the midst of wolves.³ I mean, the Lord didn't say, "Behold, I'm sending you like lions in the midst of cattle"; but by talking of sheep in the midst of wolves he clearly enough indicated very few sheep, and whole packs of wolves. And whereas just one wolf can throw a whole flock of sheep, no matter how big, into total confusion, these sheep, sent into the midst of wolves, went and weren't afraid, because the one who was sending them wasn't forsaking them.⁴ What was there, I ask you, to be afraid of, when the lamb was with them, who roundly defeated the wolf?

Cunning as snakes

2. Another thing we heard in the reading was, *When they hand you over, don't rack your brains about how you are to speak, for it is not you who are speaking, but the Spirit of your Father who is speaking in you* (Mt 10:19-20). That's why he says in another place, *Behold, I am with you up to the completion of the age* (Mt 28:20). Do you imagine that those who heard these words of the Lord's were going to remain here until the completion of the age? But the Lord wasn't only thinking about them, due to pass away in course of time, but also about the others, including ourselves and those who will come after us in this life, who would succeed them, and he was seeing us all in his only body. So they weren't the only ones who heard his words, *I am with you up to the completion of the age*; we did too. And if we didn't hear them then in our own knowledge, we did do so in his foreknowledge.

For all these reasons, let us be like sheep without a care in the world among wolves, and let us follow his instructions as he advises us to be *simple as doves, cunning as snakes* (Mt 10:16): simple as doves, by not harming anybody; cunning as snakes, by taking care not to be harmed ourselves. But you can't take care not to be harmed yourself, unless you understand how you really may be harmed. There are people, for example, who will resist and fight to the death for the sake of temporal possessions. And when you reprove them for putting up such an excessive resistance, when they ought rather, as the Lord himself enjoined, not to resist evil,⁵ they reply that they are doing what he also recommended: being cunning as snakes.

So they should observe what the snake really does, how it presents the coils of its body to the blows of those who strike it, in order to protect its head, to guard that part where it senses its life is concentrated; how it disregards the rest of its length, to prevent its head from being struck by the attacker. So if you wish to copy the cunning of the snake, guard your head. Now it's written, *The head of the man is Christ* (1 Cor 11:3). So mark where you keep Christ, because Christ dwells in you through faith: *for Christ*, he says, *dwells through faith in your hearts* (Eph 3:17). So in order that your faith may remain intact and whole, present the persecutor with everything else, so that what you live by may continue unimpaired.

Christ himself, of course, the savior, the head of the universal Church,⁶ our Lord, seated at the right hand of the Father, cannot now be struck by persecutors, and yet he does suffer with us, and to show that he is in us, he cried out from heaven to that Saul who afterward became the apostle Paul, *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* (Acts 9:4). Nobody, I mean, was touching *him*, but on behalf of his members being trampled on upon the earth, he as the head cried out from above. But if Christ dwells through faith in a Christian heart, in order that faith itself may be kept safe, that is, that Christ may remain in the believer, everything else that the persecutor can strike or confiscate should be disregarded, and allowed to go west for the sake of faith, instead of faith going west for its sake.

The martyrs imitated the cunning of the snake

3. It was this cunning of the snake that the martyrs imitated, when they offered to their persecutors whatever they possessed as mortals to protect Christ as their head, since Christ is the head of man;⁷ they were determined not to die in that part of themselves where they were really alive. They followed the instruction of the Lord advising them to be as cunning as snakes, and so when orders were given for them to be beheaded they didn't suppose that they would then lose their head, but on the contrary when their heads were cut off, they kept Christ their head intact. However ferociously the torturer may assault different parts of the body, with whatever cruelty he may plough up our flanks with lashes, lacerate our entrails and get at the innermost part of our bodies, at our head he cannot get, because he is not permitted even to see it. Though indeed he does get at it, if he wishes to, not by raging against us, but by believing the same as we do.

But how were women able to imitate this cunning of the snake, in order to win the prize medal, the crown of martyrdom? Christ, you see, is called the head of the man, while the man is the head of the woman.⁸ And these women didn't die for their husbands, did they, seeing that in order to suffer they spurned the appeals even of their husbands trying to call them back from the brink. Well, of course, they too through the same faith are members of the Church, and thus Christ, who is head of the whole Church, is the head of all his members.

So the whole Church is called both a woman and a man; you see, it is said to be "one virgin." The apostle says, *I engaged you to one man, to present you to Christ as a chaste virgin* (2 Cor 11:2). And it is perceived as a man, when the same apostle says, *Until we all attain to the unity of faith, to the recognition of the Son of God, to the perfect man, to the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ* (Eph 4:13). So if it's a woman, Christ is her husband; if it's a man, Christ is his head. Thus since the head of the woman is the husband, and Christ is the husband of the Church, when women also suffered for Christ, they fought for their head with the cunning of the snake. So let us too guard our head against the persecutors, let us imitate the cunning of the snake, and let us send up our sighs to God for these same persecutors of ours, in order to hold on also to the innocence of doves.

(End of the sermons where it says: *Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves.*)

NOTES

1. The passage of the gospel read probably ran from verse 16 to verse 22, but could have been longer. No suggestion is offered about where or when the sermon was preached; clearly on the feast day of some martyrs, a group including some men and women. The sermon strikes me as quite

uncharacteristically colorless, even a little stilted. Not Augustine at his best. Well, he could have been, and doubtless was, off his feed at any time during his long career. But I would argue that i) as a priest, before being ordained bishop, he would have taken more pains over a sermon; ii) later in life, when he was always preaching *extempore*, he would have been more relaxed, more casual. So my instinct is to date the sermon about 396-399, when he was only recently ordained bishop, and there is no reason in the sermon to assign it to anywhere other than Augustine's own church in Hippo.

2. The Latin has *finis hujus saeculi*—that is the usual, the technical expression. It means the end of time as we know it—of this age. The usual English phrase, “the end of the world” (not usually “of this world”), while technically a correct translation, is no longer so accurate or appropriate, since “world,” which used to be *wer-eld* (Dutch), that is, “man-age,” has shifted from having a temporal to a spatial significance. But eschatology looks primarily, not to the dissolution of the spatial, material universe, but to the termination of chronological time.

3. It doesn't make sense to talk about sending many in the midst of few, only about sending few in the midst of many. That's what shows that the wolves were many, and the sheep few.

4. In the Latin a play on words, *qui eas mitebat, non dimitebat*. In the next sentence the lamb defeating the wolf is on the face of it Christ defeating the devil. But nowhere in scripture is the devil very obviously compared to a wolf, whereas human beings, usually enemies, frequently are. In particular, Benjamin is called a wolf in Gn 49:7, and Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin. So I think Augustine was actually thinking of Christ roundly defeating Saul/Paul by converting him. The fact that in the next section the preacher refers to the conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus supports this view.

5. See Mt 5:29.

6. See Eph 1:22.

7. See 1 Cor 11:3.

8. *Ibid.* Paul is thinking of husband and wife, but I think the context requires me to keep “man” and “woman.” It *looks* as if Paul is denying that Christ is the head of the wife, or of any woman, just as in verse 7 below it *looks* as if he is denying that woman (Eve) is the image of God. But Augustine refuses to accept this interpretation of the apostle's words. He doesn't argue about it here—just finds another argument, implicit in other texts (for example Eph 1:22) to state that Christ is the head of the woman too. He argues the matter, in favor of women, in great detail and great length in *The Trinity*, XII, 7, 9-12—though a leading feminist, Rosemary Radford Ruether, reading the intricate argument too hastily, perhaps, or simply relying on some secondary source, has stated publicly that Augustine denied women were made in God's image (*New Blackfriars*, July/August, 1985).

SERMON 65

ON THE GOSPEL WHERE IT SAYS:
DO NOT BE AFRAID OF THOSE WHO KILL THE BODY, ETC.

Date: 405-415¹

Fear by not being afraid

1. The divine message which has just been read advises us to fear by not being afraid, and by being afraid not to fear. You will have noticed when the holy gospel was read, that the Lord our God, before he died for us, wanted us to be strong; but he expressed it by advising us not to fear, and by advising us to fear. He said, *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul*; that was him advising us not to fear. Now for where he advised us to fear: *But fear him*, he said, *who has the right to kill both body and soul in gehenna* (Mt 10:28).

So let us be afraid in order not to be afraid. Fear, it would seem, goes with cowardice; fear is what you would expect in the weak, not in the strong. But notice what the scripture says: *The fear of the Lord is the hope of courage* (Prv 14:26). Let us fear in order not to fear, that is, let us fear wisely in order not to fear groundlessly. The holy martyrs, for whose festival this passage from the gospel was recited, precisely by fearing were not afraid, because by fearing God they took no notice of men.

A creature threatening a creature

2. What is it, after all, that a man has to fear from men? And what is it that one human being can frighten another human being with? He intimidates him, and says, "I'm going to kill you," and he's not afraid that while he's making this threat, he may die first himself. "I'm going to kill you," he says. Who says it? Who does he say it to? I hear two people, one doing the intimidating, the other being intimidated; of these one is powerful, the other weak, but both are mortal. So what grounds has mere power for throwing its weight about, seeing that while it is more conceited than others about its status, it is only their equal in its weakness?

Let the person who is not afraid of death threaten others with death, and be

easy in his mind about it. But if he's afraid of what he's intimidating others with, he should take a look at himself, and compare himself with the one he's threatening. Then he may find in that other person he's trying to cow with threats a state of mind exactly the same as his own and then he can join him in asking the Lord for pity and forgiveness. He's only a human being, after all, and it's a human being he is threatening, a creature threatening a creature, but one is puffed up with pride under the creator, the other is taking refuge in the creator.

The martyr's testimony

3. The brave, the courageous martyr, then, a man standing before a man, can say, "I am not afraid, because I am afraid. What you threaten me with you cannot do, if *he* doesn't wish it, but *his* threats nobody can prevent him from carrying out. In any case, even if he permits you to carry out your threat, what can you really do? You can be cruel to the flesh; the soul is safe from you. You can't kill something you can't see; you are just a visible body trying to intimidate another visible body. Both of us have an invisible creator, whom we both ought to fear. And he created man from a visible and an invisible element. He made the visible one from the earth; the invisible one he animated with his breath.³ So the invisible substance, that is, the soul, which raised up inert and lifeless earth from the earth, is not afraid when you strike what is only earth. You can knock down the habitation, but can you touch the inhabitant? It was chained there, but once you strike off the chain it escapes, and will receive its crown in secret. So what's the point of your threats, since you can't do anything to the soul? Through the merits of that part you can't do anything to, the part you can do something to will rise again. I mean, through the merits of the soul the flesh too will rise again, and it will be given back to its inhabitant, to fall down no more, but to last for ever."

Remember, those are a martyr's words I have been speaking; mind you, as regards my own flesh I *am* afraid of threats and intimidation.⁴ My flesh is at the mercy of the powers that be, yet even the hairs of my head are all numbered and known to the creator.⁵ So why should I be afraid of losing my flesh, if I'm not even going to lose a single hair? How can God fail to take care of my flesh, if even the most insignificant bits of me are known to him like this? This body which can be struck and killed will be ashes for a time, but immortal for ever. But who will this be for? Who will the body be given back to for eternal life, even though it's been killed, destroyed, scattered all over the place? Who will it be given back to? To any who were not afraid to lay down their lives, because they are not afraid of their flesh being slain.⁶

The soul is immortal after its own fashion

4. As you all know, brothers, the soul is generally held to be immortal, and indeed it is immortal after its own fashion, because it's a kind of life, which can give life to flesh by its presence. I mean, it's through the soul that the flesh lives.

This life cannot die, and that's why the soul is immortal. So why did I say "after its own fashion"? Listen why. It's because there is a true immortality, an immortality that is absolute and total unchangeableness. The apostle, speaking about God, has this to say about it: *Who alone has immortality, and dwells in light inaccessible; whom not a single man has ever seen, and what is more cannot see; to whom be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen* (1 Tim 6:16).

So if God alone has immortality the soul is certainly mortal. That's why I said the soul is immortal after its own fashion. You see, it can also die. Your graces must try to understand, and then the problem will be solved. I make bold to say, the soul can die, can be killed. Certainly it's immortal. So there you are, I make bold to say it is both immortal and capable of being killed. And that's why I said there is a kind of immortality, that is to say, an absolute and total unchangeableness, which God alone has, as it says of him, *Who alone has immortality*. I mean, if the soul couldn't be killed, how could the Lord say, when he meant to frighten us, *Fear him who has the right to kill both body and soul in gehenna* (Mt 10:28)?

The soul can be killed

5. So far I have just confirmed that there is a problem, I haven't solved it. I have proved that the soul can be killed. The gospel cannot be contradicted, except by an impious soul. Yes, and that has just given me an idea, it has just occurred to me what I want to say: life cannot be contradicted except by a dead soul. The gospel is life; impurity and disbelief is the death of the soul. That's how it can die, and yet be immortal.

So how is it immortal? Because there is always some sort of life which is never extinguished in it. How does it die? Not by ceasing to be life, but by losing life. You see, the soul is both life to some other thing, and also has its own life. Pay attention to the order of creation: the soul is the life of the body; God is the life of the soul. Just as life, that is, the soul, is present in the body to stop the body dying, so life, that is to say, God, ought to be present in the soul to stop the soul dying.

How does the body die? By the soul departing from it. When the soul, I say, departs, the body dies, and it lies there, a corpse, someone desirable just a little while ago, now just something to be got rid of. All the parts are still there: the eyes, the ears, but these are only the windows of the house; its inhabitant has departed. Anybody mourning the dead is calling out in vain to the windows of the dwelling; there's no one inside to hear. How many things are said by the love of the mourner, how many things recalled and recounted. And in what a frenzy of grief, if I may say so, does the mourner speak as though to someone who can hear, while speaking in fact to someone who isn't there. She lists the virtues, she lists the marks of kindness by the deceased toward herself. "It's you who gave me this; you provided me with this and that; you're the one who showed me in this way and that how you loved me." If you could really notice things, if you could understand, if you could restrain the frenzy of your grief—

well the one who loved you has gone away. It's all for nothing you go on knocking at a house, in which you cannot ever find anyone staying.

Death of body and soul

6. Let's go back to the case I was talking about a little earlier on: A body is dead. Why? Because its life has departed, that is to say, the soul. A body is alive, and he is wicked, he's an unbeliever, too stubborn to believe, as stiff as iron when it comes to correcting his faults; while the body's alive the soul, by which the body lives, is dead. So marvelous a thing is the soul that it is capable of giving life to the body even though it's dead itself. So marvelous a thing, I repeat, is the soul, so noble a creature, that it is capable, even though it's dead, of making flesh live.

Because, you see, the soul of the wicked person, of the unbeliever, the soul of the perverse and stubborn person, is dead; yet it is by this dead soul that the body lives. That's why it's there, moving the hands to do things, the feet to walk, directing the gaze to see things, turning the head to hear things with the ears, distinguishing flavors, shrinking from pains, seeking pleasures. These are all indications of a living body, but they come from the presence of a soul. I ask the body whether it is alive. It answers me, "You see me walking, you see me doing things, you hear me speaking, you perceive me seeking and shrinking from things, and you don't realize that the body is alive?" By these activities of the soul established inside, I realize that the body is alive.

Then I ask the soul itself whether it's alive. It too has its activities by which to indicate its life. "The feet are walking." Yes, I realize the body is alive, by the presence of the soul, of course. But I'm asking whether the soul is alive. "These feet walk." Very well, we'll just talk about this one movement. I'm asking body and soul about life. The feet walk, I realize the body is alive. But where are they walking to? To an assignation for adultery. So the soul is dead. Scripture was perfectly right when it said, *The widow who lives for pleasure is dead* (1 Tm 5:6). Seeing that there is a world of difference between pleasure and adultery, how can the soul that is said to be dead in its search for pleasure be alive in committing adultery? It's dead.

But it isn't only dead when it acts like that. I hear someone talking, the body is alive. The tongue, after all, wouldn't move in the mouth, and punch out articulate sounds from each part of it, unless there were a resident within, a kind of musician using the tongue as his instrument. Of course I understand perfectly well; the body speaks in this way, the body is alive. But I'm asking whether the soul is alive too. "Look, the body's talking, it's alive." Well, what is it saying? As I said about the feet, they walk, so there you are, the body is alive, and I asked where they are walking to, in order to tell whether the soul also was alive. So too when I hear somebody talking I can tell the body is alive; I want to know what he says, to see whether the soul too is alive. He utters a lie. If he utters a lie, then the soul is dead. How do we prove this? Let's question Truth itself about it, and it says, *The mouth which lies slays the soul* (Wis 1:11). I inquire, why is

the soul dead? As I was saying a short while ago: I inquire, why is the body dead? Because the soul, its life, has departed. Why is the soul dead? Because God, its life has forsaken it.

The martyr's stance

7. With that brief explanation, then, just hold onto this as something you can be quite sure of: the body is dead without the soul; the soul is dead without God. Every person without God has a dead soul. You mourn the dead. Mourn, rather, the sinner, mourn the wicked, mourn the unbeliever. It is written, *Mourning for the dead, seven days; but for the fool and the wicked, all the days of their life* (Sir 22:13). Or are you perhaps lacking in the bowels of Christian compassion, so that you can mourn a body from which the soul has departed, and not mourn a soul from which God has departed?

Let the martyr hold onto this truth, and so answer the threats of the judge, "Why are you trying to force me to deny Christ? Are you then trying to force me to deny the truth? If I refuse, what can you do? You can slay my body, so that my soul departs from it, but this soul of mine has a body of its own.⁸ It isn't being foolish or hasty. You wish to slay my body; do you really want me, frightened of your slaying my body and of my soul departing from it, to slay my own soul and have my God depart from it?"

"No, don't be afraid, martyr, of the executioner's sword; be afraid of your own tongue, of you slaying yourself and killing not the flesh but the soul. Fear for your soul, lest it should die in the gehenna of fire."

The martyr's feast

8. So that's what the Lord was talking about: *the one who has the right to kill both body and soul in the gehenna of fire* (Mt 10:28). How? When the wicked one is thrown into gehenna, the body will burn there, the soul will burn there too.⁹ The death of the body is everlasting punishment; the death of the soul is the absence of God. Do you want to know what the death of the soul is? Hear the prophet saying, *Let the wicked be taken away, and not see the glory of the Lord* (Is 26:10).

So let the soul fear its own death, and not fear the death of its body. Because if it fears its own death, and lives in God, without offending him or driving him out of itself, it will deserve at the end to receive its body back again, not for eternal punishment like the wicked, but for eternal life, like the just. That's the death the martyrs feared and that's the life they loved, and so trusting in the promises of God they despised the threats of their persecutors, and earned the right to be rewarded with their crowns in the presence of God, and left us the legacy of celebrating their festivals.

NOTES

1. The title is the one given by Possidius in his Catalogue. Again there is no obvious indication of when or where the sermon was preached. From sections 1, 3 and 8 it seems evident that it was preached on the feast of some martyrs or of a martyr. It is largely taken up with discussing the immortality of the soul but in a somewhat unusual way. With a thoroughly Platonist dualism, he assumes the human person to be a soul inhabiting and animating a body, and he states the simple analogy: as the soul is life to the body, so God is life to the soul. Hence the soul, as Augustine talks of it here, may be said to be conditionally immortal—with the only immortality that really matters, namely sharing in the life, the absolute immortality, of God. I have sometimes thought that Augustine sat more and more lightly to his Platonism as he grew older. If that is the case, this sermon should be dated to not later than his middle years—say anytime between 405 and 415. Perhaps preached to a Carthaginian congregation, rather more sophisticated than the average in Africa? It is pure guesswork.

2. It is interesting to observe that when Augustine thinks of intimidation, he immediately thinks, not of the thug or the gangster, but of the man of influential status in society—mainly the wealthy landowner.

3. See Gn 2:7, rather loose way of speaking. But he is, I think, deliberately avoiding the suggestion that the human soul is the breath of God, a kind of emanation from the divine substance. So he is, possibly, presupposing a soul, an *anima*, existing before animation, which implies a not yet animated *anima*. Philosophically a somewhat monstrous concept. But the origin and nature of the soul was something that puzzled Augustine all his life. The rigid Platonist dualism of body and soul that marks this sermon is not only disconcerting to modern readers, but also, in my opinion, seriously impeded Augustine in his quest for a solution to the puzzle.

4. Reading, *ecce propter ipsam carnem meam timeo comminantem*, with the earliest editions, and it seems, the bulk of the manuscripts. The Maurists follow one Vatican manuscript in reading a negative, *ecce nec propter* etc.: "as regards my own flesh I am not afraid, etc." Leaving out the *nec* means choosing the more difficult reading—and here in my view with justification. Superficially it doesn't make such good sense, which is why it is easy to imagine a copyist inserting it. But on maturer consideration it makes better sense: Augustine is admitting he's no martyr, he's not the stuff martyrs are made of—and then going on to provide arguments why he ought to be.

5. See Mt 10:30.

6. "To any etc."; this is in the singular in the Latin. At first sight, "To one who was not afraid to lay down his life" looks like a reference to Christ (see Jn 10:17-18); then on second thought it seems to be referring to the soul getting its body back. But on maturer consideration I think it refers to the person, any person, who follows the example of the martyrs. There is an implication that resurrection is a reward for the just only, and is not for the wicked. But the matter of the resurrection (if you can call it that) of the wicked will at least be touched on below in section 8. It is strictly parallel to the matter of the "immortality" of the souls of the wicked.

7. The gender here is my choice. A sentence or two earlier the governing pronoun was masculine.

8. I don't really know what this last phrase means: *sed ipsa anima mea ad se habet corpus*, literally, "but this soul of mine has body to itself." Which body? The one the persecutor slays, or another? I opt for the second alternative, and take him to mean, either that the soul is sure of the resurrection of the body, or else that the soul is itself a kind of "body" in relation to God who is its life, in terms of the simple analogy stated in note 1 above. The Italian translation seems to choose the first alternative, and renders, "but this self-same soul considers the body as its property"—of which again the implication would be confidence in the body's resurrection.

9. The Maurists, followed by the Italian edition, treat this sentence as a question. I cannot think that it improves the sense.

SERMON 65A

**ON MATTHEW 10:37: WHOEVER LOVES FATHER OR MOTHER MORE THAN ME
IS NOT WORTHY OF ME**

Date 397-398¹

The heights and depths of love

1. When the Lord urges us to love him, he begins by mentioning those persons whom we are quite right, indeed obliged, to love. *Whoever*, he says, *loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me* (Mt 10:37). So if you are not worthy of Christ when you prefer your father to Christ, how can you be worthy of the slightest trace of Christ when you prefer gold to Christ? There are, you see, things that are wrongly loved in the world, and when they are wrongly loved in the world, they make their lovers vile.² Unlawful love is a serious pollution of the soul, and a heavy weight holding down the soul that is longing to fly. Just as a right and holy love whirls the mind up to the heights, so a wrong and vile love plunges it down to the depths.

The proper weight of everything, which carries it where it ought to go, is its love.³ I mean, it doesn't carry it where it oughtn't to go, but where it ought. Those who love well will be carried off to what they love, and where will that be, but where the good object is which they love? After all, what other reward does Christ the Lord offer when he urges us to love him, but the fulfillment of what he asked the Father for: *I will that where I am, these also may be with me* (Jn 17:24)? Do you want to be where Christ is? Love Christ, and be whirled away to the place of Christ. Something that pulls or whirls you upward doesn't allow you to hurtle downward.

Don't try and invent any other mechanisms for mounting upward;⁴ it's by loving that you strive, by loving that you are snatched up and away, by loving that you arrive. You strive, you see, when you struggle against a vile love; you are snatched up and away when you overcome it; you arrive when you receive the gold medal. *Who will give me wings, says a certain lover, like a dove's, and I will fly away and be at rest?* (Ps 55:6). He was still trying to find wings, he didn't have any yet, and that's why he was sighing; he wasn't yet rejoicing, he was still struggling, he wasn't yet being snatched up and away.

To overcome many loves, only one love is necessary

2. So improper and unworthy loves are all around us with their billing and cooing. On every side they are inveigling and holding back those who are eager to fly; visible things are almost forcing themselves on our love. But they mustn't be allowed to force themselves; they must be seen for what they are, and so be overcome. The world is beautiful and comely, it entices us with the infinite variety of its beauty. It is impossible to count the things that are suggested every day by unlawful love.⁵

How simple is the love that overcomes the infinitely various! To overcome many loves, only one love is necessary—one good love against many bad ones. Unity, you see, conquers variety; love beats greed. *Who will give me wings*, the psalmist was saying, wanting to get the means of flying away to his rest; as he loved something else, he couldn't find rest even among the good things that are called good in this world.

Lovers of their native land regard with sour distaste even a comfortable exile amid surroundings with all kinds of advantages, crying out to be loved. It is a grievous trial, not having what you love. But you haven't got what you love; you've got something you could love, but you haven't got what you have already begun to love. What's the good of what you could love being there, if what you do love is missing? It's a torment to the heart, to love and not to have. For example, you love your native land, and you've got plenty of money. Don't exchange love of your native land for love of money. If you loved money while living abroad, where there's plenty of money to be had, this money could well keep you there, and prevent your returning home. Say what you like, it prevents you returning. *But if you have that one thing necessary*,⁶ it's enough; everything else that doesn't help you get to the place you love is treated as so much junk. Of course, though, if you were told, "Money will help you to travel back home to your own country," you'd take it with you, you would have it handy,⁷ you'd try and get it—but not for its own sake. "A ship will help you"; you would try to get one, but not for the sake of a ship. "The sailors will help you, the captain will help you, the ship's chandler will help you"; you take them all along, you engage their services, but not for their own sakes. Everything else is taken along, only one thing is loved. Everything else is taken along for this alone, to arrive at long last⁸ at the place that is loved.

Asking one thing from the Lord

3. Do we consider that we can say, *One thing have I asked of the Lord?* Let's say it now, let's say it if we are able to, let's say it in order to be able to, as much as we are able to. Notice how fortunate is the heart that employs these words within, where he alone can hear who is being addressed (many people, I mean to say, express outwardly what they don't have inwardly, because they pride themselves on superficial appearances, and not on the deeper realities of the heart). So let us all observe how fortunate is the heart that says inwardly, where it is fully aware of what it is saying, *One thing have I asked of the Lord, this will*

I seek after. What is it? Well, he means either one thing or one request. What is it? That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the delights of the Lord (Ps 27:4).

This is the one thing, but what a good one! Weigh it against the many. If you have already tasted something of it, if you are already looking for a little bit of it, if you know what it means to be on fire for it with a holy desire, weigh it against the many, bring in the scales of justice, put on one tray gold, silver, precious stones, honors, office, authority, titles, human praise—how can I list all the possibilities?—put on the whole world; see if there's any comparison,⁹ see if it's even possible to put these two things on the scales to balance them against one another—the whole world, with the world's creator.

The beauty of the creator

4. What does gold say to me? "Love me." But what does God tell me to reply? "Let me use you, and so use you that you don't possess me, and that you part me from you."¹⁰ Anything else that says to me, "Love me," is a creature. I love the creator. What he made is good, but how much better is he that made it! I cannot yet see the beauty of the creator, but only the outer beauty of creatures. What I don't see I believe, and believing love—and loving see. Hush, then, you carrion blandishments, hush the voice of gold and silver, hush the dazzling attraction of jewels, hush finally the allurements of this light, hush, the lot of you. I have a clearer call to follow, the sound of which moves me more, stirs me more, inflames me more intensely. I can't hear any longer the din of earthly things. What am I to say? Silence, gold; silence, silver; silence everything else in this world.

Love in Christ, not instead of Christ

5. Let my father say, "Love me." Let my mother say, "Love me." Am I to say to these voices, "Be quiet"?¹¹ Aren't they making a just demand? Am I not to pay back what I have received? My father says, "I begot you." My mother says, "I bore you." My father says, "I reared you." My mother says, "I nursed you." Perhaps these voices have every right to say, "You want to be carried on his wings; don't fly as a debtor; pay back the advance we made you." Let us answer our fathers and mothers, when they say to us, with every right, "Love us"; let us answer, "I do love you, in Christ; I don't love you instead of Christ. Be with me in him; I won't be with you without him." "But we," they say, "don't want Christ." "But I want Christ more than you. Am I to attend to my father and lose my creator?"

I answer my father: "You begot me under the inducement of pleasure. He created both me and you out of sheer goodness. Just because we are, must he be set at nought, who loved us even before we were?" And let us say to our mothers, "You were able to conceive me, were you also able to fashion me? You could grow big with my flesh in your womb; could you also breathe my

soul into the flesh? When you carried me within you, you didn't know whether I would be female or male. Was God, do you think, as ignorant of his handiwork as you were of your burden? You have the nerve to say, 'Don't let's go to him,' and you don't listen to me when I say, 'Let's go together.' I listen more than you do, and I fear more than you do, and I love more than you do. You didn't bestow more on me than he did, who created me in you. . . ." ¹² if not because he was created for my sake? For you see, the one through whom all things were created,¹³ was himself created among all things for our sake. Am I, by loving my mother, to set Christ at nought, who being God was willing to have a mother for my sake? Perhaps that's why he wished to have a mother—to have someone through whom to give me a practical lesson in setting at nought both father and mother for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.¹⁴

Examples of Christ in loving parents and relatives

6. Addressing his disciples he says, *Do not say anyone is a father to you on earth, your one Father is God* (Mt 23:9). That's why, when teaching us the prayer, he instructed us to say, *Our Father who art in heaven* (Mt 6:9).¹⁵ The father I had on earth I have laid in his grave; I have a Father for ever in heaven. *Do not*, he says, *say anyone is a father to you on earth, for one is your Father, God.* It would have seemed harsh if he had imposed a rule and not given an example. As he was talking with his disciples about some aspects of the kingdom of heaven, his mother was standing outside, she was reported to be standing outside. His mother, I repeat, with his brothers (that is, with his cousins) was reported to be standing outside. What mother? The mother who conceived him by faith, the mother who bore him while remaining a virgin, that faithful and holy mother was reported to be standing outside. So if he had broken off his talk and gone out to her, he would have reinforced in his heart an affection that was not divine, but merely human. To prevent you from listening to your mother when she holds you back from the kingdom of heaven, he even set the good Mary at nought for the sake of a mere sermon on the kingdom of heaven. Holy Mary, wanting to see Christ, is snubbed. What mother, trying to stop you seeing Christ, is to be listened to?

Let's recall the answer he gave when his mother with his brothers, that is, with relatives of his clan, was reported to be standing outside. How did he answer? *Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, These, he said, are my brothers. Whoever does the will of my Father who sent me, that person for me is brother and sister and mother* (Mt 12:48-50). He rejected the synagogue he was born from, he found those he gave new birth to. If those who do the will of the one who sent him are mother, brother, sister, there among them is Mary his mother.

God taught us to love our parents

7. *Whoever does the will of him who sent me, that person for me is brother and sister and mother.* There you have the way to be Christ's brother; love with

him your paternal inheritance. There you have the way to be Christ's sister; love with him the same inheritance. There you have the way to be Christ's mother, if you conceive in your heart what she conceived in her womb. The names of such relationships canalize and limit human affection. In ordinary family terms no one can be the same person's brother and mother. Everybody, surely, knows that's impossible. But charity is not so canalized and limited. Certainly the Church is the consort of Christ, the Church is the bride of Christ. We know the mystery symbolically signified by the first prophecy made by the first man: *They shall be two in one flesh* (Gn 2:24). We know how the apostle explains this; he says, *But I mean in Christ and in the Church* (Eph 5:32). So if the Church is without any doubt the consort of Christ, it is still possible in another sort of way, according to another reasonable understanding of the matter, for the Church to be the mother of Christ.

I mean to say, if it can be said about anybody at all, *The one who does the will of him who sent me is my brother, sister, mother*, how much more can this be said about the universal Church, which every day in the catechumens conceives the members of Christ, and from among unbelievers gives birth to members of Christ? *But you*, says the apostle, *are the body and the members of Christ* (1 Cor 12:27). I am interrogating you, members of Christ: Who gave you birth? You answer, "Mother Church." How can the Church not be the mother of Christ, seeing that it gives birth to the members of Christ? This is the house in which that man chose to live who asked for only one thing. How can you not think lightly of your consort, if you wish to live in the consort of Christ? How can you not think lightly of your mother, if you wish to live in the mother of Christ? How can you not think lightly of your father, if you wish to have as your father the Father of Christ?

Parents, please, mustn't be angry. We show them very considerable respect if the only one we put before them is God. Or if they don't even want us to prefer God to them, what do they want for themselves, what is the case they are making? Well, let's listen to them. I imagine they won't dare to tell us, "Put us before God." They don't say that. Not even a raving lunatic will say that.¹⁶ Not even the man who says in his heart, *There is no God* (Ps 14:1), says that to his son. Therefore there is not the slightest chance that either fathers or mothers will dare to say that they are to be preferred to God. So what do they say? "God told you"—What did God tell me? *Honor your father and your mother* (Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16). I agree; God did tell me this. Don't you be angry with me, when the only one I put before you is the one who told me this. I love, I most certainly do love, I love you too. But the one who told me to love you is better than you. Only please don't turn me against him, and please join me in loving him who taught me to love you—but not more than him.

Love in the right order

8. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. But he did add "more than me." Love your parents, he says, but not more than me. His

bride cries out to you, *Set charity in order toward me* (Sg 2:4).¹⁷ Love in the right order, so that you yourself may be rightly ordered.¹⁸ Allot things their own proper weights and importance. Love your father and mother, but you have something you should love more than father and mother. If you love them more, you will be condemned, and if you don't love them, you will be condemned. Let us show respect to our parents, but let us prefer our creator to them, since we love him more; let us do this by fearing and loving him, and by obeying and honoring him, and by believing and desiring him. *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.* So will our parents, please, not spurned indeed but honored in due order, step aside a little from the center of the stage.

Love means suffering

9. Someone has a wife, someone has children. They cry out, "Love us." Answer them, "I do love you." Say to your wife, "If I didn't love you, I wouldn't have married you." Say to your children, "If I didn't love you, I wouldn't have begotten you, I wouldn't have brought you up. But what is it you want? Do you want to call back one who is on his way to Christ as a martyr, not meaning to run away from you, and do you grudge one whom you love his prize? Give him back his own coin; he loves you, see to it to love him. Why should he show love and you show hatred? Look; he denies Christ, and he is condemned.¹⁹ Just look what you have done. Would you want one you love to be condemned by a judge on earth? If you did, it certainly means you don't love him. But it's because you love him, of course, that all the more you don't want him condemned by a judge on earth. No, if he denied Christ, he's not condemned on earth, but he's condemned by the one who made heaven and earth. Why aren't you dreading the one you love being condemned by the higher judge? The judge on earth relentlessly passes sentence of death. Yes, this one relentlessly passes a death sentence; afterward that one passes a sentence beyond death. So what do you think you are doing, inflicting evil on the one you love? From what, precisely, are you calling back the one you love? You are making sure he gets gehenna, and doesn't get his prize. And you call that loving. But your not wanting him to suffer these things for Christ's sake shows that you don't believe. After all, if you did believe, you wouldn't try to call him back from his martyrdom, but would yourselves wish to suffer martyrdom with him."

God has joined husband and wife

10. It's easy enough to shut the children up; the wife is rather more insistent. "Don't leave me," she says. "You will go away, and I shall stay behind, a widow. God joined us together; let not man put asunder."²⁰ You must answer words of this sort. Don't let them break you; don't let them seduce you. They are not fair; they must be rejected. You shouldn't let them frighten you, just because she quoted the gospel to you: *What God has joined together, let not man put asunder* (Mk 10:9), frighten you into separating yourself from God because you wish to

remain joined to your wife. If separation from one's wife is to be feared, how much more is separation from one's creator? God has joined, let not man put asunder.

But in fact you won't be separated from your wife when you go before her to your reward for the sake of Christ's name. The widow you abandon has you as her advocate, because in fact you haven't abandoned her when you have left her for such reasons. But if, quite apart from suffering for Christ, you had died in an ordinary human way, would that be called desertion? A husband dies first, and that's not desertion, is it? You bad woman, this isn't a matter of doing well for yourself, it's a case of doing your husband down.²¹ But you will be left a widow, will you? You will be truly better off if you stay a widow. But she's worried, did someone say, about being inveigled into a second marriage?²² It's perfectly legal, of course, to marry again, but no doubt, dear lady, you will be quite safe from this too. You'd be ashamed to marry again, you, the consort of a martyr.

No one should love someone more than Christ

11. Nobody, then, must love father, mother, children, wife more than Christ. Whatever it's right to love, whatever it's religious to love, whatever it's a sin not to love, none of us should love it more than Christ, none of us should love it as we love Christ. If you do love it that way, let it be in the same manner of loving, not in the same measure. What is meant by your loving that way in the same manner of loving, not in the same measure? It means loving spiritually, not materialistically. But you mustn't love anything else that way, in the sense of loving it as much and equally with Christ.

You see, it's not only a sin to love anyone more than Christ; it's also a sin not to love Christ more than anyone else. "I don't love anyone more," he says. So there you are, you are not sinning. But there's something else I would like to hear: how much do you love? You answer, "As much as I love my parents, as much as my children, as much as my wife, that's how much I love Christ." Then you are still sinning. Just as you would sin by preferring them to Christ, so you sin by even comparing them with Christ. Does it seem right to you that Christ should be loved by you just as much as your father, your mother, your wife? Do you think it right to equate the creature with the creator? Is it right? What about that appeal, *Set charity in order toward me* (Sg 2:4)? Your father didn't die for you, nor your mother, nor your children.

If some danger should menace you, they want you to live, but they are much keener on going on living after you themselves. Supposing a father was told, "Either you shall die, or your son," do you imagine you could find anyone who would say, "Rather me than my son"? Can we imagine such a father, such an old man who wouldn't rather choose to go on living even the short while left to him, than to lay down his life for his son? Few days are left for that old man, that broken down old man, that weary old man, that stooping old man, and he won't readily dispense those few days for the sake of many more days for his

son. The weight of his years has already brought him to the brink of the grave, yet in his desire for the light he would rather be bereaved than die. What sort of light will it be after his son's funeral? How unpleasant, how mournful, how bitter! Yet the light is loved, the son is buried!²³

Give God back yourself

12. Christ loved you before you existed; he created you; he predestined you²⁴ before the foundation of the world; once created through the agency of your father and mother, he has reared you. It's not your parents, you see, who made you, though they hand on to you their family characteristics. He loved you, he created you, he reared you, he gave himself up for you, he listened to insults for you, he endured wounds for you, he redeemed you with his blood. Aren't you overwhelmed, and won't you say, *What shall I give back to the Lord for all that he has given to me?* (Ps 116:12). What will you give back to the Lord for all that he has given to you? Listen to his saying, *Whoever has loved father or mother more than me is not worthy of me* (Mt 10:37).²⁵ Listen to him saying it, fear the menace contained in it, love the promise implied in it.

What have you given back to the Lord for all that he has given to you? So, all right, you have already given something back, eh? Well, what have you given back? Have you saved him as he has saved you? Have you opened up eternal life for him, as he has done for you? Have you created him, as he did you? Did you make him the Lord as he made you a man? Have you given anything back to him that doesn't come back to you? If you look frankly at the truth of the matter, you haven't given him anything, you have simply provided yourself with it. And even this you haven't got from yourself. *For what do you have that you have not received?* (1 Cor 4:7). Why don't you find something you can give back to the Lord? Give him back yourself, give him back what he has made. Give him back yourself, not what is yours, his creation, not your perversion.

All the days of your life

13. Saturated in this way with the right ideas, stocked in this way, polished in this way out of the law of God, ask one thing from the Lord, seek this alone.²⁶ You will lack nothing,²⁷ *he will not deprive of good things those who walk in innocence* (Ps 84:11). But you are not innocent, which means harmless, if you are harmful to yourself. Why imagine you can be kind to others, when it seems you haven't yet learned to be so to yourself? *Be kind to your soul and please God* (Sir 30:23).²⁸ You want God to please you, you don't want to please God. In fact, you are the sort of person whom God couldn't please if he tried. I mean, he will only please you if he favors your crooked ways. *You have crookedly surmised*, he says, *that I shall be like you* (Ps 50:21). Be kind to your soul and please God. It's not a good thing that God should please you while you are crooked; straighten yourself out. Don't go on wishing you could make God bend. Be straight, or you will be looking not only for a crooked self but a crooked

God as well. Look at you, sitting there idly and constructing a God to suit your own greedy whims! "If only God would do this," he says. "Oh, if only he would do that!" Well, he won't do anything except good. But God displeases the bad. *How good is the God of Israel to the upright of heart!* (Ps 73:1).²⁹

So, brothers, let us ask one thing of the Lord. When I say this to you, I am also saying it to myself. Let us all ask for this one thing. Let us all hear this from one man.³⁰ Let us ask one thing of the Lord, let us seek after this, to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life. All those days are one eternal day. When you hear *all the days of my life*, don't be afraid they are days that can come to an end. Really and truly, those days don't come to an end, because when they arrive we aren't going to desire a human day.

For us now not a single day stands still, not a single day stands still for us, they all fly away. It's gone before it's come. So of this very day on which I'm speaking, how much has already flown. We can't even hold on to this moment we are in now; it too flies away and another one comes, and it's not going to stand still either, but will fly away in turn. What is it you so love? Embrace what you love, hold on to what you love, keep what you love—but it doesn't stand still, and it doesn't let you stand still. *All flesh is grass and all the glory of man like the flower of grass. The grass withers, the flower falls.* All these things fly away; do you want to remain standing? *But the word of the Lord remains for ever* (Is 40:6).³¹ So stand in his Word which remains for ever, and listen to him, and with him you will remain for ever.

NOTES

1. The sermon gives no indication of where it was preached. Also there is no title for this sermon; the translator provided one. As for its date, two scholars, including the one who first published it (Étaix in *Révue Bénédictine* 86 [1976] 41–48), suggest some time between 414 and 418, a third puts it as early as 397/8. I imagine the reason for the later date is found in what looks like an echo of *City of God* XV, 22 when he touches on the order of love, and quotes the Song of Songs, (2:4) in section 8 (see note 17 and 18), and also in his mention of predestination in section 12 (note 36). On the other hand the earlier date will be supported by the strong echo of the *Confessions* VIII (Augustine's account of his conversion), which can be detected in section 2 (notes 5 and 6). Of course, he could still be echoing the *Confessions* twenty years later—and hardly echoing the *City of God* and the Pelagian controversy twenty years earlier. But the echo from the *Confessions* is so vivid, so emotionally charged, that I think it must be heard as almost contemporary with that work. Whereas the passage in the *City of God* is simply working out a theme to which he had often turned his thoughts throughout his career.

So I myself incline to favor the earlier date. I have a further, and admittedly very subjective reason. I do not find this a very pleasant sermon, not Augustine at his most attractive, by any means. Sections 9, 10, and 11 in particular leave a somewhat sour taste in the mouth (notes 22 and 23). Now it's my understanding of Augustine that he mellowed with age. His idea of human nature may have become more pessimistic, more narrow indeed, as his polemic against the Pelagians dragged on during the last twenty years of his life, but his attitude to people, his manner of addressing them, as I read him, grew progressively milder, more tolerant and more humorous, even when he was berating

their vices. As an old man in his sixties and seventies he would never, I am sure, have treated "the wife" in section 10 so offensively, or been so cynical about the old father at the end of section 11. The treatment of such subjects was very probably a commonplace of the schools of rhetoric in which he himself had been a master. In his mid forties (397/8) he would still make use of such commonplaces without a second thought. But not, I like to think, in his old age.

2. An untranslatable play on words in the Latin: *cum male amantur in mundo, amatorem faciunt immundum*—all the more "agreeable" if we bear in mind that *immundum* was probably pronounced almost exactly the same as *in mundo*. *Mundus*, "world," in fact does seem to be a derivative from *mundus*, "pure"; compare the Greek *kosmos*, "world," deriving from *kosmos*, "order." So Augustine by his pun is, so to say, denying the world the honor that human language, expressing human values, has bestowed on it.

3. See *Confessions* XIII, 9, 10: *Pondus meum amor meus; eo feror quocumque feror*. My love is my weight; by it I am carried wherever I am carried. According to ancient ideas of gravity, which he outlines in this passage, everything (that is, every element, of which there were four: fire, air, water, and earth) has its own proper place. That of earth is at the bottom or center, that of fire at the top or periphery of the universe. So the weight of earthy things carries them downward, unless it is prevented, while the "weight" of fiery things carries them upward, unless restrained.

4. Dreams of flying are probably as old as the human race, from the myth of Icarus to witches flying on broomsticks. I wonder, were many people dreaming of making the first aeroplane in Augustine's Africa?

5. The whole passage echoes his account of his conversion, of all his old loves trying to hold him back from the great decision, *Confessions* VIII, 9, 26.

6. That is the one single love (see Lk 10:41)—in this case of the native land (clearly a metaphor for the kingdom of God). The personal background is again strongly in evidence. At the time of his conversion Augustine was resident abroad, living in Milan, earning a good salary, with plenty of wealthy and well-connected friends—in fact enjoying an extremely comfortable exile in the most pleasant possible surroundings. But immediately after he had been baptized, with his son Adeodatus and his friend Alypius, at Easter 387, he set about returning to Africa, and to his home town of Thagaste. With his conversion to the love of Christ, his love of his native land simultaneously and symbolically revived.

7. *Assisteret* (I have changed the Latin's third person into second person). This is a strange word to find here. I am taking it in a causative sense, to set something (in this case money) beside you.

8. Reading *ad huc* (my own emendation) for *ad hoc* of the text—which simply repeats, presumably by error, the *ad hoc* of two words previously.

9. *Contemplatio*, in an unusual and archaic sense of ritually surveying ground for a temple, hence of measuring things, hence commensurability, hence comparison.

10. I have been very free here with what I find an incomprehensible text, starting from "But what does God . . ." A very literal translation would run: "But God to me what? Let me use you, and I will so use you that you do not hold me and separate from me."

The most obvious way to treat the question is, "But what does God say to me?" Then the "Let me use you" etc. is what God says to me. That is how the Italian translates it, giving a reference to *Teaching Christianity* (*De Doctrina Christiana*) I, xxxi—xxxii, 34–35. Here Augustine is in the middle of elaborating his distinction between enjoying and using, as the only two possible ways of loving. He says God cannot love us by enjoying us, strictly speaking, because that would mean he needs us as his happiness, which cannot be true. So he must love us by using us, but for our own advantage, not his own—just as an expression of his goodness.

But why should he bring such an abstruse consideration into this sermon, where he is talking more about the order of love than about its various kinds? If he is introducing it here, he fails completely to pursue it. (If this is the proper interpretation of the passage, then God's words would have to conclude "that you neither possess me nor part me from you"; but I think that would be a forced rendering of the construction *ut non . . . et . . .*; it would properly require, *ut nec teneas me nec separares a te.*)

What one expects God to say is either "Love me (and not gold)," or "Don't love gold, but use it." And that is how I have interpreted it. However, the sentence following the question is in the

first, not the second person singular; so it must be what God advises me to answer the gold.

No doubt, Augustine's congregation would have at once grasped his meaning, because he would have been *acting* the dialogue as he spoke it.

11. I treat this sentence as a question. The text presents it as a statement: "To these voices I am going to say, 'Be quiet.'"

12. There is a gap in the text here. It cannot have been very long, probably no more than the first half of the sentence. Perhaps it ran something like this: "Why should God have been born of a human mother, if not etc." Unlike the text itself and the Italian translation, I treat the whole as a question.

13. See Jn 1:3.

14. See Mk 3:31-35, referred to in the next section; also Jn 2:3-4, Lk 2:41-51.

15. Notice how he quotes the passage differently in quick succession. This may possibly indicate a rather later date for the sermon, since it is less likely that early on in his ministry he would have been reading and comparing various versions. He certainly came to do so later on. See Sermons 56 to 59.

16. The furthest a lunatic would go would be to claim to be God, perhaps!

17. This is the Septuagint version. By the order of love Augustine means, to state it crudely, putting first things first; first God, then creatures, and them in the order of their intrinsic worth; thus persons before things—one of the basic principles of Christian social, and in particular economic, ethics. See *City of God*, XV, 22 (probably written about 417), and *The Morals of the Catholic Church*, I, 15 (an early work, about 392).

18. In the *City of God* text he briefly defines virtue as "the order of love." To love ourselves or others for our own sakes without reference to God is disorderly; even more so is loving material things simply to enjoy them.

19. He can only avoid martyrdom (which his family wants him to do) by denying Christ, and if he does that, he is condemned—damned. The speaker (husband and father) is now assuming in imagination that he has done this. Considering that when Augustine preached there wasn't the slightest likelihood of anyone being haled off to martyrdom, the whole passage seems extraordinarily artificial. Of course, it served to make his point of precisely how Christ is to be loved more than one's nearest and dearest. Again, I suspect, we have to do with a rhetorical commonplace (see note 1), which suggests the earlier date for the sermon.

20. See Mk 10:9.

21. A rather weak attempt on my part to reproduce his play on words: *hoc non est tibi providere, sed marito invidere*—this is not providing for yourself, but grudging your husband.

22. Reading *Sed sollicita est* instead of *sollicita es*. As the text stands it clearly needs some adjustment, because it alters person in mid-course: "But you are worried about her being inveigled into a second marriage." Where does this third person suddenly come from? The obvious thing is to change "her being inveigled" (*ne illecebretur*) into the second person (*ne illecebreris*). But it is hard to see in that case how the scribal mistake could have arisen.

So I emend *sollicita es* into *sollicita est*, which represents the simplest of mistakes, and treat the sentence as an intervention by a third party in the conversation between Augustine and the woman, on the woman's side. Augustine would have acted this out clearly enough from his pulpit or his bishop's chair.

There is something rather mean about the rhetoric of this whole passage. Not Augustine at his most attractive.

23. Again a rather ungenerous passage. The point he is making is legitimate enough, but his manner of making it unpleasantly sour. Perhaps a lingering sense of guilt (emotional rather than rational) over the premature death of his own son Adeodatus was still haunting him? The Italian editor refers to the *Alcestis* of Euripides as a classical instance of an old man's, an old father's, selfishness. *King Lear* would be another. So it could well have been a set theme of the schools of rhetoric.

24. The difficult concept of predestination was going to be a painful issue between Augustine and the Pelagians from 412 onward, and indeed would become something of an obsession with him in his old age. But the casual introduction of it here is not obsessive, and doesn't necessarily imply a later date for the sermon. He blandly assumes the predestination (a favorable word, let us remem-

ber) of his interlocutor, which he probably would not have done later on. The source text is Rom 8:29.

25. Notice the slightly different form of the quotation.

26. See Ps 27:4.

27. See Ps 23:1.

28. Sir 30:23, according to the Latin text. The Greek differs considerably.

29. The Latin text here leaves out "God," and reads, "How good is Israel to the upright of heart." But this must be a mistake. It wasn't the reading of his bible (see Sermon 48, 3 *passim*), and it has nothing to do with what he is talking about.

30. A distinctly obscure sentence; "from one man" refers, presumably, to the psalmist, or else to the cantor who has recited the psalm.

31. Quoted exactly as in the Septuagint. This is quoted, not quite so exactly, in 1 Pt 1:24-25.

SERMON 66

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 11:2-11: WHEN JOHN IN CHAINS
HEARD OF THE WORKS OF THE CHRIST, ETC.

Date: 417¹

What John says about Christ

1. The reading of the holy gospel has presented us with a problem about John the Baptist. May the Lord help me to solve it for you, as he has solved it for me. John, as you heard, was praised with a testimonial from Christ himself, praised to the extent that among those born of women none has arisen greater than he.² But greater than he was the one born of the virgin.³ How much greater? Let the herald himself say how much the difference is between himself and his judge, whose herald he is. John, you see, went ahead of Christ, both in his birth and in his preaching. But he went ahead of him by way of performing a service, not by way of claiming precedence. After all, the whole retinue of court officials walks in front, and those who are at the head of the procession are the junior ones.

So what kind of testimonial did John give to Christ? Well, he said he wasn't worthy to untie the strap of his sandals.⁴ What else? We, he said, have received of his fullness (Jn 1:16).⁵ He admitted he was a lamp lit from Christ, and that's why he took refuge at his feet, to avoid being blown out by the wind of pride if he flew too high. He was in fact so great that some people thought he might be the Christ, and if he hadn't been his own witness that he wasn't, the mistake would have persisted, and people would have gone on thinking he was.⁶ What a humble man. This honor was offered him by the people, and he spurned it. People were getting the wrong ideas about his greatness, and he put himself in his place. He didn't want to be magnified by the words of men, because he had grasped the Word of God.

What Christ says about John

2. So that's what John says about Christ; what does Christ say about John? We have just heard: *He began to talk to the crowds about John: What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind?* Of course not, because John wasn't being blown around by every wind of doctrine.⁷ *But what did you*

go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? No; because John wore a rough garment; he had a garment of camel's hair, not of swan's down.⁸ *But what did you go out to see? A prophet?* Yes; and one greater than a prophet (Mt 11:7-9). Why one greater than a prophet? They had foretold the coming of the Lord whom they desired to see, and didn't see;⁹ to this man was granted what they had sought. John saw the Lord, he saw him; he pointed his finger at him, and said, *Behold the Lamb of God, behold the one who takes away the sins of the world* (Jn 1:19); look, there he is. He had already come, and he wasn't being acknowledged, and so John himself was being mistaken for him. Look, here is the one whom the patriarchs had desired to see, whom the prophets had foretold, whom the law had foreshadowed. *Behold the Lamb of God, behold the one who takes away the sins of the world.*

He gave the Lord a good testimonial, and the Lord gave him one: *Among those born of women, said the Lord, none has arisen greater than John the Baptist; but the one who is less, in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he* (Mt 11:11);¹⁰ less in age, greater in majesty. He meant himself to be understood when he said that. Very great indeed among men is John the Baptist, than who Christ alone among men is greater. But the sentence can also be punctuated, and explained as follows: *Among those born of women, none has arisen greater than John the Baptist, but the one who is less in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he;* not as I spoke it just now, *the one who is less, in the kingdom of heaven is greater.*¹¹ By the kingdom of heaven he meant where the angels are, so whoever is less among the angels is greater than John. He was recommending a kingdom to us which we should desire; he was proposing a city whose citizens we should long to be. Just think what those citizens are like!¹² How great those citizens are! Whoever is the least of the people there is greater than John. Than what John? The one than who there has arisen none greater among those born of women.

Did John have doubts about Christ?

3. We have heard a true and good testimonial, both from John about Christ and from Christ about John. So what's the meaning of John's sending his disciples to him when he was shut up in prison, shortly to be put to death, and telling his disciples, *Go and say to him, Are you the one who is to come, or are we waiting for another?* (Mt 11:2-3). Well! Is that the sum total of your praise? Have those praises turned into doubts? What are you saying, John? Who are you saying it to? Who are you, saying it?¹³ You are saying it to the judge, you are the herald, saying it. You stretched your finger out, you were the one who pointed him out, you were the one who said, *Behold the Lamb of God, behold the one who takes away the sins of the world* (Jn 1:29). You were the one who said, *We have all received of his fullness* (Jn 1:16).¹⁴ You were the one who said, *I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals* (Lk 3:16; Jn 1:27). And now you are the one who says, *Are you the one who is coming, or are we waiting for another?* Well! Isn't he the one? Who, in any case, are you? Aren't you his forerunner?

Aren't you the one of whom it was foretold, *Behold, I am sending my angel before your face, and he will prepare your way* (Mal 3:1; Mt 11:10)? How can you prepare the way, and then lose it yourself?

So John's disciples came, and the Lord said to them, *Go and tell John: The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the poor have the good news preached to them, and blessed is he who hasn't been put off by me* (Mt 11:4-6). You mustn't suppose that John had been put off by Christ. And yet that's what the words sound like. *Are you the one who is coming?* Ask the works: *The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the dead rise again, the poor have the good news preached to them.* And you ask who I am? My works, he says, are my words. Go and take back the message. *But as they were going away*—in case anyone should say, "John used to be a good man at first, and the Spirit of God abandoned him," that's why he said all this about him after their departure; after the departure of the ones John had sent, Christ praised John.

John's disciples become Christ's disciples

4. So then, what's the meaning of this obscure problem? Let the sun, from which that lamp was lit, shed its light.¹⁵ The solution it provides is obviously the right solution. John had his own disciples apart, not that he was forming himself a separate party, but that he was a witness ready to testify.¹⁶ You see, it was important for such a man, who also had his own band of disciples, to bear witness to Christ, because his disciples could have grown jealous of Christ, if they hadn't been able to see him.¹⁷

So then, because John's disciples regarded their master John as a very great man, they were astonished, not to say skeptical, when they heard the testimonials he gave to Christ. As he was soon to die, he wanted them to be convinced by Christ himself. They, after all, were doubtless saying to one another, "He says all these marvelous things about that man, who doesn't say them about himself."¹⁸ *"Go and say to him*—not that I have any doubts, but so that you may find out for yourselves. *Go and say to him*—hear from the man himself what I'm in the habit of telling you; you've heard the herald, get the judge's confirmation. *Go and say to him, Are you the one who is coming, or are we waiting for another?*" They went, and they said it—for their own sake, not for John's. And for their benefit Christ said, *"The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed, the dead rise again, the poor have the good news preached to them.* You have seen me, acknowledge me. You've seen the deeds, acknowledge the doer. *And blessed is he who has not been put off by me.* But I'm talking about you, not John." After all, to show us he wasn't talking about John, *As they were going away, he began to talk to the crowds about John;* he, the Truth, truthfully true praises spoke about him.

Care for the poor

5. I think that's enough for solving that problem. Let's be content with having found a satisfactory solution. Bear the poor in mind; do what you haven't done yet. Believe me, you are not losing anything; in fact the only money you do lose is what you don't bring to the chariot.¹⁹ Now we have to pay back to the poor what you have offered—those of you who *have* offered anything! And we've got a much smaller sum here than you usually offer; shake off your sluggish reluctance, I have become a beggar for the beggars. What's in it for me? Let me be a beggar for the beggars, so that you may be numbered in the number of the sons.²⁰

NOTES

1. The sermon is not found in any ancient collections, but was first published by the Maurists from one old manuscript they found in the library of Colbert. The Italian editor offers no suggestion about where or when it was preached. As for where, I have not the slightest doubt it was preached in Augustine's own Church of Hippo. The last paragraph is surely the words of a pastor addressing his own people, whom he knows very well, and can be quite sharp with. It would have been rather bad manners for him to speak in that tone to another bishop's congregation. And as for when, I would be inclined to put it fairly late in his life, about 417 sometime in his sixties, anyway. But that is no more than a hunch.

His solution of the "problem" of John the Baptist will probably strike the reader as rather artificial. Indeed, modern readers and commentators of the gospel wouldn't regard it as a genuine problem, wouldn't have many difficulties about John in prison having sudden doubts about Jesus. And yet, I think Augustine was onto a real point about John's disciples. There very probably was rivalry between them and the disciples of Jesus, long after both masters had disappeared from the scene. For the first Christians, the most convenient thing would have been to dismiss John as a false prophet. But they couldn't do this, precisely because of the praises Jesus had heaped upon him, which must be among the most clearly authentic *ipsissima verba* of Jesus; no early Christian writer could have had any conceivable reason for inventing them! What John says about Jesus, on the other hand, represents the early Christian solution to the "problem" of John the Baptist. He is the forerunner of the Messiah, the one foretold in Malachi's prophecy, he must decrease (that is, his disciples must fade away, join the Christians), while Christ (that is, the disciples of Jesus, the Christians) must increase.

2. See Mt 11:11.

3. In Latin a "virgin" is distinguished from a "woman" (*mulier*); a *femina* becomes a *mulier* when she ceases to be a *virgo*. So Augustine interprets what Jesus says about John as excluding Jesus himself, and his own birth. In fact, this wouldn't work in Aramaic or Hebrew, or even Greek, any more than it would in English. See Gal 4:4, *God sent his Son, born of a woman*, which Augustine always has to explain rather laboriously when he comes to it. See, for example, the fragment Sermon 49A, note 2.

4. See Lk 3:16; Jn 1:17.

5. This sentence is not usually attributed to the Baptist, but to the evangelist. Augustine leaves out the word "all"; so I suspect he is interpreting the "we" to mean "I," John the Baptist speaking for himself.

6. See Jn 1:20.

7. See Eph 4:14.

8. See Mt 3:4.

9. See Lk 10:23-24.

10. For the unusual punctuation, see the next note.

11. Augustine talks about two ways of "distinguishing"—that is, punctuating—the sentence, and I have indicated them. The one he prefers, or gives first, is not the received one—and is certainly wrong. But to give the same punctuation of the text all through, as the Maurists do (at least as their text is reproduced in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, PL 38, 431), is to make nonsense of what the preacher is saying. In this craven (or thoughtless) policy they are slavishly followed by the Italian edition, and the Italian translation seems to miss Augustine's point in consequence.

12. They are like the angels (see Mk 12:25), and therefore greater than John the Baptist on earth.

13. Reading *qui dicis?* instead of the *quid dicis?* of the text, which simply repeats the first question. That Augustine said *qui dicis?* is as certain as anything can be, from the answer he gives: *Judici dicis* (answering *cui dicis?*), *praeco dicis* (answering *qui dicis?* but not answering *quid dicis?*). That the stenographer should have heard and recorded *quid dicis?* is hardly astonishing.

14. Is the "all" here due to scribal interference (unconscious rather than deliberate), assimilating the quotation to the Vulgate? I am inclined to think so; see note 7 above.

15. See Jn 5:35. See above, section 1, paragraph 2.

16. An obscure sentence, in which he is being just a little too clever: *non separatus, sed testis paratus*. I am interpreting the passive participles as "middles"; literally, "not separating disciples for himself, but being a witness preparing them for himself." John wasn't setting up in opposition to Jesus (Augustine's argument goes), so why did he need his own disciples? In order to carry on his own work of witnessing to Jesus.

17. Another rather compressed sentence, in which I have felt it necessary to emend the text, which runs, as it stands: ... *qui et ipse discipulos colligebat* (who also had his own band of disciples), *qui ei poterat invidere, si non possit videre* (literally, "who could also have been jealous, if he could not see"). The second "who" clause, being in the singular, must also refer to John the Baptist. The Italian translator assumes it does so refer to him, and makes some sense of it by making *si non possit videre* mean "if he could not bear him." I don't understand how that can legitimately be done. So I prefer to emend the singular verbs in this clause to plurals, and read *qui ei poterant invidere, si non possint videre*. The reading in the text could have arisen very easily by a scribal or even a stenographical slip.

18. Or, "he (John Baptist) doesn't say them about himself"—so the Italian. But that doesn't seem to be the point of the argument. Augustine goes on to have John the Baptist saying to them, "You've heard me saying it, go and hear it from the horse's mouth"—if you will excuse the irreverence.

19. "The chariot," I guess, was a name for some sort of collecting box—perhaps an acolyte pulled it round the congregation.

The Italian translator takes it literally, for the chariots that were raced in the circus, but he can only make sense of this by ignoring the negative "don't" in the sentence—*perditis quod non fertis ad quadrigam*. I have a recollection of coming across the word in an exactly similar context in one of his homilies on the psalms, but I cannot remember which one.

20. See Mt 8:12; also 17:25-26. There is a faint echo of these texts here, or at least of the phrase "sons of the kingdom."

SERMON 67

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 11:25: *I CONFESS TO YOU, FATHER, LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, BECAUSE YOU HAVE HIDDEN THESE THINGS FROM THE WISE, ETC.*

Date: 412¹

The meaning of the word confess

1. When the holy gospel was read, we heard how the Lord Jesus exulted in the Spirit and said, *I confess to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the knowing, and revealed them to little ones* (Mt 11:25).² For the moment let's just think about the Lord's words that far, and do it, of course, seriously, carefully, and above all devoutly, and the first thing we shall realize is that when we read about confession in the scriptures, we don't always have to take it as a word for sinners. I really had to say this and warn your graces about it, because no sooner was this word out of the reader's mouth, than there followed the sound of the beating of your breasts, that is, when you heard what the Lord said, "I confess to you, Father." The moment the word was spoken, "I confess," you all beat your breasts. Now breast-beating means, doesn't it, rebuking what's hidden in the breast, and chastising "hidden" sin by open punishment?

Why did you do this, if not because you heard "I confess to you, Father"? You heard "I confess"; you didn't pay attention to who is confessing. So now, get this straight. If "I confess" was said by Christ, from whom all sin is far, far removed, then it isn't only a word for sinners, but also sometimes for praisers. So we confess, whether we are praising God or accusing ourselves. Both sorts of confession are truly religious, whether you are blaming yourself, who are not entirely sinless, or praising him, who is incapable of sin.³

Accusing yourself in confession amounts to praising God

2. In fact, if we think it out rightly, blaming yourself is praising him. Why after all are you already confessing in bringing a charge against your sin? Why, in bringing a charge against yourself, are you confessing, if not because after being dead you have come to life? Scripture says, as a matter of fact, *From the dead, as though from one who is not, confession passes away* (Sir 17:28). If

confession passes away from the dead, anyone who confesses is alive, and if he's confessing sin, then of course he has come back to life from death. If you have come back to life when you confess your sin, who raised you up? Nobody who's dead can raise himself up.

The only one who could raise himself up was the one who didn't die, when his flesh died. Even in this case he raised up what had died. He raised himself up, because he was alive in himself, though he had died in his flesh which was to be raised. You see, it wasn't only the Father who raised up the Son, about which the apostle said, *Therefore God also exalted him* (Phil 2:9); but the Lord too raised up himself, that is, his body, which is why he said, *Pull down this temple, and in three days I will raise it up* (Jn 2:19).

But sinners are dead, especially ones who are buried under a pile of bad habits, rather like Lazarus was buried.⁴ I mean, it wasn't just a case of his being dead; he had also been buried. So then, any who are buried under a pile of bad habits, of bad life, namely of all sorts of earth-bound cravings, to the extent that the miserable thing said in one of the psalms is verified about them, *The fool has said in his heart, There is no God* (Ps 14:1; 53:1), these people become like the one of whom it is said, *From the dead, as though from one who is not, confession passes away* (Sir 17:28). And who will raise them up, who but the one who cried out, when the stone was moved aside, *Lazarus, come out here* (Jn 11:43)? And what does coming out here mean, but bringing out here what was hidden in there? When you confess, you come out here; you couldn't come out here unless you were alive; you couldn't be alive unless you had been brought back to life. So accusing yourself in confession amounts to praising God.

The church unbinds us and lets us go

3. So someone says, "What's the use of the Church, if you can confess, and be brought back to life by the voice of the Lord, and come out straightaway?" "What use is the Church to you as you confess, the Church to which the Lord said, *What you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*" (Mt 18:18)?⁵ Look at Lazarus' case; he came out, all tied up. He was already alive, by confessing, but he wasn't yet walking around freely, being still entangled with the bandages. So what does the Church do, told as it has been, *Whatever you loose shall be loosed?* What the Lord went on at once to tell the disciples, of course: *Unbind him and let him go* (Jn 11:44).

No room for the devil

4. So, whether we are accusing ourselves, or whether we are praising God, we are in fact praising God twice. If we accuse ourselves religiously, we are certainly praising God. When we praise God, we are proclaiming him as the one who is without sin,⁶ but when we are accusing ourselves, we are giving the glory to the one through whom we have risen. If you do this, the enemy can find no

chance of getting round you in front of the judge. After all, since you yourself will be the accuser, and the Lord will be the liberator, what else is there left for the enemy to be but a crooked lawyer?

So that man in the psalms was quite right to provide himself here⁷ with a protection against his enemies—not the obvious ones of flesh and blood, which we should be sorry for rather than wary of, but against those enemies the apostle urges us to arm ourselves against: *Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood*, that is to say, against men whom you see to be raging against you. They are only tools, another is using them; they are instruments, there's another who is playing them. *The devil, it says, put himself into the heart of Judas, to betray the Lord* (Jn 13:2). Someone is going to say, "So what did I do that's wrong?" Listen to the apostle: *Do not give the devil room* (Eph 4:27). You, with your bad will, have given the devil room; he's come in, he's taken possession, he uses you. If you hadn't given him room, he wouldn't have taken possession.

You detest an invisible enemy by believing

5. So he warns us with the words, *Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against princes and powers* (Eph 6:12). Someone could assume he meant against the kings of the earth, against the secular authorities. Why should he, though? Aren't these flesh and blood? He has already said "not against flesh and blood." Forget about any human beings at all. So what other enemies are there? *Against princes and powers of spiritual wickedness, controllers of the world*. It seems as if he has given more room to the devil and his angels—he has given them much more, by calling them controllers of the world. But in case you get him wrong, he explains what world they are controllers of: *controllers of the world of this darkness* (Eph 6:12). What is the world of this darkness? Of those whom he controls, his lovers and unbelievers, the world is full enough. The apostle calls them "this darkness." Their controllers are the devil and his angels.

This darkness isn't natural, it isn't unalterable; it changes, and becomes light. They believe and in believing are enlightened. When this happens with them, they will hear, *For you were once darkness, but now light in the Lord* (Eph 5:8). When you were darkness, it wasn't in the Lord; again, when you are light, it is not in yourself, but in the Lord. What, after all, have you got that you have not received?

So because the enemies are invisible, they have to be fought to a standstill with invisible weapons. Of course, you defeat a visible enemy by striking him; you defeat an invisible one by believing. The human enemy is visible, and it is a visible action also to strike him. The diabolical enemy is invisible, and it is an invisible action to believe. So there is an invisible battle against invisible enemies.

Call upon the Lord, and you will be saved from your enemies

6. From these enemies, then, how does someone in the psalms say he has found safety? That's what I started talking about, and I found it necessary to

deal with these enemies in some detail. So now we have recognized the enemies, let's look at the safeguard. *Praising, I will call upon the Lord, and I shall be saved from my enemies* (Ps 18:3). There you've got something you can do. Praising, call—but remember it's the Lord you praise and call upon. Because if you praise yourself, you won't be saved from your enemies. Praising, call upon the Lord, and you will be saved from your enemies.

What does the Lord say himself? *A sacrifice of praise will give me glory, and there the way is, in which I will show him my salvation* (Ps 50:23). Where is the way? In a sacrifice of praise. Don't put a foot outside this way. Stick to the way, don't turn off the way, off the praise of the Lord by so much as a toenail, let alone a foot.⁹ You see, if you want to wander off this way and praise yourself instead of the Lord, you won't be safe from those enemies, because it says of them, *They set snares for me beside the path* (Ps 140:5). So, whatever good you imagine you get from yourself, you have strayed from the praise of God. So why be surprised if the enemy deceives you, when you are your own deceiver? Listen to the apostle: *Anyone who thinks he is something, when he is nothing, is deceiving himself* (Gal 6:3).

Mercy brought forward what patient misery put back

7. So now attend to the Lord confessing: *I confess to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth.* I confess to you—I praise you. I praise you, I don't accuse myself." As regards that man, taken up by the Word, it's all grace, it's unique grace, it's perfect grace. What did that man who is Christ deserve, if you take away grace, and such grace as was needed for Christ to be one person, and to be the person we know he was?¹⁰ Take away this grace, and what is Christ but a man? What is he, but merely what you are? He took to himself a soul, he took to himself a body, he took to himself a complete human being; the Lord fits this to himself, the Lord makes one person with the slave. What a tremendous grace this is! Christ in heaven, Christ on earth; Christ simultaneously both in heaven and on earth. Christ with the Father, Christ in the virgin's womb; Christ on the cross, Christ in the underworld, rescuing some of the dead; on that very same day Christ in paradise with the thief who confessed.

And how did the thief deserve to be there, except by sticking to that way, in which God showed him his salvation? Take care your foot doesn't stray from it. By accusing himself, you see, he praised God and made his life blessed. Indeed, he was sure of the Lord, and said to him, *Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom* (Lk 23:42). He was thinking of his crimes, and reckoned it would be a great thing even if he had to wait to the very end to be forgiven them. The Lord, however, immediately on his saying "Remember me"—but when? "when you come into your kingdom"—immediately said, *Amen, I tell you, today you shall be with me in paradise* (Lk 23:43). Mercy brought forward what patient misery put back.

Who are the little ones? The humble

8. So listen to the Lord confessing: *I confess to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth.* What do I confess? What do I praise you for? (Because this confession, as I have been saying, is a matter of praising.) *Because you have hidden these things from the wise and the knowing, and revealed them to little ones.* What's the meaning of this, brothers? Understand it from the opposite. "You have hidden these things," he says, "from the wise and the knowing," and he didn't go on, "You have revealed them to the foolish and ignorant." But he said, "You have hidden these things, indeed, from the wise and the knowing, and revealed them to *little ones*." In mockery of the wise and the knowing, arrogant, falsely considered grand, in fact merely full of themselves, he opposed to them not the foolish, not the ignorant, but *little ones*. Who are the little ones? The humble.

So: *You have hidden these things from the wise and the prudent.* By the wise and the prudent he has himself explained that the proud are to be understood, when he goes on, *You have revealed them to little ones.* So: "You have hidden them from the not little ones." What's the meaning of "not little ones"? "Not humble." And what does "not humble" mean, but of course "proud"?

O wonderful way of the Lord! Either it wasn't there, or else it was concealed in order to be revealed to us.¹¹ Why did the Lord exult? Because it was revealed to little ones. We must be little ones, because if we want to be big, as though we were wise and knowing, this thing isn't revealed to us. Who are the big ones? The wise and the knowing. *Calling themselves wise, they became foolish* (Rom 1:22). You have a remedy in the opposite procedure. If by calling yourself wise, you have become foolish, call yourself foolish and you will be wise. But say it; say it, and say it inwardly, because it is just as you say. If you say it, don't say it to men and fail to say it to God.

Of course, as far as you are concerned, and your capacities, you are in darkness. I mean, what else is being foolish, but being in mental darkness? In any case, that's what he said of them: *Calling themselves wise, they became foolish.* And before they said this, what else had he said about them? *And their foolish minds were darkened* (Rom 1:21). Say that you are not your own light. At the most you are an eye; you are not light. What's the use of an open and healthy eye, if there's no light? So say it; you don't get any light from yourself, and cry out what is written, *You will light my lamp, O Lord;* with your light, Lord, *you will light up my darkness* (Ps 18:28). I mean, all I have is darkness; you are the light dispelling the darkness, lighting up me; it's not from me that light comes to me, but the only original, uncreated light¹² is in you.

Christ is light; John is a lamp

9. Thus John too, the friend of the bridegroom, was thought to be Christ, was thought to be light. *He was not the light, but in order to bear witness about the light* (Jn 1:8).¹³ And what was the light? *That was the true light*—and what is the mark of being true?—which *enlightens every man* (Jn 1:9). If the true light

is the one that enlightens every man, it therefore also enlightens John, who rightly says, rightly confesses, *But we have received from his fullness (Jn 1:16).*¹⁴ Tell me if he is saying anything different from *You will light my lamp, O Lord.* Finally, once lit, he bore witness. For the sake of the blind, the lamp bore witness to the daylight. Here is proof that he is a lamp: *You, he says, sent to John, and were willing to exult for a time in his light; he was a burning and shining lamp (Jn 5:33,35).* He was a lamp, that is, something lit up, lit in order to give light.

What can be lit can also be put out. But in order not to be put out, it should not be exposed to the wind of pride. Therefore: *I confess to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and the knowing,* from those who thought they were light, and they were in fact darkness; and because they were darkness and thought they were light, they weren't even able to be lit up. But those who were darkness and confessed that they were darkness were little ones, not big ones; they were humble, not proud. So they were rightly able to say, *You will light up my lamp, O Lord.* They recognized themselves, they praised the Lord, they did not turn aside from the way of salvation. Praising they called upon the Lord, and they were saved from their enemies.¹⁵

Prayer

10. Turning to the Lord God the Father Almighty with pure hearts, let us give him hearty and abundant thanks as much as we can in our littleness, beseeching him in his singular kindness graciously to hear our prayers in his good pleasure; also by his power to drive the enemy away from our actions and our thoughts; to increase our faith, direct our minds, grant us spiritual thoughts, and bring us to his bliss, through Jesus Christ his Son. Amen.¹⁶

NOTES

1. There is nothing to tell where this sermon was preached. The formula with which it ends, the prayer "Turning to the Lord etc., " is to be found (not usually recorded in full) after several sermons; one, sermon 15A was preached at Hippo Diarrhytus, another, sermon 34, at Carthage. So it doesn't seem to indicate a local custom of any particular church—just possibly of the churches of the province of Africa Proconsularis (modern Tunisia), as distinct from those of Numidia, in which Augustine's church of Hippo Regius was situated (Eastern Algeria). Of Sermon 63, which also ends with it, I suggested it was preached in or around Hippo, but there was no definite evidence for that. As for the date, one scholar says, very indefinitely, "after 400." In note 10 I suggest about 412, because of what the preacher has to say about the grace of Jesus Christ (what in later terms is called the grace of the hypostatic union), which I consider represents a deeper reflection on the subject, provoked by the Pelagians.

2. But his mentioning Jesus exulting in the Spirit indicates that he was more probably preaching on the parallel text, Lk 10:21 etc. The Maurists, as usual whenever there was any choice, opted for Matthew.

3. Augustine frequently makes this point. See Sermons 29.2; 177.5; Expositions of the Psalms 29.2,22; 78.17; 94.4 (these will be the *Vulgate* psalm numberings; in the RSV they will be Psalms 30, 79 and 95).

4. See Jn 11:17. Augustine seems here to assume (though he must have known it was not the case) that Lazarus was buried in a grave, with earth piled on top of him. But when it came to raising him up, Jesus didn't say "Dig him up," but "Take away the stone." Lazarus was interred in a burial chamber, a tomb, not buried in a grave.

5. See Jn 20:23. The quotation is not of the famous saying to Peter, Mt 16:19, as the Italian edition assumes; the verbs are in the second person *plural*. Here Augustine is not simply justifying the existence and the necessity of the "institutional Church." He is also stressing the social or communal dimension of redemption, including the forgiveness of sins. He is warning us against excessive individualism in religion, as if this were all just a matter of "between me and my God." Such individualism, it would seem, was a real temptation to Christians then, though nothing like so common a one as it is today. The whole passage from which he quotes this sentence, Mt 18:15-20, should be read, where "the Church" of verse 17 is clearly the local community, directly involved in the matter of the forgiveness of sins.

6. See Heb 4:16. In talking of God, Augustine is very often thinking primarily of Christ.

7. In the praise of God. He is referring to Ps 18:3, as we shall discover at the beginning of section 6, when he gets back to the point. Right here, he immediately shunts himself onto a siding in a long digression, with its own "sub-sidetracks."

8. See 1 Cor 4:7.

9. Nearly all his congregation, if they weren't barefoot, would have been wearing sandals—without socks.

10. That is, the person of the Word, God the Son. The point of this digression, lasting till the end of the section, is I suppose to explain why Christ alone did not have to praise God by accusing himself. And the explanation is interesting; it isn't just the fact—the Christian conviction attested by the New Testament—that Christ was without sin (see note 6 above). It is that the man Jesus Christ was without sin *because* he was the unique grace of being the one human being to be united as one person with the divine Word, God the Son. The supreme instance of grace, the primary recipient of God's free gift of himself, of his favor, is Christ.

Also, I imagine Augustine had in mind here the continuation of his text, which he comments on in the next sermon (68.9): *All things have been revealed to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him* (Mt 11:27).

The explicit reference to Christ's personal reception of grace suggests to me a date for the sermon considerably later than 400, a date after he had begun to confront Pelagius—412 at the earliest.

11. The meaning of the first part of this sentence, the first alternative, escapes me.

12. *lumen non participans*. I presume it means what I have translated it as, but it is a curious expression, in a somewhat incomplete sentence, where he appears to have lost count of his negatives.

13. He was thought to be Christ (and by implication, the light); see Jn 1:20. He called himself friend of the bridegroom, Jn 3:29.

14. See Sermon 66 above, note 5.

15. See Ps 18:3.

16. For this ending, see also Sermons 15A and 63. A slightly fuller version of it is given by the Maurists at the end of Sermon 34.

SERMON 68

ON THE CHAPTER OF THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW WHERE THE LORD SAYS, *I CONFESS TO YOU, FATHER, LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, BECAUSE YOU HAVE HIDDEN THESE THINGS FROM THE WISE AND THE KNOWING, ETC.*

Date: 425-430¹

1. As you no doubt remember, we also heard this reading of the holy gospel yesterday, on Sunday, but I especially wanted it read again today, because there was such a crowd here yesterday, squashed even in the passages, that they were rather more restless than usual, and didn't give my voice a chance, and it's not strong enough to carry except in a profound silence. So then today, with the Lord's help, I have decided we must discuss what we left out yesterday, and I must deal with it to the best of my somewhat feeble ability. It isn't that I begrudged it to the crowd here yesterday, but that with my feeble voice I can't cope with a crowd. So now, assist me with your attention in the presence of the Lord our God, so that he may grant me what I am to say, and grant you something to hear for your profit.

The meaning of confession

2. The Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, God always, man for our sake, having become what he made—I mean, he became man, having made man—says to the Father, *I confess to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth* (Mt 11:25). “You are my Father, Lord of heaven and earth”; Father of the one through whom all things were made. The whole of creation, you see, is briefly unfolded in these two words, heaven and earth. That's why it says in the first book of God's scriptures, *In the beginning God made heaven and earth* (Gn 1:1); and also, *My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth* (Ps 121:2). But by the word “heaven” is to be understood whatever is in the heavens, and by the word “earth” whatever is on the earth; so by naming these two parts of creation, you don't leave out a single creature, because it's either here, or it's there.

Now the Son says to the Father, “I confess,” and thereby reminds us that confession doesn't only have to be made to God about sins. Very often, I mean, no sooner are the words of scripture pronounced, “Confess to the Lord,”² than

many of the listeners start beating their breasts; they assume that the only thing confession means is what penitents normally do, confessing their sins, looking for their deserts from God. I don't mean what they deserve to suffer, but what he in his mercy is prepared to do.³ But if there wasn't also a confession of praise,⁴ the one who doesn't have any sin to confess would not have said "I confess to you, Father." There is also a book of the bible where it says, *Confess to the Lord, and this is what you shall say in confession: All things are the works of the Lord, for they are very good* (Sir 39:15-16). Here too it's a confession of praise, not of faults. So when you praise God, you are confessing to God; when you find fault with your sins in God's presence, you are confessing to God. But it all redounds to the praise of the creator, both your proclaiming him and your blaming yourself.

Who are the wise and the knowing? Who are the little ones?

3. That it redounds to his praise when you proclaim him, of course, nobody questions, but how your blaming yourself also redounds to his praise, you may very well wonder. Here is how to put it and understand it in a nutshell: when you blame yourself for a sin, you are praising him who made you without sin, because if he had made you with sin, you wouldn't be blaming yourself as the sinner, but him as the creator. So to proclaim God is to praise him, and to blame yourself is also to praise God, and each is a subject of confession.

We have heard the Son of God saying, *I confess to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth*. What does he confess to him? What does he praise him for? *Because you have hidden these things from the wise, he says, and the knowing, and have revealed them to little ones* (Mt 11:25). Who are the wise and the knowing? Who are the little ones? What did he hide from the wise and the knowing, and reveal to the little ones? By the wise and the knowing he means the ones about whom Paul says, *Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the inquirer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?* (1 Cor 1:20). Perhaps you're still wondering, even now, "Who are these?" Perhaps they are the ones who indulge in a great many arguments about God, and say things that are untrue about him; full of their own learning, they have been totally unable to find and recognize God.⁵

Someone may perhaps say that these are the ones meant by the apostle Paul, when he says, *Where is the wise man? Where the scribe? Where the inquirer of this age?* Let these indeed also be the ones; yes, understand too those who have been totally unable to recognize God, and instead of God whose being is incomprehensible and invisible, have supposed that the air or the ether⁶ is God, that the sun is God, that any thing eminently sublime among creatures is God; observing the vastness and beauty and power of some creatures, they stopped there. They didn't find the creator, being lost in admiration for the things that were made. It's certainly to the point to take such people as signified here.

Look for the creator

4. Nonetheless, my dearest friends, it is rather more surprising that we can find holy scripture finding fault in one place or other even with those who have recognized him, and accusing them of folly, and making fun of their false wisdom. As for those who didn't recognize the creator from the creation, the book of Wisdom reproves them where it says that *they supposed the circuit of the stars, the sun, the moon, to be the gods that govern the world* (Wis 13:2). And of these it was said that, while they are preferable to people who worshiped idols and imagined that human creations, not divine ones, are gods, yet they too were to be blamed, so that it went on, *Again, not even they were to be pardoned* (Wis 13:8). Now of course in comparison with people who hold human creations to be gods, those who hold divine creations to be gods are certainly better. After all, it's a carpenter that made an idol, it's God that made the sun; in comparison with the one who thinks that something a carpenter made is a god, far better is the one who thinks something God made is a god.

But for all that, notice how these people too are shown up, and how properly they are blamed: *Again, he says, not even they are to be pardoned, for if they were able to show such ability that they could calculate the course of time, how did they fail to find the more readily its Lord?* (Wis 13:9). They were blamed for wasting their time and their opportunities for reflection on examining and to some extent measuring creation; they traced the courses of the constellations, the revolutions of the stars,⁷ the wanderings of the heavenly bodies, so that by complicated calculations they achieved such scientific precision, that they could predict an eclipse of the sun, an eclipse of the moon, and it happened when they predicted it would, on the very day and the very hour, and to the precise extent that they had predicted. What marvelous diligence, what meticulous skill!

But when they sought out the creator, who wasn't situated far away from them, they didn't find him; if they had found him, they would have had him in themselves. It's as if someone were to come into this building and start counting the pillars and measuring how many feet tall they were, working out the height of the roof, the breadth of the paving, and the thickness of the walls, and were to inform you of the measurements of everything, which you were quite ignorant of. But you at least knew by whom the building had been constructed, and he didn't know, and being quite ignorant about the facts of life didn't think this building had been put up by men, but guessed that these pillars, this roof, these walls existed of their own force and nature, without any agent; or else he attributed that power to a particular part of this building, and felt that the others had been constructed by it. And when you said "A man made this building," he said, "What man? When could a man have built this building? It's this high roof that you see, the roof that built all these lowly things you observe." He would strike you, I don't say as silly, but as positively raving.

And what good would it do him that he calculated for you the measurement of all the pillars and the mathematics of the whole building, and told you what you hadn't known? A man graced with a better kind of knowledge, you knew the agent responsible for this building, after all, it means more to know that a

man made it, that it was made by reason, that it was constructed by a rational mind, that planning preceded this pile, than to know how many feet tall a pillar is, or how many pillars there are, or how wide the paving is, or the roof.

Observe what the creator made, love the one who made it.

5. I imagine your graces can tell the difference between these kinds of knowledge. I mean, even this isn't knowing very much, that you know a man made it, if you attribute this building to the man's body. It's knowing something important if you know it was made by a plan, by a rational mind, where this building existed before it could be seen with the eyes. You see, first came the plan to build, and then the result followed; first came what you couldn't see, to produce what you could see.⁸ So now you see the building, you praise the plan; you look at what you can see, you praise what you cannot see, and what you can't see is more important than what you can.

And so it was a very good thing and absolutely right to blame those who were able to investigate the mathematical relations of the constellations, their time cycles, to tell the eclipses of the great lights⁹ and predict them; it was right to blame them, because they didn't find the one by whom these things were made and set in order because they didn't take the trouble to look for him. You, however, shouldn't care very much if you are ignorant of the circuits of the constellations and of heavenly, or earthly, bodies. Observe the beauty of the world, and praise the plan of the creator. Observe what he made, love the one who made it. Hold on to this maxim above all; love the one who made it, because he also made you, his lover, in his own image.

So it's not very surprising, is it, that from wise people such as those, so taken up with creatures that they didn't want to be bothered with looking for the creator and couldn't find him either, that from them should be hidden the things about which Christ said, *You have hidden these things from the wise and the knowing?* Much more surprising is what you are going to hear, that the wise and the knowing who were able to recognize the creator were also rebuked. *The wrath of God, it says, is being revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and injustice of men, who hold down the truth in iniquity.* You wonder, perhaps, what truth they hold down in iniquity? *Because what is known of God is manifest among them.* How is it manifest? He goes on to tell us: *For God manifested it to them.* You are still wondering how he manifested it to people to whom he hadn't given the law? So how did he do it? *For his invisible things from the foundation of the world being understood through the things that have been made are to be clearly perceived* (Rom 1:18-20). So this is how he manifested it, because his invisible things, being understood from the foundation of the world through the things that have been made, are to be clearly perceived.

A great big book—the book of created nature

6. Others, in order to find God, will read a book. Well, as a matter of fact there is a certain great big book, the book of created nature. Look carefully at it

top and bottom, observe it, read it. God did not make letters of ink for you to recognize him in; he set before your eyes all these things he has made. Why look for a louder voice? Heaven and earth cries out to you, "God made me."¹⁰ You can read what Moses wrote; in order to write it, what did Moses read, a man living in time? Observe heaven and earth in a religious spirit.

So there were some people, not like Moses the servant of God, not like the many prophets who beheld these things and understood them, aided by the Spirit of God, the Spirit they quaffed in faith, drank from with a devout and godly thirst, belched up again through the mouth of the inner man.¹¹ No, they weren't like that, they were quite different, able indeed to arrive at an understanding of the creator through this creation, and to say about the things God has made, "Look at what he has made, what he governs and holds together; he himself, having made it all, fills what he has made with his presence." They were capable of saying this; as a matter of fact, the apostle Paul mentioned them in the Acts of the Apostles, where he had just said about God, *For in him we live and move and are*, and because he was speaking among Athenians, where these very learned men were settled, he immediately added, *As also some of your own people have said* (Acts 17:28).¹²

What they said is certainly not trivial, that in him we live and move and are. So in what way were they different, for what reason were they censured? Why was it right to blame them? Listen to the apostle's words, which I had earlier begun to quote: *The wrath of God*, he says, *is being revealed upon all ungodliness*—of those, that is, who hadn't received the law—*upon all ungodliness and injustice of men, who hold down the truth in iniquity*. What truth? *Because what is known of God is manifest among them*. Who is manifesting it? *For God manifested it to them*. How did he manifest it? *For his invisible things from the foundation of the world, being understood through the things that have been made, are to be clearly perceived, as also his everlasting might and divinity*. Why did he manifest it? *That they might be without excuse*. Well, if he manifested it in order that they might be without excuse, what have they got to be blamed for? *Because, while recognizing God, they did not glorify him as God*. What do you mean by saying they did not glorify him as God? *Nor did they give thanks* (Rom 1:20-21).

So glorifying God means giving thanks to God. Certainly it does. What after all could be worse than that being created in his image, and having got to know God, you should be ungrateful? Yes this, this undoubtedly is what glorifying God means, giving thanks to God. The faithful know where and when the words are said, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God." And who do give thanks to the Lord, but the ones who lift up their hearts to the Lord?¹³

The humble—the little ones

7. With all this talking among yourselves¹⁴ there are some of you who are listening and can't hear, but they mustn't get angry with me, when they are causing their own distraction.

So those people are to be blamed; they are without excuse, *because while*

recognizing God, they did not glorify him as God, nor did they give thanks. But what did they do? *But they faded away in their thoughts.* What made them fade away? It can only have been because they were proud. Smoke too fades away, as it surges upward; and the fire shines more brightly and gains in strength, as it catches hold at humble ground level. *They faded away in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened.* Smoke too, while it is higher than the fire, is dark. Finally, notice what follows, and see what the whole matter springs from: *For calling themselves wise, they became foolish* (Rom 1:20-22). By arrogating to themselves what God had bestowed on them, they forfeited what God had given.

So he hid himself from the proud, God who through his creation had given those diligently seeking the creator hints of himself alone. So it was well said by the Lord, *You have hidden these things from the wise and the knowing;* whether from those who with their complex calculations and skillful researches made such thorough investigations into created nature, but failed totally to recognize the creator, or from those who recognized God but did not glorify him as God or give thanks, and were unable to see things straight and as they are, because they were proud.

So, *You have hidden these things from the wise and the knowing, and have revealed them to the little ones.* What little ones? The humble. He says, *Upon whom shall my Spirit rest? Upon one who is humble and quiet and trembles at my words* (Is 66:2). At these words Peter trembled, Plato didn't; let the fisherman keep what the great and famous philosopher lost. *You have hidden these things from the wise and the knowing, and have revealed them to the little ones.* You have hidden them from the proud and revealed them to the humble.

So what are we, however important we are? If we are humble, we shall deserve to be given the bliss of seeing God fully face to face provided we deserve to be counted among the little ones. *Even so, Father,* he says, exulting in the Holy Spirit—he approved, he was pleased about it, he applauded its being so, he applauded its having been made so—*even so, Father, because thus it was decreed in your presence* (Mt 11:26).

Christian grace

8. In his saying, *You have hidden these things from the wise and the knowing, and revealed them to the little ones*, we have heard who the wise and the knowing are from whom you have hidden them, and who the little ones are to whom you have revealed them. So now, what are these things? After all, when he said this, *You have hidden these things from the wise and the knowing, and revealed them to the little ones*, he wasn't thinking of the sky and the earth and indicating them with a wave of the hand, so to say, when he said "these things." I mean, there isn't anybody, is there, who doesn't see these things? The good see them, the bad see them too, because *he makes his sun rise upon the good and the bad* (Mt 5:45). So what are these things, about which he said, *You have hidden these things from the wise and the knowing, and revealed them to the little ones?* What

can they be except what he goes on to add, and say, *Even so, Father, because thus it was decreed in your presence?* Here he applauded, and it pleased him. So what are these things?

*All things have been handed over to me by my Father.*¹⁵ This Christian grace, that all things were handed over by his Father, has escaped the notice of all the wise ones of this world. Not only those who were so preoccupied with intense, and excessive, curiosity about creatures, whether earthly or heavenly ones, that they neglected to seek and were incapable of finding the creator, but also those who were able to reach out in thought from creation and from things that could be seen, from visible things, that is, to him by whom they were made; they all failed to realize the truth of what is said here, *All things have been handed over to me by my Father.* Moses saw this, the prophets saw it, the patriarchs saw it; those great philosophers, such clever debaters and investigators, pouring out their words like thunderstorms, were totally ignorant of it. *This was the mystery which was hidden from of old in God, but is now made plain to his saints* (Col 1:26),¹⁶ to his little ones, thus to his humble ones, upon whom his Spirit rests, to those who are quiet and tremble at his words (Is 66:2). *All things*, he says, *have been handed over to me by my Father.*

The Son reveals the Father

9. But what, among all these things, we really want and long to see is God himself, and we long for this all the more, the better we are, the more devout, the more faithful; the more effectively geared we are to the growth of our minds, this longing swamps all other cravings. And because this is so, he gently addresses these little ones of his, to whom he has given knowledge of his grace, that all things have been handed over to Christ by his Father, and tells them not to take it hard that they don't yet see, but to put up with the salutary delay, because they need to be made ready for that vision.

All things, he says, *have been handed over to me by my Father.* And the little ones are going to say, “*We want to see the Father, just like Philip who said, Show us the Father, and that is enough for us*” (Jn 14:8). And it's as though he said, “I know what your longing is, and how small you still are for such a great good: *No one knows the Son except the Father.* You thought you already had me by heart: *No one knows the Son except the Father.* And then, as though you now knew me by heart, you wanted to see and get to know the Father: *Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son.*” You won't, however, remain cut off from this vision, because he goes on, *And whoever the Son wishes to reveal him to* (Mt 11:27). And who will the Son wish to reveal him to, if not to those of whom it is said, *You have revealed these things to little ones?*

So let us be little ones, let us seek to learn this lesson from this great master. You are in fact nothing, and will you refuse to be little, seeing that for your sake such a great one became little? So the Father reveals the Son to whomever he likes, and the Son reveals the Father to whomever he likes. It's not the case, you see, that the Son reveals the Father, while the Father doesn't reveal the Son. In

this text we have heard, we have read, *Neither does anyone get to know the Father except the Son, and whoever the Son wishes to reveal him to;* we have learned that the Son is the revealer of the Father. How do we know that the Father is the revealer of the Son? Listen to the same Son speaking: when Peter had said, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*, he received the reply, *Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jona, because flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but my Father who is in heaven* (Mt 16:17).

So the Father reveals the Son, and the Son also reveals the Father. After all, how can you acknowledge the Son, unless you acknowledge that he has a Father? And how can you acknowledge the Father, unless you acknowledge that he has a Son? I mean, he can't be called Father if he doesn't have a Son, and he can't be called Son if he hasn't got a Father. So if he is only Father because he has a Son, the Father reveals the Son. By the very fact of acknowledging fatherhood in him, you start looking for offspring; if he's the Father, you wonder whom he has begotten; the answer is God the Christ.¹⁷ If Christ is the Son, you wonder whom he was begotten by; the answer is God the Father. So when you turn the eye of your mind, the eye of your faith upon the Son, insofar as he is the Son, you acknowledge that he was begotten, in order to be the Son. And thus the Son reveals the Father, but to whom, if not to the little ones?

Our sins make a big gap between us and God

10. Why is it we don't see God now? Because our sins make a big gap between us and God. So if the reason we don't see him is that our sins make a big gap between us and God, and that because of our crimes he turns his face away from us, let us listen, as we sweat it out under the burden of our sins,¹⁸ to him crying out next, "*Come to me, all you who labor.* Why sweat under your sins for nothing? *Come to me, all you who labor.*" And when do you labor, if not when you crave for something that is not in the power of the craver?

You have a craving for gold, you're in love with gold; you don't get gold just by loving it, do you? Now what is this business, this thing you love? Because you love it, you thirst for it; when you thirst for it, you seek it; when you find it, it's a torture. I mean, look: before you find what you crave to have, before you can grab it, before you can get hold of it, before you possess it, you are on fire with greed. This torturer disembowels your heart, the greed itself tears you to ribbons. But for how long? Until you get there. Here you are, you've got there. You were on fire with greed when you wanted to have this thing in your possession. Now you've got it and you are terrified of losing it. So greed isn't followed by satisfaction, but fear has succeeded to greed, like one torturer to another. Before you had something, you were tormented only by greed; after you have come into possession, you are also being tormented by fear.

I used the wrong word, "succeeded"; the fact is, another torturer was added. Greed remains—first it was greed to get, now it's still there as greed to increase. You see, just because what you were seeking has come your way, it doesn't mean a limit has been set to greed. Don't you realize that the more you have,

the more you crave for? When you didn't have anything, you only wanted little things, but because you have become rich, no amount of savings will satisfy your cravings.¹⁹ You crave to get what you haven't got, you are frightened of losing what you have got; these two torturers are slaying you.

At least have the wit, in the middle of your torments, to confess to your God; listen to him calling you, be aware of what he is offering you: the removal of your torturers. Listen to the one who says, *Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened*. You are being worn out by a variety of worldly ambitions that are tearing you apart, weighed down by awkward, heavy loads: *I will refresh you* (Mt 11:28).

You were wandering about loose, and careening around in rough country: *Take my yoke upon you*. The combination of greed and the difficulty of getting what you want had made you rough; the futile success of your affairs had you walking about with your nose in the air; against this harshness and against this arrogance, *Learn from me, because I am meek and humble of heart* (Mt 11:29). Don't compare yourselves with one another, he is saying, and compete with each other in arrogance.

In Christ is to be found the standard of humility

11. Somebody says, no doubt, "Well, what of it if I do want to have lots of things? Oh, if only I did! O God, give me lots of things to have. Look, there's my neighbor, got lots of things I haven't got; people greet him, and he doesn't greet them; I greet him again, and he doesn't greet. O God, give me lots." "If you don't like his manners, why do you want to be like him?" This fellow is saying, "I return a greeting, and I'm not greeted," and he's longing to be what he's condemning. "But when I've got lots," he says, "I won't only return a greeting, but I will also be the first to greet." You are modest and submissive out of your craving to get rich, but the one who made you knows you better; he's taking better care of you by not giving you what isn't good for you, even when you ask for it. This, of course, is to get rich, because you think you will do so in a just and lawful way, you will use it well, manage it conscientiously; yes, to get rich because you dread labor, destitution.

Are you longing to be happy? Come to him who cries out, *I will refresh you*. The only thing is, you must learn what he says: *Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart*. You're looking at that rich neighbor of yours, a man of property and of pride. By looking at him and trying to compete with him, you will grow proud too. You won't become humble unless you look at the one who became humble for your sake.²⁰ Learn from Christ what you won't learn from man; in him is to be found the standard of humility. Those who measure up to him are first formed in humility, in order to be eventually honored with high nobility.

I mean, what, I ask you, did he look like? *Who though he was in the form of God, did not think it robbery for him to be equal to God, but he emptied himself, accepting the form of a slave, made in the likeness of men, and being found in*

condition as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, death too on a cross (Phil 2:6-8). He said all that, and he wouldn't have defined the full measure of his humility yet, if he hadn't added, *death too on a cross*. You see, this kind of death was regarded by the Jews as peculiarly disgraceful. And that's what he took upon himself, something peculiarly disgraceful, in order to provide a reward for those who are not ashamed of this thing, humility. How far was he prepared to go in cutting out your swelling tumor of pride? As far as the indignities of the cross.

Christ's load is light

12. But did he do this, perhaps, as someone small? *Who when he was in the form of God.* Listen: when were you ever in the form of God? And you're ashamed to humble yourself, you for whose sake the form of God humbled itself? *Learn,* he says, *of me.* You haven't discovered, perhaps, from whom you might learn about this extremely important foundation of your lofty dignity. "From me," he says, "learn that I am meek and humble of heart, *and you shall find rest for your souls; for my yoke is light* (Mt 11:29-30).

"Were you afraid of being harnessed? My yoke is smooth, it's easy; if you were afraid of being harnessed, be eager to be delighted. Have you never seen how people who eagerly desire human temporal things also bind things round their necks and arms, which give them great pleasure? How difficult it is to get them to allow themselves to be released from such trappings! Someone wearing a torque round his neck is delighted with his torque, all the while being tortured by his greed. And are you assuming that the yoke of Christ will throttle you? Don't be afraid; take it upon you; it's smooth, it checks an unhappy kind of liberty, it doesn't chafe roughly. *And my load is light* (Mt 11:29-30). Don't imagine I'm not going to impose anything on you if you become my beast of burden"—this is what your Lord says to you—"I too will impose my load. But don't worry; it's light. It doesn't press you down, but raises you up; it isn't an intolerable burden, but an honorable guerdon."²¹

It isn't light, in the sense of not being very heavy; the way small loads are, so that when they are picked up the man carrying them says, "This is light"; yet even this light load, though not very big, has some weight, Christ's load is so light, and in such a way, that it lightens. You won't be pressed down by it or with it, but without it you certainly won't rise up. Think of this load being for you what the load of their wings is for birds. As long as a bird has the load of its wings, it can lift itself up, but if its wings were taken away, it would have to stay on the ground.

What, after all, is heavy for a lover? Don't we see how much the hunting enthusiast (to pass over all the other countless things that can obsess the human race and engage its passionate interest), how much he will endure, what he will put up with, the heat in summer, the cold in winter, the forest thickets, the rough journeys, the steep mountainsides? But love makes all these things, not just tolerable, but even actually pleasant, so pleasant, that if you were to prohibit

hunting, he would then endure torments indeed, he would suffer hideous boredom of spirit; he can't stand quiet. All that and more they will put up with in order to get at a boar, and how difficult they find it to endure anything, in order to get at God!

Christ's load is charity

13. So that's why Christ said this. When you hear, *My load is light*, don't start thinking about what the martyrs suffered here below, and saying to yourselves, "How can Christ's load be light?" Men confessed him and suffered such terrible things; boys confessed him, girls confessed him; the stronger sex and the weaker, the older in years and the younger, they all had the honor of confessing him and being rewarded. In my opinion they didn't find it hard. Why didn't they find it hard? Because they endured all these things with charity. That is the load of Christ, which he has the goodness to place upon our shoulders; it's called charity, the word for it is charity, its name is love.

By means of this you will find easy whatever you found very, very hard before; by means of this, whatever you used to reckon as heavy will turn out to be light. Take on this load; it won't press you down, it will lift you up. It will be your wings, and before you get them, cry out to the one who is calling you, *Who will give me wings like a dove*—like a dove, not like a crow²²—*and I will fly away*, he says. And as though you wanted to know, "So what?"—*and be at rest* (Ps 55:6). And so by means of that load *you will find rest for your souls*. Accept this load, these wings, and if you have already begun to sprout them, cultivate and cherish them. Let these wings reach such a size that you are able to fly with them.

One wing is, *You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind*. But don't stick to one wing; because if you think you've got one wing, you haven't even got that. *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Mt 22:37,39). I mean, if you don't love the brother you can see, how can you love the God you can't see?²³ Add the other wing; in this way you will fly, in this way you will remove your cravings from earthly things, and fix your charity on heavenly things. To the extent that you exert yourself with these two wings, you will at the same time be lifting up your heart, and the heart being lifted up will, in due course, also haul up its flesh. And you mustn't think it will be a great deal of trouble for you to get all the necessary feathers; there is a whole range of commandments related to this love to be found in the holy scriptures, to provide the reader and the hearer with practice, *but on these two commandments depends the whole Law and the Prophets* (Mt 22:40).

NOTES

1. The Maurist editors knew only of a fragmentary summary of this sermon, comprising extracts from sections 3-8. The full text was first published by Dom A. Mai (Mai 126), and is printed in the supplement to Migne's *Patrologia Latina* (PLS 2, 501-512). The first paragraph indicates that it was preached in Hippo but perhaps not in the principal basilica. The reference to "this building" in section 4, with the implication that its builder was well known, suggests that it may have been a basilica built by the priest Heraclius, who seems to have been Augustine's right hand man and who succeeded him as bishop. Now this basilica was built as a shrine for relics of Saint Stephen, about 420. So this is one among several reasons for dating the sermon to the last years of Augustine's life, 425 to 430.

2. For example Ps 118:1; above all Ps 136:1,2,3

3. An extremely odd use of the word "deserts" (*merita*), as the preacher seems to have felt himself, but an interesting one, coming from the great anti-Pelagian preacher of grace.

4. Modern translations, both of the Hebrew in the Old Testament and of the Greek in the New, usually translate "Give thanks" rather than "Praise." But as a matter of fact, Hebrew at least makes no distinction between thanking and praising.

5. He means pagan philosophers of all sorts, from the Platonists and Pythagoreans to the Aristotelians and Epicureans.

6. Ether is the pure, fine "atmosphere" of the higher heavens, where the stars are, distinguished from the gross air of this earth's atmosphere. Hence the notion of "ethereal."

7. *Intervalla stellarum*. I take him to mean, not the distance between the stars (so the Italian translation) but the "intervals" of time between the appearances of stars or planets at a particular point, that is, the length of a star's, or planet's "year" or "month."

8. By "plan" (*consilium*) he doesn't mean the architect's drawings; he means the ideas in his mind.

9. See Gn 1:16.

10. This is Augustine's grammar, not mine. He treats "heaven and earth" as a single, singular subject.

11. Evidently belching wasn't "rude" in those days.

12. Epimenides is the poet paraphrased by the words just given; Aratus the one whom Paul goes on to quote, but Augustine doesn't.

13. From the dialogue that introduces the preface at Mass.

14. *Sunt in his verbis inter vos*. At first sight *in his verbis* would seem to refer to the words just spoken, either the ones quoted from Paul, or the words from the preface at Mass. That means construing the sentence thus: *Sunt, in his verbis, inter vos qui...* "There are, with these words, those among you who hear and do not hear" (see, for example, Mk 4:12). It also means interpreting the preposition *in* as meaning "with reference to," and that strikes me as stretching the poor little word altogether too far. So I prefer to construe: *Sunt, in his verbis inter vos, qui audiunt et non audiunt*; "There are, with these words among you (that is, with all this talking among yourselves) those who . . ." At his reference to what the faithful know (that part of the Mass was in theory barred to all unbaptized persons), a buzz of recognition and explanation would have followed, and his voice being very weak, as he said at the beginning, this meant that some of the congregation couldn't hear. And he's saying they mustn't blame him for this.

15. It is interesting that he calls this handing over of everything by God to Christ "Christian grace." He does so, presumably, because it is the foundation principle of the salvation of the world through Christ. A number of other texts also state the principle: Acts 4:12, *And there is salvation in no one else*; Eph 1:10, *to sum up all things in Christ*. It is also possible that he understood the handing over of all things by God to Christ to include the eternal bestowal by the Father of the godhead on the Son: a statement of "God from God, light from light, true God from true God."

16. I rather think he is conflating this text with, say, Col 3:3, and that the considerable divergence from the genuine text which is reproduced by the Vulgate is due to him, and not to his pre-Vulgate Latin version.

17. A very odd expression, I agree. At first I thought *Deus Christus* should be translated "Christ as God." But it is clearly parallel to the "God the Father" (*Deus Pater*) of the next sentence, and so I concluded that "God the Christ" was the only possible translation. The name "Christ," it is clear from countless instances, is for Augustine a *divine* title, signifying the divinity of Christ. This in my view is a fault in his christological language, but it is a fact.

18. *Sub onere peccatorum nostrorum*, following an obvious correction made by Dr C. Mohrman to the text, which reads *subonere pectorum nostrorum*, "under the burden of our breasts." *Pectorum* was presumably a scribal abbreviation of *peccatorum*, not correctly picked up by another copyist.

19. *Tuas cupiditates non satiant hereditates*, which more literally means "inheritances don't satisfy your cravings."

20. It sounds odd to talk of Christ having *become* humble, if you think of being humble simply as a virtue; it suggests that he was previously not humble. But a synonym for humble is "lowly" and we talk about "humble circumstances," "a humble dwelling" etc. Christ became humble in becoming lowly, in lowering himself to our level.

21. *Non onerat, sed honorat*. He makes the same play on words in another sermon, but I haven't been able to trace where. I render it then in much the same way as here.

22. The two birds sent out of the ark by Noah; the crow (raven) didn't return. It is a bird of ill omen. Its croak—*cras, cras*, Augustine transcribed it—means "tomorrow, tomorrow" in Latin. So it is a *mariana* bird, a "jam yesterday, jam tomorrow, but never jam today" bird. *Cras, cras*, the crow's croak, is what the sinner says as he puts off turning over a new leaf. This croak is distinguished from the dove's "moan" (*gemitus*), a penitential sound. See Sermon 82, 14.

23. See 1 Jn 4:20.

SERMON 69

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 11:28-29: *COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO LABOR AND ARE OVERBURDENED, ETC.*

Date: 4/3¹

Why do we all labor?

1. In the gospel we heard the Lord, in the liveliest of moods,² say to God the Father, *I confess to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the knowing, and have revealed them to the little ones. Even so, Father, because thus it was decreed in your presence. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and whoever the Son wishes to reveal him to* (Mt 11:25-27). We ministers labor as we try to speak loudly and clearly, you labor as you try to listen. So let us listen to him as he goes on to say, *Come to me, all you who labor* (Mt 11:28).

Why, after all, do we all labor? Isn't it because we are mortal human beings, fragile, weak, carrying along with us our earthen vessels,³ which don't leave each other much room here.⁴ But if the vessels of flesh are all squashed together, the space made by charity can always expand. So why does he say, *Come to me, all you who labor?* To save you, surely, from laboring. And anyway, he has his promise ready to hand. He called along those who labor, and they would probably ask what advantage they were called along to: *And I, he says, will refresh you* (Mt 11:28).

A great skyscraper has a foundation of humility

2. *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me* (Mt 11:29), not how to construct the world, not how to create all things, visible and invisible,⁵ not how to perform miracles in this world, and raise the dead; but *because I am meek and humble of heart* (Mt 11:29). Do you want to be great? Start from the bottom. Are you thinking of constructing a great skyscraper of a building? First give thought to the foundation of humility. And however much anybody may wish to spend on piling story upon story in his building, the bigger the building is meant to be, the deeper he digs the foundation. As the building is being con-

structed, of course, it rises higher and higher, but the one who is digging the foundations is pushed down lower and lower. So the building has to be humbled before it reaches its loftiest height, and its topmost pinnacle can only be erected after it has been humbled to the depths.

To see the one who sees

3. What is the topmost pinnacle of the building we are striving to construct? How far does the top of our skyscraper reach? I'll tell you straightforwardly: as far as the sight of God himself. You can see how high that is, what a great thing it is, to see God. Any of you who long for this will understand what I am saying and you are hearing. We have been promised the sight of God, of the true God, of the supreme God. This really is a wonderful thing, to see the one who sees.⁶

I mean, those who worship false gods can easily see them, but they see ones who have eyes and do not see.⁷ But we have been promised the vision of the God who lives and sees,⁸ and so the God we should be yearning to see is the one of whom scripture says, *Will he who planted the ear not hear? Does he who fashioned the eye not observe?* (Ps 94:9). So does the one who made you something to hear with not hear himself? And does he not see, the one who created the means for you to see with?

In this psalm he very neatly prefacing those words with these: *Understand, therefore, you who are unwise among the people; and you fools, come sooner or later to your senses* (Ps 94:8). You see, this is why many people do wrong, imagining that they are not noticed by God. It's difficult, of course, for them to believe he can't see, but they assume he doesn't want to. You won't find many people so totally irreligious that they fulfill the text, *The fool has said in his heart, There is no God* (Ps 14:1; 53:1). Few hold this crazy idea. Just as there aren't many people who are deeply religious, so there aren't many who are totally irreligious. But what I'm going to say now is what the crowd says: "Look, do you really think God takes trouble to know what I do in my house, that God cares tuppence what I choose to do in my bed?" Well, who is it that says, *Understand, you who are unwise among the people; and you fools, come sooner or later to your senses?* Being a mere man, it takes you quite a lot of trouble to know everything that goes on in your house, and to insure that what your slaves say and do gets back to you; but do you imagine it's any trouble like that for God to pay attention to you, seeing that it was no trouble at all for him to create you? Having made your eyes, will he not turn his own on to you? You didn't exist, and he created you, to bring you into being. Now that you do exist, will he not care for you, he that summons the things that are not, as though they were?⁹

So you shouldn't kid yourself about this. Willy-nilly, he sees you, and there is nowhere you can hide yourself from his eyes. If you climb up to heaven, he is there; if you go down to the underworld, there he is.¹⁰ You give yourself a lot of trouble, not wishing to give up your evil ways, and wishing not to be seen by God. Great trouble, great labor. You want to behave badly every day, do you

suppose you are not seen? Listen to the scripture saying, *Will he who planted the ear not hear? Does he who fashioned the eye not observe?* Where can you hide your bad behavior from God's eyes? If you don't want to give it up, a lot of laborious trouble is yours.

You will see God by living a good life

4. Listen to him saying, *Come to me, all you who labor* (Mt 11:28). You don't put an end to your labor by running away. You prefer to run away from him, do you, not to him? Find somewhere, and run away there. But if you can't run away from him, for the good reason that he is present everywhere, the next thing to do is to run away to God, who is present right where you're standing. Run away, then. So you see, you have run away beyond the heavens, he's there; you've gone right down to hell, he's there; whatever solitary places of the earth you may choose, there he is, the one who said, *I fill heaven and earth* (Jer 23:24). So if he fills heaven and earth, and there is nowhere you can run away to from him, don't go on laboring with all that trouble. Run away to him where he's present right beside you, to avoid experiencing him as he comes to judge you.

Work on the assumption that you will see him by living a good life, because you are seen by him even when you are living a bad one. When you live a bad life you can be seen, but you cannot see; but if you live a good life you are both seen and you see. God sees you in mercy as he calls you while you are still unworthy; with what a much more intimate look will he see you as he rewards you for being worthy? Nathanael said to the Lord, whom he didn't yet know, *How do you know me?* The Lord said to him, *When you were under the fig tree, I saw you* (Jn 1:48). Christ sees you in your own shade; won't he also see you in his own light?

After all, what's the meaning of, *When you were under the fig tree, I saw you?* What's it getting at? What does it mean? Remember the original sin¹¹ of Adam, in which we all die. After he had first sinned, he made himself an apron of fig leaves, signifying by these leaves the itchy lust he had come down to by sinning. That's what we are born from, that's how we are born, we are born in the flesh of sin, which can only be healed by the likeness of the flesh of sin. That's why God sent his Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin.¹²

That's what he came from, but that's not how he came. For the Virgin did not conceive him by lust, but by faith. He came into the Virgin, having existed before the Virgin. He chose the one he had created, he created the one he would choose. He brought the Virgin fertility, he did not take away her virginity. So the one who came to you without the itch of fig leaves saw you when you were under the fig tree. Make yourself ready to see in his sublimity the one you have been seen by in his mercy. But because that is a very high pinnacle, give a thought to the foundation. "To what foundation?" you ask. Learn from him, because he is meek and humble of heart. Dig in yourself this foundation of humility, and you will eventually reach the pinnacle of charity.

Turning to the Lord, etc.¹³

NOTES

1. Two scholars date this sermon very precisely to one of the days between 26 January and 1 February 413, and say it was preached at Carthage. This must be on evidence external to the sermon, probably from Augustine's letters. I have not had access to their arguments.
2. See Lk 10:21, where the evangelist talks about Jesus exulting in spirit. Augustine here uses the word *exilaratum*, which is what I am trying to capture in my rather secular phrase.
3. See 2 Cor 4:7. He interprets the "earthen vessel" to mean simply the human body, whereas Paul meant something rather wider than that—something like the whole gamut of our individual, personal limitations.
4. The congregation was evidently packed in like sardines. But at least (see note 1) it was winter.
5. See Col 1:16, and the Nicene Creed, which echoes it.
6. See Gn 16:13-14. For Hagar, turned out into the desert, being seen was as important as seeing.
7. See Ps 115:5; 135:16.
8. See Gn 16:14—the well of the living seeing one—*Be'er Lahai Roi*.
9. See Rom 4:17.
10. See Ps 139:8.
11. See Gn 3:1-7. He uses the phrase *originale peccatum* here to mean the first actual sin, the sin committed by Adam—and Eve. But when we refer to the doctrine of original sin, which Augustine did so much to bring to the forefront of the Latin Christian mind, we don't mean by the phrase that first actual sin, but the common defect or flaw of human nature which has resulted from it, but which is in no sense an actual sin that anyone commits or can commit; it is a lack of God's justifying grace which Adam (and Eve, I suppose—Augustine is rather an inverted male chauvinist here) forfeited for the whole race of which they were the first examples and parents.
12. See Rom 8:3.
13. See the end of Sermon 67.

SERMON 70

AGAIN ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 11:28-30:
**COME TO ME, ALL WHO LABOR AND ARE OVERTBURDENED,
AND I WILL REFRESH YOU, ETC.**

Date: 398¹

The easy yoke and light load

1. Some people, my brothers, are astonished to hear the Lord say, *Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my load is light* (Mt 11:28-30). They look at those who have unhesitatingly submitted their necks to this yoke and so meekly shouldered this load, and see how they are vexed and tormented, with such fearsome difficulties by this world, that they seem to have been called from rest to labor, rather than from labors to rest. And you have the apostle too saying, *All those who wish to live religiously in Christ will suffer persecution* (2 Tm 3:12). So someone will say, "How is that yoke easy, and that load light, seeing that to bear that yoke and carry that load is simply to live religiously in Christ?" And how can he say, "Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will refresh you," instead of saying, rather, "Come, you that are at leisure, in order to labor"? I mean, those men he hired for the vineyard, to bear the heat of the day—he found them idle.²

And under this easy yoke and light load we hear the apostle saying, *In every way commanding ourselves as God's servants, in much patience, in afflictions, in hardships, in tight spots, in beatings, etc.* (2 Cor 6:4). And elsewhere in the same letter he writes, *From the Jews five times I received forty strokes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times shipwrecked, a night and a day I spent in the depths of the sea* (2 Cor 11:24-25); and several other dangers which can indeed be listed, but cannot, without the help of the Holy Spirit, be endured.

How comfortable was the yoke of Christ

2. So he frequently had to undergo all the harsh and rough treatment he mentioned here, but of course he had the Holy Spirit with him to renew the inner

self from day to day, while the outer self was wasting away,³ and to give him a taste of spiritual rest in the abundant delights of God,⁴ in the hope of future bliss, while smoothing away all the roughness of the present, and soothing its harshness. That just shows you how comfortable was the yoke of Christ he bore, and how light the load; that he could call all those dreadful, cruel experiences, which appall any listener who hears them read out, that he could call them a light affliction.⁵ With the inner eyes of faith he considered what temporal price must be paid for eternal life, for not suffering the eternal toils of the wicked, and for enjoying without the slightest anxiety the eternal happiness of the just.

People allow themselves to be cut and burned, in order at the price of sharper pains to spare themselves the pains, not of an eternal, but of a somewhat longer-lasting sore or ulcer. For the sake of⁶ a weary and uncertain retirement, bound to be pretty short, at the end of his life, a soldier wears himself out in dreadful wars; probably spending more years in unrelieved labors than he can hope to have for his quiet retirement. What gales and storms, what hideous, fearsome savagery of sea and sky will merchants challenge and outface, simply in order to acquire fickle, wind-blown riches, which are full of greater storms and dangers than the ones they were acquired through!

What extremes of heat and cold, what dangers from horses, from ditches, from cliffs, from rivers, from savage beasts are hunters ready to endure! What inconveniences in eating and drinking, what wretched rations of disgusting food and drink, just to catch a wild animal! And meanwhile they don't even need the meat of the animal, for which they put up with such horrors, for their feasts. Even though they net a boar and a stag, the hunter's heart finds more pleasure in its being caught than the eater's palate does in its being cooked.⁷ To what torments of almost daily beatings are the tender years of children subjected! Again, how they are kept at work in schools, and harried with long hours and short rations—not to learn wisdom, but to learn the use of numbers and letters and clever tricks of argument for the sake of accumulating empty riches and honors!⁸

Easy for all who love

3. But in all these cases, people who have no love for whatever it is suffer the same ghastly inconveniences as those who do, while those who love it all suffer the same things indeed, but don't seem to find them inconvenient. Everything frightful and savage, you see, is made wonderfully easy and practically nothing at all by love. So if greed and ambition can do this with respect to what is in fact wretchedness, how much more surely and easily will charity do it with respect to true happiness?⁹ How easy it is to endure any kind of temporal adversity, in order to avoid eternal punishment, and obtain eternal rest! That vessel of election.¹⁰ Paul, was absolutely right to say with such tremendous joy, *The sufferings of this time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to come, which will be revealed in us* (Rom 8:18). There you have what makes that yoke comfortable, and that load light. Even if it's oppressive for a few who

choose it, yet it is easy for all who love. The psalmist says, *Because of the words of your lips, I have kept to hard ways* (Ps 17:4). But what is hard for those who labor grows easier even for them when they love.

That is why it has been arranged in God's loving plan of salvation that the inner self who is being renewed from day to day should no longer be set under the law, but already under grace¹¹ should be relieved of the load of innumerable observances, which were indeed a heavy yoke, very properly imposed upon stubborn necks. And so, thanks to the ease conferred by simple faith and good hope and holy charity,¹² whatever vexations that prince who has been cast out¹³ may inflict from outside on the outer self become for the inner self light with an inner joy. Nothing is so easy, you see, for a good will as it is for itself, and that's enough for God. So however much this world may rage, what the angels proclaimed at the birth of the Lord in the flesh was absolutely true: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will* (Lk 2:14), because the yoke of the one who was just born is comfortable, and his load is light. And as the apostle says, *God is faithful, who does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear, but with the temptation he also provides the way out, so that we may endure it* (1 Cor 10:13).

NOTES

1. This sermon is joined with 69 and 67 in the manuscripts, and one of the scholars who gives Sermon 69 its precise date at Carthage in January 413 dates this one even more precisely to 3 February 413, also at Carthage. Again, I have not had any access to his arguments, but on purely internal grounds of style (rather more artificial than usual, and to some extent of tone), I would be inclined to date it considerably earlier, about 398.

2. See Mt 20:3ff, 12.

3. See 2 Cor 4:16.

4. See Ps 36:8-9.

5. See 1 Cor 4:17.

6. Reading *Pro languida* etc. instead of the *In languida*, a suggestion made in the margin of one of the manuscripts. The whole passage and its punctuation is a little problematic. The two first sentences of this paragraph could be so divided that the clause about retirement at the very end of life could go with the people suffering from ulcers instead of with the old soldiers.

7. I don't suppose Oscar Wilde had this passage in mind when he defined fox-hunting as the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable. But it is nice to think that for all their differences in style, he and Augustine had minds that sometimes made the same connections. Had they met, perhaps they might have clicked.

8. Augustine assesses his own education in much the same way in the *Confessions*. Most likely, if you had asked him whether education was a good thing he would have agreed that it was. But his insistence on regarding its aims as well as its methods with a thoroughly critical, not to say jaundiced, eye is something we could all profitably learn from him today.

9. Augustine has a much more precise moral "language of love" (largely, perhaps of his own making) than is still—or yet—available to us in English. He has a morally neutral word, *amor*, "love." Then for good love he has *caritas*, "charity," and for bad love *cupiditas*, "greed." But in

English we have long since knocked the stuffing out of "charity," as well as feebly romanticizing "love." "Greed" is still its proper self, but a more limited one than *cupiditas*.

10. See Acts 9:15.

11. See the *Rule* of St Augustine, in its concluding paragraph: Letter 211, 16.

12. These three virtues are the effect of being "under grace."

13. See Jn 12:31.

SERMON 70A

AGAIN FROM THE SAME CHAPTER OF THE GOSPEL ON HUMILITY

Date: 425-430¹

We all labor in this world

1. The mouth of the Lord, that trumpet of justice and truth, as though he were standing up in the general meeting of the whole human race, calls out and says, *Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, because I am meek and humble of heart, and shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is comfortable, and my burden is light* (Mt 11:28-30).² If you don't labor, you needn't heed, but if you do labor, you should pay heed to the words, *Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened*. If you are not overburdened, you needn't heed; but if you are overburdened, you should pay heed to the invitation, *Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened*. What for? *And I will refresh you*. Everybody who labors and is overburdened seeks refreshment, longs for rest.

And who doesn't labor in this world? I would like to be told, who doesn't labor, either by working or by thinking? The poor man labors in work, the rich man labors in thought. The poor man wants to get what he hasn't got, and labors; the rich man, afraid of losing what he has got and wishing to add to it what he hasn't got, labors even more. But anyway, all of us carry our burdens of whatever sins they may be, and these press down on our proud necks, and yet for all that, under such a top-heavy pile, pride heaves itself up; though weighed down by sins, pride continues to swell up.

That's why the Lord says—well, what? *I*, he says, *will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me*. What, Lord, are we to learn from you? We know that in the beginning you were the Word, and the Word with God, and the Word who was God; we know that all things were made through you, visible and invisible.³ What are we to learn from you? How to hang up the sky, fix the earth solid, pour out the sea, spread the air around, fill all the elements with the appropriate animals, arrange the ages, rotate the seasons? What are we to learn from you? Or do you perhaps want us to learn how to do the works you did on earth? Is that what you want to teach us? So we are to learn from you how to cleanse lepers, how to drive out demons, put fevers to flight, command the sea

and the waves, raise the dead? Not things like that either, he says. Tell us, then, what? *Because I am meek and humble of heart.* Let God put you to shame, human pride. The Word of God says it, God says it, the Only-begotten says it, the Most High says it: *Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart.* Such high majesty came down to humility, and is man going to stretch himself up? Pull in your horns, O man, and reduce yourself to the humble Christ, or you may stretch yourself so far that you burst.

God is humble, and are you proud?

2. Just now the psalm was being sung, just now the alleluia was being recited: *Who is like the Lord our God, who dwells on high and observes humble things?* (Ps 113:5-6). When he observes you, may he find you humble, and not condemn you. He's the one who said it, his was the keynote address, he was the one inviting the human race to this salvation: *Learn from me,* he says, not how to create the creation; learn *that I am meek and humble of heart.* He was in the beginning; what could be more sublime? *The Word was made flesh* (Jn 1:1, 14); what could be more lowly? He rules the world; what could be more sublime? He hangs on the cross; what could be more lowly? When he did all this for you, why do you still rear up, still swell up, you inflated balloon? God is humble, and are you proud?

Perhaps because it said *The Lord is sublime and observes lowly things*, (Ps 138:6)⁴ you say to yourself, "Then he doesn't observe me." What could be more unfortunate than you, if he doesn't observe you, but ignores you?⁵ Observing indicates compassion, ignoring indicates contempt. But no doubt, because the Lord observes lowly things, you imagine you escape his notice, because you are not humble or lowly, you are high and mighty, you are proud. That's not the way to be missed by the eyes of God. I mean, just see what it says there: *The Lord is sublime.* Sublime indeed. How are you going to get to him? Will you look for a ladder? Look for the wood of humility,⁶ and you have already got to him. *The Lord is sublime, he observes lowly things, but high and mighty things (don't imagine you escape notice, you that are so proud) but high and mighty things he knows from afar* (Ps 138:6). He knows them, all right, but from afar. *Salvation is far from sinners* (Ps 119:155).

What about lowly things? Them he knows from close at hand. Marvelous, the ingenuity of the Almighty! He is sublime, and he observes lowly things from close at hand; the proud are high, he the sublime knows them from afar. *The Lord is near to those who have crushed their hearts, and the humble in spirit he will save* (Ps 34:18).

So, brothers, don't let pride swell in you, let it shrivel instead and rot. Be disgusted by it, throw it out. Christ is looking for a humble Christian. Christ in heaven, Christ with us, Christ in hell—not to be kept there, but to release others from there. That's the kind of leader we have. He is seated at the right hand of the Father, but he is gathering us up together from the earth: one in this way, one in that; by favoring this one, chastising that one, giving this one joy and that

one trouble, may he that gathers⁷ gather us up; may he gather us up, otherwise we are lost; may he gather us together where we can't get lost, into that land of the living⁸ where all deserts are acknowledged and justice is rewarded.

NOTES

1. In the manuscript collection from which Dom A. Mai edited this sermon, it follows immediately on Sermon 68. So the heading means that it is on the same chapter of the gospel as that sermon. I don't really understand why in this series it was not placed after that sermon as Sermon 68A; it would have been equally in place there. We saw that Sermon 68 was preached at Hippo, probably in the last few years of Augustine's life, between 425 and 430. This little sermon too sounds to me like something preached on the bishop's home ground—and during the same period of his life, though in theme and in the manner of treating it, it more closely resembles Sermon 69.

2. In the last sentence of the quotation the text differs in two words from the one he has used in the previous sermons; we have *suave* for *lene*, "my yoke is comfortable" instead of "easy"; and *onus* for *sarcina*, "my burden is light" instead of "my load." Both new words, *suave* and *onus*, are those of the Vulgate text, so their occurrence here may be due to unconscious scribal correction rather than to free quotation by Augustine. But in Sermon 70 he did several times paraphrase *lene* with *suave*, though never *sarcina* with *onus*.

3. See Jn 1:1-3; Col 1:16.

4. Augustine is apparently mixing up this psalm and Ps 113. One wonders which precisely had been sung at the Alleluia. His own comments, direct and indirect, all refer to Ps 138. It is of course possible that Ps 138 was sung, and the Alleluia verse was taken from Ps 113.

5. *Si non respicit, sed despicit*: a word play not easy to reproduce in English—certainly not once one has chosen to render *respicit* by "observes."

6. The cross.

7. Lk 11:23 is faintly echoed here, though the gatherer here is obviously Christ. See also parables like that of the wheat and the tares, Mt 13:24-30.

8. See Ps 116:9.

SERMON 71

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 12:32: WHOEVER SPEAKS A WORD AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL NOT BE FORGIVEN, NEITHER IN THIS AGE NOR IN THE AGE TO COME

Date: 417-420¹

The Pharisees belong to the devil's kingdom

1. It's a real problem that we are faced with, in this passage read just now from the gospel, one we are quite unequal to solving if left to ourselves. *But our sufficiency is from God* (2 Cor 3:5), to the extent that we are able to receive and make use of his help. So first you must notice what an enormous problem it is, so that when you see the bulk of it placed on my shoulders, you may assist my efforts with your prayers, and through the assistance thus given me may find a constructive solution to satisfy your minds.

The Lord, then, had been presented with a blind and dumb demoniac, and had cured him so that he could speak and see, *and the crowds were all astounded and said: Can this be the son of David? When the Pharisees heard this, they said: This man only casts out demons by Beelzebub the prince of demons. But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said to them: Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will remain standing; and if Satan casts out Satan he is divided against himself, so how will his kingdom remain standing?* (Mt 12:22-26).

In saying this he wanted to show that by their own admission, through failing to believe in him, they had chosen to belong to the devil's kingdom, which of course could not remain standing if it were divided against itself. So let the Pharisees choose whichever they wish: if Satan cannot cast out Satan, then they could find nothing to say against the Lord, but if he can, then they have all the more reason to look to themselves and clear out of his kingdom, which being divided against itself cannot remain standing.

Christ casts out demons by his own power

2. How, then, does the Lord Christ cast out demons? Well, to rid themselves of the idea that it was by the prince of demons, they should pay attention to how

he goes on: *And if I, he says, cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges* (Mt 12:27). He said this, of course, about his disciples,² sons of that people, who as the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ certainly had clear consciences that they had never learned any evil arts from such a good master, such as how to cast out demons by the prince of demons.

Therefore, he says, they shall be your judges. "They," he says, "yes, they, the base-born and contemptible things of this world (1 Cor 1:28), in whom is displayed not the artful malignity but the holy simplicity of my power, they shall be my witnesses and your judges." Then he adds. *But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has caught up with you* (Mt 12:28). What does this mean? "If I," he is saying, "by the Spirit of God cast out demons, your sons could not be casting them out in any other way either, seeing that I have given them a simple faith, not a malignant science. Without a shadow of doubt the kingdom of God has caught up with you and it is undermining the kingdom of the devil; and you will be undermined with it too, if you don't change your ways."

Grace frees us from the demons

3. And because he had said *By whom do your sons cast them out?* he wanted to show that it was by his grace in them, not by their own merits. So he went on, *Or how can anyone enter a strong man's house and plunder his things, unless he first ties up the strong man, and in that way plunders his house?* (Mt 12:29). "Your sons," he is saying, "who have either believed in me or else are going to believe in me in due course, and are going to cast out demons by simple holiness, not by the prince of demons; who certainly were, or still are, what you also are, that is to say sinners and wicked people, and for that reason are in the devil's house and among the devil's things: how could these sons of yours be delivered from the powerful grip he acquired on them by the epidemic spread of iniquity, unless he were first tied up with the chains of my justice, and unless in this way I plundered his things, which had been objects of wrath, and made them my own objects of mercy?"³

This is also what the blessed apostle says when he is rebuking people for being proud and apparently taking pride in their own merits: *For who set you apart?* he says—that is to say, "Who sets you apart from the lump rejected since Adam⁴ and from the objects of wrath?" And in case anyone should say, "My own justice does," he adds *For what have you got that you did not receive?* (1 Cor 4:7). That's why he also says about himself, *For we too were once naturally children of wrath, just like the rest* (Eph 2:3).⁵ So he too was once an object in the house of that evil strong man, when he persecuted the Church, blaspheming and insulting, acting out of malice and envy, as he himself admits.⁶ But the one who tied up the strong man snatched this rejected object from his grasp, and made it an object of special choice.⁷

Not all belongs to Christ's kingdom

4. But unbelievers and godless people who are opposed to Christianity may well think that the kingdom of Christ is also divided against itself, considering the various heresies and schisms caused by those who gather round themselves groups of desperate people under the name of Christian.⁸ So next, to counter that idea, he adds, *Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters* (Mt 12:30). He didn't say, "Whoever is not registered under my name," or "under the specific mark of my sacrament,"⁹ but, *Whoever is not with me is against me*. Nor did he say "Whoever does not gather under the style and title of my name," but *Whoever does not gather with me scatters*. So the kingdom of Christ is not divided against itself, even if men try to divide up what was bought at the price of Christ's blood.¹⁰ *For the Lord knows who are his. And, Let him depart from iniquity*, it says, *everyone who names the name of the Lord* (2 Tm 2:19).

I mean, if he doesn't depart from iniquity, he doesn't belong to the kingdom of Christ, even though he names the name of Christ. So let me give you some other example; the spirit of avarice and the spirit of extravagance, the one hoarding, the other splashing money around, are divided against each other—and both belong to the devil's kingdom. Among the worshipers of idols, the spirit of Juno and the spirit of Hercules are divided against each other¹¹—and both belong to the devil's kingdom. The pagan enemy of Christ and the Jewish enemy of Christ are divided against each other—and both belong to the devil's kingdom. The Arian and the Photinian are both heretics, and are both divided against each other;¹² the Donatist and the Maximianist are both heretics, and are both divided against each other;¹³ all the vices and errors of mortals are contrary to one another and divided against each other, and they all belong to the devil's kingdom. That is why his kingdom will not remain standing.

But the just and the godless, the believer and the unbeliever, the Catholic and the heretic, are all indeed divided against each other; but they don't all belong to Christ's kingdom. *The Lord knows who are his*. So none of us should congratulate ourselves about a mere name. If you want the name of the Lord to be any good to you, depart from iniquity, you who call upon the name of the Lord.¹⁴

The sin against the Holy Spirit by pagans, Jews, and heretics

5. But even if this passage of the gospel had some obscurities about it, which I think with the Lord's assistance have been cleared up, it wasn't anything nearly as difficult as the piece that follows clearly is. *Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but blaspheming the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, neither in this age nor in the age to come* (Mt 12:31-32). So what will become of those whom the Church longs to win? Do you mean to say that when they have recognized the error of their ways, whatever it may have been, and come to her, they are

promised a false hope of having all their sins forgiven? Are there any, I ask you, who cannot be convicted of having spoken a word against the Holy Spirit before they became Christians or Catholics?

Take first the ones we call pagans, worshipers of many gods and false ones too, who bow down to idols; when they say the Lord Christ performed miracles by magical arts, aren't they exactly like those people who said he cast out demons by the prince of demons? When they speak in mockery every day about our sanctification,¹⁵ what else are they blaspheming but the Holy Spirit? What about the Jews, whose words about the Lord have given rise to this sermon? Don't they continue to speak a word against the Holy Spirit up to the present day, by denying he is present among Christians just as in those days they denied he was present in Christ? I mean, they didn't also curse the Holy Spirit (like the pagans), or deny that he exists, or say that he exists all right, but isn't God, only a creature, or that he isn't any use for casting out demons. They didn't say these shocking things, or anything like them, about the Holy Spirit. The Sadducees, to be sure, denied that there is a Holy Spirit; the Pharisees, though, defended his existence against the heresy of the Sadducees, but denied that he was present in the Lord Jesus Christ, assuming that he cast out demons by the prince of demons, while in fact he was casting them out by the Holy Spirit.

And thus the Jews also, and any heretics at all who confess the Holy Spirit but deny he is present in the body of Christ, which is his one and only Church (none other, of course, but the one Catholic Church): these are without a shadow of doubt exactly like the Pharisees of that time, who even if they confessed that there is a Holy Spirit, nonetheless denied that he was present in Christ, attributing his work of casting out demons to the prince of demons. I pass over the fact that there are some heretics, like the Arians and Eunomians¹⁶ and Macedonians,¹⁷ who maintain quite simply that the Holy Spirit is a creature, not the creator; others who deny his existence altogether, just as they deny that God is a Trinity, asserting that only God the Father exists, and that he is sometimes called Son, sometimes called Holy Spirit, like the Sabellians¹⁸ who are sometimes called Patripassians, because they hold that the Father suffered.¹⁹ Since they deny there is any Son, they undoubtedly deny there is any Holy Spirit. The Photinians too say that only the Father is God, and that the Son is merely a man; and they simply deny altogether the existence of a third person, the Holy Spirit.

Is there no hope for forgiveness?

6. It's quite plain, then, that the Holy Spirit is blasphemed both by pagans and by Jews and by heretics. So does that mean we should just leave them to stew in their own juice, reckoning there is no hope for them, because this sentence is irrevocable, *Whoever speaks a word against the Holy Spirit may not be forgiven, neither in this age, nor in the age to come?* Does it mean that only born Catholics are to be regarded as being quit of liability for this gravest of sins? Because all those who have become Catholics by believing the word of God must certainly have come into the grace and peace of Christ from among

the pagans or the Jews or the heretics; and if they are not forgiven any word they have spoken against the Holy Spirit, then a quite groundless promise is being made when the gospel is preached to people, urging them to turn to God and receive forgiveness of their sins either in baptism or in the peace of the Church.²⁰ After all, it doesn't say "will not be forgiven except in baptism," but *will not be forgiven, neither in this age nor in the age to come.*

The Church does not refuse to accept repentance for any kind of crime

7. Some people are of the opinion that the only ones who sin against the Holy Spirit are those who have been cleansed by the washing of rebirth²¹ in the Church and have received the Holy Spirit, and then afterward have shown themselves ungrateful for such a wonderful gift by plunging themselves in some deadly sin, such as adultery or murder or withdrawal from the Christian religion altogether or at least from the Catholic Church. But I don't see how this view can be allowed, seeing that the Church does not refuse to accept repentance for any kind of crime you can think of²² and seeing too that in order to correct the heretics precisely on this point the apostle says, *In case God may perhaps grant them repentance to recognize the truth and to sober up from the snares of the devil, by whom they are held captive to his will* (2 Tm 2:25-26). I mean, what good can correction do, if there is no hope of forgiveness?

In any case, the Lord didn't say "Any believing Catholic who speaks a word against the Holy Spirit," but *Whoever speaks*, that is, "Anyone at all who speaks, anyone you care to think of who speaks," *will not be forgiven, neither in this age nor in the age to come.* So whether it's a pagan or a Jew or a Christian, or a heretic among Jews²³ or Christians, or any other kind of error you like to mention, the text doesn't say "This sort or that sort," but, *Whoever speaks a word against the Holy Spirit* (that is, blasphemes the Holy Spirit) *will not be forgiven, neither in this age nor in the age to come.*

So now then, if, as I have already shown, every error that is contrary to the truth and an enemy of Catholic peace is "speaking a word against the Holy Spirit"; and if for all that the Church does not cease to correct and gather in people from every kind of error, to receive both forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit they have blasphemed—then I think I have shown the unfathomed depths and extent of this colossal problem. So let us seek from the Lord the light needed to explain and solve it.

A difficult and troublesome problem

8. And so, my dear brothers and sisters, I want you to be all ears, all ears to me and all minds to God. I'm telling your graces, there is probably no greater, no more difficult problem to be found in all the holy scriptures. That's why—and here I have a little confession to make about myself—in the sermons I have preached to the people²⁴ I have always hitherto avoided this difficult and troublesome problem. Not that I never had any kind of thoughts about it—on

such an important point I wouldn't dream of neglecting to seek, to ask, to knock²⁵—but that I didn't think that with the words which occurred to me at any particular moment I could do justice to the glimmer of understanding that was opened up to me. Today, however, listening to the readings about which I would have to give you a sermon, I was so struck by the gospel when it was read, that I really thought God wanted you to hear something on this matter through my ministry.

Not every blaspheming against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable

9. So the first thing I want to draw to your attention is that the Lord did not say "*No* blaspheming the Spirit will be forgiven," nor did he say "*Whoever* speaks any word at all against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven," but simply *Whoever speaks a word*. You see, if he had said that, there would be nothing at all left for us to argue about because if people are not going to be forgiven *any* blasphemy and *any* word spoken against the Holy Spirit, then the Church couldn't win anybody from any kind of godless error spoken against the gift of Christ and the sanctification of the Church, whether pagans or Jews or heretics of any sort, not to mention quite a few ignorant people in the Catholic Church itself. But far be it from the Lord to say that, far be it, I say, from the Truth to say that *no* blasphemy and *no* word spoken against the Holy Spirit would find forgiveness, either in this age or the age to come.

There are some blasphemies and some words which, if spoken against the Holy Spirit, will not be forgiven

10. Obviously, what he wanted to do was to exercise our minds with a difficult problem, not to deceive us with a false statement. So there is no need for us to assume that no blasphemy whatever or no word at all spoken against the Holy Spirit can find forgiveness; but we certainly do need to accept that there is *some* blasphemy and *some* word which, if spoken against the Spirit, deserves never to be pardoned or forgiven. Because if we take it as applying to *all* such blasphemies and words, who at all can be saved? If on the other hand we don't think it applies to any, we are contradicting the Savior. So there is undoubtedly *some* blasphemy and *some* word which, if spoken against the Holy Spirit, will not be forgiven.

But what this word may be, the Lord wished us to inquire; that's why he didn't state it explicitly. He wanted us to inquire, I say, not to deny it. You see, this is a manner of speaking quite common in the scriptures; when something is said without its definitely referring either to the whole or to the part, it doesn't have to be taken as having a total application, so that you may not understand it as applying partially. So this sentence would refer to the whole, that is, it would be universal in application, if it ran, "*No* blaspheming the Spirit will be forgiven," or "*Whoever* speaks any kind of word whatsoever against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, neither in this age nor in the age to come." It would refer

to the part, that is, it would be particular in application, if it ran, “*Some blaspheming the Spirit will not be forgiven.*”

As a matter of fact, though, the sentence isn’t framed with either a universal or a particular reference (it doesn’t say either “No blaspheming the Spirit” or “*Some blaspheming*”), but is only phrased indefinitely: *Blaspheming the Spirit will not be forgiven.* Nor does it say “Whoever speaks any word at all,” or on the other hand, “Whoever speaks a certain word,” but it puts it indefinitely, *Whoever speaks a word.* So we don’t have to take it as meaning every blasphemy and every word; but we certainly do have to take it that the Lord meant us to understand some blasphemy and some word. But he didn’t wish to say explicitly which, so that by having to seek, to ask, to knock, we would be obliged to take seriously any true and right meaning we might discover.

John 15:22—its meaning

11. To help you see this more clearly, consider what he also said about the Jews: *if I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin* (Jn 15:22). He didn’t say it in such a way, you see, as to give us to understand that the Jews wouldn’t have had any sin at all, if he hadn’t come and spoken to them. Surely, he found them full of sins and overburdened with them. That’s why he said, *Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened* (Mt 11:28). What with, if not the loads of their sins and transgressions of the Law? Since *the Law crept in that the trespass might abound* (Rom 5:20).

As he says himself somewhere else, *I did not come to call the just, but sinners* (Mt 9:13). So how would they not have had sin if he hadn’t come, unless it were the case that this sentence being framed neither as a universal nor a particular but as an indefinite statement, it does not oblige us to take it as referring to every sin? But of course, if we didn’t take it as meaning some sin, which they would not have had if Christ hadn’t come and spoken to them, we would be calling the statement false, which God preserve us from. So he didn’t say, “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have had any sin,” otherwise Truth would have been lying. Again, he didn’t say either in a definite way, “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have had a particular sin,” otherwise there would be nothing to stimulate pious study.

Actually in the whole wide field of the holy scriptures we are nourished by the passages that are clear, exercised by those that are obscure; the first kind relieve us from hunger, the second save us from boredom.²⁶ So because it doesn’t say “they would not have had any sin,” we need not be worried when we admit that the Jews were sinners, whether the Lord had come or not. And yet, because it does say, *If I had not come, they would not have sin*, that does necessarily imply that they did not contract some sin, though not of course every sin, from the Lord’s coming, which they didn’t have before. That sin surely is that they did not believe in him when he was present and talking to them, and that they regarded him as an enemy because he told them the truth, and what’s more killed him. It is this great and horrific sin that they certainly would not have had, if he had not come and spoken to them.

So just as in this case, when we hear *they would not have sin*, we don't take it to mean any sin, but only some particular sin; so too when we hear in today's reading *blaspheming the Spirit will not be forgiven*, it doesn't mean any blasphemy but a particular one; and when we hear *Whoever speaks a word against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven*, we don't have to take it as meaning any and every word, but only some particular one.

Blaspheming the Holy Spirit

12. After all, in the statement *Blaspheming the Spirit will not be forgiven*, we must obviously not take it as meaning blaspheming any and every spirit, but only the Holy Spirit.²⁷ Even if it didn't say this more clearly in other places, could anyone be so silly as to take it in any other sense? The same figure of speech applies in that other text, *Unless one is born again of water and the Spirit* (Jn 3:5). It doesn't say there either "of the Holy Spirit," and yet that's how it is to be understood. Just because it says "of water and the Spirit," we are not obliged to take it as meaning any and every spirit. Therefore, when you hear *But blaspheming the Spirit will not be forgiven*, you shouldn't take it as meaning any and every kind of blaspheming the Spirit.²⁸

Mark and Luke agree with Matthew on this matter

13. Now I see that you want to hear precisely what kind of blaspheming the Spirit will not be forgiven (since it isn't every kind), and what word (since it isn't every word) will not be forgiven if it is spoken against the Holy Spirit, neither in this nor in the age to come. Well, I too would now like to tell you what you are so eagerly expecting to hear. But please try and bear with a little more delay, which will be caused by further careful investigation, until with the Lord's help I can fully explain everything that occurs to me.

The fact is, the two other evangelists, Mark and Luke, talking about this matter, didn't say "blaspheming" or "a word," in such a way that we could easily take them to mean only some, not every, kind of blaspheming and some, not every, word. So what did they say? This is what is written in Mark: *Amen I tell you, that all sins will be forgiven the children of men, and the blasphemies they blaspheme with. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness for ever, but will be guilty of an eternal offense* (Mk 3:28-29). In Luke it's like this: *Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven* (Lk 12:10). Is there any departure from the truth of what is one and the same statement, just because there is a difference in the wording?

You see, the only reason why the evangelists don't say the same things in the same way is to teach us the lesson of putting matter before words, not words before matter, and of only looking in a speaker for the intention or meaning he wishes to express by the words he utters. What difference does it make, after all, whether it says *Blaspheming the Spirit will not be forgiven*, or says *Whoever*

blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven? Except that possibly the same thing is said more clearly in the second sentence, and one evangelist is not cancelling the other, but explaining him. The phrase "But blasphemy of the Spirit"²⁹ is ambiguous, because it doesn't explicitly say which spirit. The Holy Spirit, after all, is not any old spirit. Again, you could talk of blasphemy of the spirit when someone is blaspheming in spirit, just as you can talk of prayer of the spirit, when someone is praying in spirit; about this the apostle says, *I will pray in spirit, I will also pray in my mind* (1 Cor 14:15). But when it says, *Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit*, these ambiguities are resolved.

Again, the text, *has no forgiveness for ever, but will be guilty of an eternal offense*, is surely saying exactly the same thing as you can read in Matthew: *will not be forgiven, neither in this age nor in the age to come*. The same meaning, surely, is being expressed in different words and a different form of speaking. And what you have in Matthew, *Whoever speaks a word against the Holy Spirit*, is put more plainly by the others, *Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit*, in case we should take it as meaning anything other than blasphemy. Yet the same thing was said by them all, and none of them departed from the speaker's intention, and it is to get this expressed and understood that words are spoken, written, read, and heard.

The text has to be seen in a particular way

14. But now someone may say, "All right, I've got the point that when it says 'blaspheming' without explicitly adding either 'all' or 'some,' it can indeed be understood to mean all, but it doesn't have to be, and unless in this case you take it to mean 'some,' what is being said is untrue. So too with 'a word'; if it doesn't specify 'every' or 'some,' it doesn't have to be taken as meaning 'every word.' But if you don't take it as meaning 'some,' what is being said cannot possibly be true. Well, but where it reads, *Whoever blasphemes*, how can I take it as meaning 'some blasphemy' where 'blasphemy' isn't mentioned, or 'some word,' where it doesn't mention a 'word,' but just seems to say in the most general manner, *Whoever blasphemes?*"

This is how I reply to such an objection here too if it actually said, "*Whoever blasphemes any kind of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit*," then we would have no reason to think it just meant some blasphemy, and would have to take it as meaning every sort. But it cannot be taken as meaning every sort, because then pagans, Jews, heretics, and every variety of people who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit with their different errors and contradictions would be deprived of all hope of forgiveness, should they change for the better. So it remains that the text, which actually runs, *Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness for ever*, doesn't refer to blaspheming in any kind of way, but only in such a particular way that the person can never be pardoned.

Two kinds of temptation

15. Take, for instance, the text *God tempts no one* (Jas 1:13): it cannot be understood as meaning every kind of temptation, but only of a particular kind which God doesn't tempt anyone with, otherwise that other text, *the Lord your God is tempting you* (Dt 13:3),³⁰ would be false. Otherwise, too, we might be denying that Christ is God, or that the gospel is not telling the truth, when we read that he questioned one of the disciples, *tempting him, but he himself knew what he was going to do* (Jn 6:6). You see, there is a temptation that leads to sin, and that way God tempts no one; and there is a temptation or testing that proves the quality of faith, and that way even God is prepared to tempt people. In the same sort of way, when we hear *Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit*, we shouldn't take it as meaning every kind of blaspheming, just as in the other case we don't understand every kind of tempting.

Not every offense of blaspheming

16. Or again, when we hear *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved* (Mk 16:16), we don't, of course, understand someone believing in the same way as demons believe and tremble,³¹ nor do we think of people baptized in the way that Simon the magician could get himself baptized³²—but he certainly couldn't get himself saved.³³ So when he said *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved*, he didn't mean all who believe and are baptized, but only had some of them in mind, those namely who are established in the faith which according to the apostle's distinction *works through love* (Gal 5:6); and in the same way, when he said *Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness for ever*, he wasn't thinking of every offense of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, but only of a particular sort, which anyone found guilty of would never be absolved from or forgiven.

Doing something in a specific kind of way

17. There's also that other thing he said, *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, abides in me and I in him* (Jn 6:57); how are we to understand that? Can we possibly also include here the kind of people of whom the apostle says that they eat and drink judgment upon themselves, when they eat this flesh and drink this blood?³⁴ And what about Judas, the disloyal betrayer and seller of the Master? With the rest of the disciples he certainly ate and drank the sacrament of his flesh and blood when it was first effected by his own hands, as the evangelist Luke states more clearly than the others do;³⁵ but did he abide in Christ and Christ in him? Finally, there are many who eat that flesh and drink that blood with insincere hearts, or who fall away from the faith when they have eaten and drunk; do they abide in Christ, or Christ in them?

But of course there is a way of eating that flesh and drinking that blood, which insures that whoever eat and drink like that abide in Christ and Christ in them.

So it's not by eating the flesh of Christ and drinking the blood of Christ in any kind of way at all that people abide in Christ and Christ in them, but by doing it in a specific kind of way: a way, surely, that he himself was envisaging when he said this. So the same applies to what he said here, *Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness for ever*; it doesn't mean you will be guilty of an unforgivable misdeed, whatever way you blaspheme, but only if you do it in a specific way; and that's the way he wanted us to look for and understand, when he uttered this true and terrible assertion.

Answering the question

18. But what is this manner of blaspheming—this unmannerly manner, if I may say so³⁶—what is this blasphemy, what is this word against the Holy Spirit? It's high time, I reckon, that I told you, and stopped disappointing your hopes which I have kept so long on tenterhooks (but I think it has been necessary to do so). Now you know, dearly beloved, that in that invisible and inviolable Trinity which the true faith and the Catholic Church professes and proclaims, God the Father is not the Father of the Holy Spirit but of the Son; and God the Son is not the Son of the Holy Spirit, but of the Father; and that God the Holy Spirit is not the Spirit only of the Father or only of the Son, but of both Father and Son; and finally that this Trinity, while in it the distinct properties and subsistence of each of the persons is maintained, is nonetheless one God, not three gods, because of the undivided and inseparable essence or nature of its eternity, truth and goodness. And in this way we are given to understand, according to our limited capacity, and as far as beings such as we still are may be permitted to see by mirrors and in a riddle,³⁷ that the property of the Father is to be the author and origin of the others, the property of the Son is to be born, the property of the Holy Spirit is to be the communion of Father and Son, and the property of all three is to be equal to each other.

So by what is common to them both the Father and the Son wished us to have communion both with them and among ourselves; by this gift which they both possess as one they wished to gather us together and make us one, that is to say, by the Holy Spirit who is God and the gift of God. By this gift we are reconciled to the godhead, and by this gift we enjoy the godhead. After all, what use would it be to us to know any kind of good if we didn't also love it? Now just as truth is what we learn by, so charity is what we love by, and it enables us both to know things more thoroughly and to enjoy them when known more happily. Thus *charity has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us* (Rom 5:5). And because it is by sins that we were barred from the possession of those things that are really and truly good, charity has covered a multitude of sins.³⁸ So the Father is the true and trusty origin of the Son who is truth, and the Son is truth sprung from the true and trusty Father, and the Holy Spirit is goodness poured out by the Father who is good and the Son who is good; all three, however, enjoy entirely equal divinity and inseparable unity.³⁹

Forgiveness of sins in the Holy Spirit

19. So in order for us to receive the eternal life which will be given to us at the end, on the last day, the first gift that came to us from God's goodness, accompanying the beginning of faith, was the forgiveness of sins. As long as these remain, you see, there also remains some sort of hostility toward God, and estrangement from him which arises from the evil in us, because scripture is not lying when it says, *Your sins make a rift between you and God* (Is 59:2). And so he cannot really bring his own good things into us, unless he first takes our bad things out of us; and the former increase to the extent that the latter decrease, nor will the former be perfected until the latter are eliminated.

But now, that Christ the Lord forgives sins by the Holy Spirit, just as he casts out demons by the Holy Spirit, can be gathered from what he said to his disciples after he had risen from the dead: after saying, *Receive the Holy Spirit*, he immediately added, *If you forgive anyone's sins, they shall be forgiven; if you retain anyone's, they shall be retained* (Jn 20:22-23). And then that rebirth, which brings about the forgiveness of all past sins, takes place in the Holy Spirit, according to the Lord's own words, *Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, one cannot enter the kingdom of God* (Jn 3:5). But it's one thing to be born of the Spirit, another to be fed by the Spirit;⁴⁰ just as it's one thing to be born of the flesh, which happens when a mother gives birth, and another to be fed from the flesh, which happens when she suckles the baby; we see the child turn to drink with delight from the bosom of her who brought it forth to life; its life continues to be nourished by the same source which brought it into being.

And so the first benefit believers receive from the kindness of God is forgiveness of sins in the Holy Spirit. Thus John the Baptist, who was sent as a runner before the face of the Lord, began his preaching with that. This is what the text says: *Now in those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near* (Mt 3:1-2). So too with the Lord himself, of whom we read, *From then on Jesus began to preach and say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near* (Mt 4:17). But among the other things spoken by John to those who came to be baptized by him, he also said, *I indeed am baptizing you in water for repentance; but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire* (Mt 3:11). And the Lord in his turn said, *John indeed baptized in water; but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit, whom you are to receive not many days from now* (Acts 1:5), which would happen at Pentecost. As for what John added, "and fire," while it could be taken to mean the tribulation which believers would have to endure for the name of Christ, it isn't all the same far-fetched to see the Holy Spirit himself as indicated by the word "fire." That's why at his coming it says, *There appeared to them divided tongues as of fire, which also rested upon each one of them* (Acts 2:3). In the same sense the Lord himself said, *I have come to cast fire upon the world* (Lk 12:49), and the apostle says, *Aglow with the spirit* (Rom 12:11), since that is what makes love or charity glow, seeing that it is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which has been given

to us.⁴¹ The Lord suggests the opposite of this glowing when he says, *The charity of many will grow cold* (Mt 24:12).⁴²

But perfect love or charity is the final, perfect gift of the Holy Spirit. First, however, comes the gift which consists in the forgiveness of sins, the benefaction by which we are delivered from the power of darkness,⁴³ and the prince of this world is thrown outside by our faith;⁴⁴ he is the one who is at work in the children of unbelief,⁴⁵ solely in virtue of the obligations and comradeship of sin. For it is by the Holy Spirit, who gathers the people of God together into one, that the unclean spirit is cast out, who is divided against himself.⁴⁶

Being unrepentant is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

20. What speaks against this spontaneous, free gift, against this grace of God, is an unrepentant heart. So it is being unrepentant that is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which will not be forgiven in this age, nor in the age to come. I mean to say, you are speaking a very evil, utterly graceless word against the Holy Spirit in whom are baptized those who have all their sins forgiven, against the Holy Spirit which the Church received so that whoever's sins it forgives they are forgiven; you are speaking it in thought or out loud, if when the patience of God is beckoning you to repentance, you harden your impenitent heart, and so store up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and of the revelation of the just judgment of God, who will render to us all according to our works.⁴⁷

So this impenitence (that's the name we can use any time, for both the blasphemy and the word against the Holy Spirit which has no forgiveness for ever); this impenitence, I say, against which both herald and judge cried out when they said, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near* (Mt 3:2; 4:17); against which the Lord opened his mouth to preach the gospel,⁴⁸ and against which he foretold that the gospel itself was to be preached in the whole world, when he said to the disciples after rising from the dead, *It was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise again from the dead on the third day, and for repentance and the forgiveness of sins to be preached in his name throughout all nations, beginning from Jerusalem* (Lk 24:46-47).⁴⁹ Yes, this impenitence has absolutely no forgiveness, neither in this age nor in the age to come; because it is repentance that obtains in this age a forgiveness which will be valid for the age to come.

We mustn't despair of anybody

21. But as long as a person lives in the body in this life, it is impossible to judge this impenitence or unrepentant heart. We mustn't despair of anybody, as long as God's patience is beckoning to repentance; as long as he that does not desire the death of the wicked, but rather that he turn again and live, does not snatch the wicked from this life. He's a pagan today; how do you know he won't be a Christian tomorrow? He's an unbelieving Jew today; what if he believes in Christ tomorrow? He's a heretic today; what if tomorrow he adheres to Catholic

truth? He's a schismatic today; what if tomorrow he embraces Catholic peace?⁵⁰ What if those whom you mark down as being in the grip of any kind of false doctrine you like, and whom you condemn as absolutely beyond hope, should repent before they finish this life and should find true life?

What's more, brothers, on this matter you should also follow the apostle's advice, *Do not pass judgment on anything before the time* (1 Cor 4:5). Because this blasphemy against the Spirit, for which there is never any forgiveness (and we have said or discovered, or even as I think demonstrated that it is not any and every blasphemy, but a particular, and what's more persistent, hardness of an unrepentant heart) this blasphemy cannot be detected in anybody, as I have said, as long as they are still in this life.

The word, not the words

22. This shouldn't be regarded as ridiculous, just because while someone persists to the end of this life in such hard impenitence and continually utters many things against this grace of the Holy Spirit, the gospel should treat such long-drawn-out resistance of the unrepentant heart as something short and sharp, and simply call it "a word": *Whoever speaks a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks one against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, neither in this age nor in the ages to come* (Mk 3:28-29). You see, although this may be an on-going blasphemy, composed of a great many words and uttered at length, still it is the habit of scripture to call many words "a word." After all, none of the prophets ever spoke just a single word, and yet that's how it's put: *The word which came to this or that prophet.*⁵¹ And the apostle says, *Let the elders be honored with double honor, especially those who labor in word and teaching* (1 Tm 5:17); he doesn't say "in words" but "in word." And James says, Be doers of the word, and not only hearers (Jas 1:22). He didn't say either "of the words," but "of the word," even though there are so many words from the holy scriptures which are venerated in the Church, and solemnly read, spoken, and heard.

So then, as long as any of us work away at preaching the gospel, we are called preachers not of "the words" but of "the word," and as long as any of you listen to our preaching with eager attention, you are said to be studious hearers not of "the words" but of "the word." Well, in the same way, according to the scriptural habit of talking which is adopted by Church custom, people who throughout their whole lives in this body, however long it may be, speak any number of words, aloud or simply in thought, with an impenitent heart against the forgiveness of sins which takes place in the Church, say a word against the Holy Spirit.

*Everything will be forgiven those in whom is not found
this one thing that is never forgiven*

23. But the reason why not only a word spoken against the Son of man, but also absolutely every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, is that where

this sin is not found of an impenitent heart against the Holy Spirit, by which sins are cancelled in the Church, all others are forgiven.⁵² On the other hand, how can this one ever be forgiven, since it even prevents the forgiveness of other sins? So everything will be forgiven those in whom is not found this one thing that is never forgiven. But because this one is never forgiven, those in whom it is found won't be forgiven other sins either, since the forgiveness of all the others is blocked by the barrier of this one.

So the reason why anybody who speaks a word against the Son of man will be forgiven, while anybody who speaks one against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, is not that in the Trinity the Holy Spirit is greater than the Son, something that not even any heretics have ever said. The reason is that you may put up a stiff resistance to the truth and blasphem the truth, which is Christ, even after it has been preached so much in the whole world; truth such as that *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn 1:14), which is what Son of man signifies, which is the same as Christ; but if you don't say that word of an unrepentant heart against the Holy Spirit, about whom it is said *Whoever is not born again of water and the Spirit* (Jn 3:5), and about whom it is also said, *Receive the Holy Spirit; if you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven* (Jn 20:22-23), which means, "If you repent, you will receive through this gift forgiveness of all sins," including this one of speaking a word against the Son of man.⁵³ This is because to the sin of ignorance or stubbornness or any kind of blasphemy you didn't add the sin of impenitence against the gift of God and the grace of regeneration or reconciliation, which is accomplished in the Church by the Holy Spirit.

Why a word spoken against the Son of Man is forgiven

24. Again we cannot go along with those who give the following reason why a word spoken against the Son of man is forgiven, while a word spoken against the Holy Spirit is not: it's because, they think, Christ became the Son of man by taking on the flesh, and the Holy Spirit, obviously, is greater than this flesh, being in his own substance equal to the Father and to the only-begotten Son in his divinity, in which the only begotten Son is also equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit. You see, if this were the reason, he would have kept quiet about every other kind of blasphemy, and said that the only forgivable one was that spoken against the Son of man, considered simply as a man. But in fact the whole passage begins, *People will be forgiven every sin and blasphemy* (Mt 12:31) in the other gospel it goes, *The sons of men will be forgiven all sins and blasphemies which they blaspheme* (Mt 3:28); so there can be no doubt that blasphemy spoken against the Father is included in that general statement, and yet only the one spoken against the Holy Spirit is defined as being unforgivable. Did the Father too take on the form of a servant, which the Holy Spirit could surpass in greatness? No, of course not.

So why, after mentioning all sins in general and every kind of blasphemy, did he want to single out for particular mention blasphemy against the Son of

man?⁵⁴ Because, even if people were tangled up in that sin he mentioned when he said *If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin* (Jn 15:22), and he also showed in John's gospel that it is a very serious sin, when he says about the Holy Spirit, in promising to send him, *He will convince the world of sin, and of justice and of judgment; of sin indeed, because they did not believe in me* (Jn 16:8-9); even so, if they hadn't spoken a word against the Holy Spirit out of that hardness of an unrepentant heart, even this word spoken against the Son of man will be forgiven.

Pardon for sins is the work of the Trinity

25. Here perhaps someone may want to know if it's only the Holy Spirit who forgives sins, or whether it's also the Father and the Son. I answer that it is also the Father and the Son. The Son himself, you see, says about the Father, *If you forgive people their sins, your Father will also forgive you your sins* (Mt 6:14). We also say to him in the Lord's Prayer, *Our Father who art in heaven*, and among the other things we ask for, we also say this: *Forgive us our debts* (Mt 6:9,12).⁵⁵ About himself he says, *That you may know, that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins* (Mt 9:6).

"So then," you say, "if both Father and Son and Holy Spirit forgive sins, why is that impenitence which is never forgiven said to belong only to blaspheming the Spirit, on the grounds that the one who is guilty of this sin of impenitence is apparently resisting the gift of the Holy Spirit, because it is by this gift that forgiveness of sins is brought about?" Here I ask in my turn whether Christ cast out demons, or whether the Father and the Holy Spirit did too? I mean, if it was only Christ who did, what about what he said himself: *But the Father abiding in me, himself does the works* (Jn 14:10). "Himself does the works" sounds as if the Son doesn't do them, but only the Father abiding in the Son. So why does he say in another place, *My Father works until now, and I work*, and a little later on, *For whatever he does, the Son too does likewise* (Jn 5:17,19). On the other hand what he says elsewhere, *If I had not done works among them which nobody else has done* (Jn 15:24), makes it sound as though he did them alone.

If, however, these things are expressed like this on the understanding, nevertheless, that the activities of Father and Son are inseparable from each other, what are we to believe about the Holy Spirit, but that he too is working equally with them? Because, you see, in the very place which gave rise to the question we are discussing, when the Son was casting out demons, he nonetheless said himself, *If I in the Holy Spirit cast out demons, it means the kingdom of God has come upon you* (Mt 12:28).

Activities of the divine—three are inseparable

26. Here someone may possibly say that it's rather a case of the Holy Spirit being given by the Father or the Son than of his achieving something by his own will, and that its saying here "*In the Holy Spirit I cast out demons*" is an instance

of this. It wasn't the Spirit himself, but Christ who did this in the Spirit; so that we should understand "In the Holy Spirit I cast out" as meaning "I cast out with the Holy Spirit." That, you see, is a common manner of speaking in the scriptures:⁵⁶ They slew in the sword,⁵⁷ meaning "with the sword"; *They burnt in fire* (Ps 74:7), meaning "with fire"; and *Jesus took stone knives, in which to circumcise the sons of Israel* (Jos 5:2.3),⁵⁸ meaning "with which to circumcise the sons of Israel."

But those who for this reason would deprive the Holy Spirit of his own proper authority and initiative should consider the text where the Lord says, *The Spirit breathes where he will* (Jn 3:8). As for what the apostle says, *But all these things are the achievement of one and the same Spirit*, we have to take care not to assume that they are not the achievement of the Father and the Son, seeing that among these achievements he mentioned both the gifts of healing and the working of deeds of power, which surely include the expulsion of demons. But when he goes on to say, *apportioning each their own just as he will* (1 Cor 12:9-11), isn't he also pointing to the Holy Spirit's own authority, though of course it is inseparable from the Father and the Son?

So then, with all these ways of speaking we still have to understand that the activities of the divine three are inseparable, so that when an activity is attributed to the Father he is not taken to engage in it without the Son and the Holy Spirit; and when it is an activity of the Son, it is not without the Father and the Holy Spirit; and when it is an activity of the Holy Spirit it is not without the Father and the Son. That being the case, those who have the right faith, or better still the right understanding as far as they can, know well enough that the reason it is said about the Father, *He does the works* (Jn 14:10), is that the works have their origin in the one from whom the co-working persons have their very existence; the Son, you see, is born of him, and the Holy Spirit proceeds primarily from him of whom the Son is born, being the Spirit common to them both. Again they know that when the Lord said, *If I had not done works among them which nobody has done* (Jn 15:24), he wasn't referring to the Father or the Spirit, as though they hadn't cooperated with him in those works, but to human beings, by whom indeed many miracles are reported to have been performed, but none to match those performed by the Son. Finally, they know that what the apostle says about the Holy Spirit, *But all these things are the achievement of one and the same Spirit* (1 Cor 12:11), does not mean that the Father and the Son do not cooperate with him, but only that in these achievements there are not many spirits but only one Spirit, and that his very diverse activities do not indicate any diversity or division in himself.

The Trinity performs the works of each of the persons in the Trinity

27. And yet, on the other hand, it is not a pointless expression, but a reasonable and true one, where it says that it was the Father, not the Son or the Holy Spirit, who said, *You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased* (Lk 3:22; Mt 3:17; Mk 1:11).⁵⁹ But although this miracle of an audible word from

heaven belongs to the Father alone, we do not deny that the Son and Holy Spirit cooperated in producing it. After all, just because the Son, clothed in the flesh, was then going about with other human beings on earth, it doesn't mean that he wasn't also in the bosom of the Father as his only-begotten Word, when that voice came from the cloud. Nor can it be wisely and spiritually supposed that God the Father excluded from the transmission of his audible words the cooperation of his Wisdom and his Spirit.

In the same way, while we very rightly say that it wasn't the Father, nor the Holy Spirit, but the Son who walked over the sea, that it was only his flesh and the soles of his feet that rested on the waves,⁶⁰ all the same, can anyone deny that the Father and the Holy Spirit cooperated in achieving such a miracle? Thus too we very truly say that it was only the Son and not the Father or the Holy Spirit, who took flesh to himself; and yet anyone who denies that either the Father or the Holy Spirit cooperated in this incarnation which belongs to the Son alone is not thinking along the right lines.

Again we say that it was neither the Father nor the Son but only the Holy Spirit who appeared both in the form of a dove and in tongues as of fire, and gave those upon whom he came power to proclaim in many and various ways the mighty works of God.⁶¹ But while this miracle refers solely to the Holy Spirit, we cannot exclude from it the cooperation of the Father and the only-begotten Word. Thus it is the Trinity that performs the works of each of the persons in the Trinity, two of them cooperating in the work of the other, harmonious action characterizing all three, inability to perform marking none of them.

All that being so, this is how it is that the Lord Jesus casts out demons in the Holy Spirit. It's not that he couldn't manage this alone, and had to bring in this outside assistance as not being up to the job himself. But on the contrary, it was very fitting that the spirit who is divided against himself should be driven out by that Spirit whom Father and Son, not divided against themselves, have in common.⁶²

Sins are not forgiven apart from the Church

28. Thus too sins, which are not forgiven apart from the Church,⁶³ must be forgiven in that Spirit by which the Church is gathered together in a unity. And then, suppose someone outside the Church does repent of his sins, and has an unrepentant heart about the particular great sin of being estranged from the Church of God, what use will that repentance be to him, seeing that by this one sin of being estranged from the Church he says a word against the Holy Spirit? Why? Because the Church has received this gift, of sins being forgiven in her in the Holy Spirit,

While it is the Trinity that effects this forgiveness, it is for all that properly understood to be the province of the Holy Spirit. He, after all, is the Spirit of sonship by adoption, in which we cry, *Abba, Father* (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6), and so are able to say to the Father, *Forgive us our debts* (Mt 6:12). And, as the apostle John says, *In this we know that Christ abides in us, from the Spirit which*

he has given us (1 Jn 3:24). The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit, that we are children of God (Rom 8:16). The companionship, you see, by which we are made into one body of the only Son of God, is his special concern. That is why it is written, If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if any solace of love, if any companionship of the Spirit (Phil 2:1).

It is on account of this companionship that those on whom he first came spoke with the tongues of all nations.⁶⁴ Because it's languages that bind human societies more closely together;⁶⁵ so it was appropriate to signify by the languages of all nations this companionship of the children of God and members of Christ that was going to exist in all nations. Just as at that time a person had clearly received the Holy Spirit if he started speaking in the languages of all nations, so now at this time you can tell you have received the Holy Spirit if you are held in the bond of the peace of the Church, which is spread out among all nations. That's why the apostle says, *Eager to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3).*

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son

29. That he is the Spirit of the Father is what the Son himself says: *He proceeds from the Father (Jn 15:26)*, and in another place, *For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you (Mt 10:20)*. That he is also the Spirit of the Son is what the apostle tells us: *God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father (Gal 4:6)*, that is, "making us cry." It is, after all, we who cry out, but in him, that is to say, through his pouring out charity in our hearts, without which anyone who cries out cries out in vain. That's why he also says, *Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ is not one of his (Rom 8:9)*. So to which person of the Trinity would communion in this companionship properly belong, if not to that Spirit who is common to Father and Son?

Those who are separated from the Church do not have this Spirit

30. That those who are separated from the Church do not have this Spirit is very clearly stated by the apostle Jude, when he says, *Who separate themselves, sensual people, not having the Spirit (Jude 19)*.⁶⁶ That is why the apostle Paul, when reproofing people in the Church itself, who were setting up divisive parties, lining up behind individuals even though these were established within the unity of the Church, why he told them among other things, *But the sensual man does not perceive the things that belong to the Spirit of God. For they are foolishness to him, and he cannot know them, since they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:14)*. He shows what he means by "does not perceive": it means "does not grasp the word of knowledge."⁶⁷ He calls these members of the Church little ones, not yet spiritual but still carnal, and needing to be fed on milk, not solid food. *As to little ones in Christ, he says, I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet capable of it, indeed you are still not capable of it (1 Cor 3:1-2)*.

The expressions "not yet" and "still not" show that the case is certainly not desperate, provided there is movement in the direction of some time becoming what they are not yet. *For you are still carnal*, he says. And to show why they are carnal, he goes on, *For since there is rivalry and competition among you, does it not mean you are carnal and walking in a merely man-like way?* (1 Cor 3:3).

He explains the matter more precisely: *For when one*, he continues, *says I am Paul's man, and another, I am Apollo's, are you not mere men? So what is Apollo? What indeed is Paul? Servants, through whom you have come to believe* (1 Cor 3:4-5). So these men, that is to say Paul and Apollo, are of one mind in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace;⁶⁸ and yet because those people had begun to share these two out among themselves and to make inflated claims for one against the other, they are called mere men, and carnal, and sensual,⁶⁹ not strong enough to perceive the things that belong to the Spirit of God. Nonetheless, because they haven't separated themselves from the Church they are called little ones in Christ. He wanted them, of course, to be angels or gods, seeing that he was rebuking them for being mere human beings, that is, in these quarrels they did not savor the things of God, but of men.⁷⁰ But of those who have separated themselves from the Church it doesn't say "Not perceiving the things that belong to the Spirit," as though it were just the perception of knowledge that was being drawn to their attention; but it says, *Not having the Spirit* (Jude 19). It doesn't, however, follow that if you have the Spirit, you also perceive consciously that you have it.

The little ones in Christ have this Spirit

31. So those who are fully in the Church as little ones in Christ have this Spirit, but still being sensual and carnal they are not equipped to perceive that they have him, that is, to understand and know it. I mean, how could they be little ones in Christ unless they had been born again of the Holy Spirit? Nor should it strike you as odd that someone should have something and be ignorant of what it is they have. To say nothing of the power of the Almighty and the unity of the unchangeable Trinity, who can easily grasp by knowledge what the soul is? And who doesn't have a soul? Lastly, to make absolutely certain that little ones in Christ, while not perceiving the things that belong to the Spirit of God, still have the Holy Spirit, let us observe how a little further on he reproves them by saying, *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?* (1 Cor 3:16). In no way at all, of course, would he have said this to people who had separated themselves from the Church; of them it is said that they do not have the Spirit.

Those who do not belong to the companionship of the Spirit

32. As for people who mingle with Christ's sheep with a merely physical presence and under false pretenses, we can't say they are in the Church either,

and belong to this companionship of the Spirit. You see, the holy Spirit of discipline will shun pretense.⁷¹ That's why people who are baptized in schismatical or heretical congregations (they should really be called "segregations") are not born again of the Spirit, being like Ishmael who was born to Abraham according to the flesh, and not like Isaac who was born according to the spirit, because by a promise;⁷² but also why there is no repetition of the sacramental bath when they come to the Catholic Church and are incorporated into the companionship of the Spirit, whom they undoubtedly did not have when they were outside. Even when they were outside, you see, they did not lack this form of religion,⁷³ but now they have added to them the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,⁷⁴ which can only be given to people inside.

What it amounts to is that before they became Catholics they were the sort of people of whom the apostle says, *Having the form of religion, but denying the virtue of it*. After all, a branch has a visible form, even apart from the vine; but the invisible life of the root can only be had⁷⁵ in the vine. In the same way the visible sacramental rites which those separated from the unity of Christ's body carry on and celebrate can exhibit the form of religion; but they can no more have in them the invisible and spiritual virtue of religion, than a person's limb can go on having sensation when it is amputated from the body.

Forgiveness of sins in that Church alone which has the Holy Spirit

33. All that being so, it follows that since the forgiveness of sins can only be given in the Holy Spirit, it can be given in that Church alone which has the Holy Spirit. You see, what happens with the forgiveness of sins is that the prince of sin, the spirit who is divided against himself, stops reigning in us, and that being delivered from the dominion of the unclean spirit we are made from then on into the temple of the Holy Spirit. And thus the one by whom we are cleaned up through receiving his pardon, we also receive as a guest living in us to help us do justly and to grow till we become perfect in justice.

I mean, take the occasion when he first came, and those who had received him started speaking in the languages of all nations, and Peter addressed the astonished bystanders; they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the apostles, *So what shall we do, brothers? Show us. And Peter said to them, Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:37.38). Both things, of course, happened in the Church, that is, both the forgiveness of sins and the reception of this gift, seeing that the Holy Spirit was in the Church. The reason, though, they were to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ was that when he promised the Holy Spirit, he said, *Whom the Father is sending in my name* (Jn 14:26).

After all, the Holy Spirit doesn't dwell in anybody without the Father and the Son, just as the Son doesn't without the Father and the Holy Spirit, nor does the Father without them. They are inseparable in their dwelling, just as they are inseparable in their working, but they are usually indicated one by one through

created symbols, not in their own substance. For instance, our voices pronounce their names separately, each with its syllables taking up a distinct interval of time; yet they themselves are not separated from each other by any intervals or moments of time. We can never utter them simultaneously, while they can only exist simultaneously, and that eternally.

But, as I have already said more than once, the reason why forgiveness of sins, by which the reign of the spirit divided against himself is overthrown and terminated, the reason why companionship in the unity of the Church of God, outside which no forgiveness of sins occurs, is seen as the proper work of the Holy Spirit (with the Father and the Son, of course, cooperating), is that the Holy Spirit is himself somehow or other the companionship of the Father and the Son. I mean, the Father is not had in common as Father by the Son and the Holy Spirit, because he is not the Father of them both; and the Son is not had in common as Son by the Father and the Holy Spirit, because he is not the Son of them both. But the Holy Spirit is had in common by the Father and the Son, because he is the one Spirit of them both.

Impenitence

34. So anyone guilty of impenitence against the Spirit, in which the Church is gathered together as a unity, a companionship and a communion, will never be forgiven, because he has shut the door of the place of forgiveness in his own face. He will deservedly be condemned with the spirit who is divided against himself, because he himself is divided against the Holy Spirit who is not divided against himself.

We are advised about this by the evidence of the gospels, if we examine them with a little extra care. You see, according to Luke, the Lord does not say a person is not forgiven for blaspheming against the Holy Spirit when he is answering the people who said he casts out demons by the prince of demons. This shows that the Lord said this more than once. But we shouldn't carelessly overlook the context of his saying it in Luke's gospel. He was talking about those who confessed or denied him before men, and he said, *But I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but whoever denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.* And in case we should despair of the apostle Peter's salvation, seeing he denied him three times before men, he immediately added, *And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven* (Lk 12:8-10); namely, with that blasphemy of an unrepentant heart that resists the forgiveness of sins that is accomplished in the Church through the Holy Spirit.⁷⁶

This blasphemy Peter was not guilty of, seeing that he soon repented when he wept bitterly.⁷⁷ He overcame the spirit who is divided against himself and who had requested him for shaking up and sifting, against whom the Lord had prayed for him that his faith should not fail;⁷⁸ and he had also received the Holy Spirit whom he did not resist, so that not only was his sin forgiven, but the forgiveness of sins was proclaimed and granted through him.

The gift of forgiveness is opposed only by one whose heart is hardened by impenitence

35. But with the two other evangelists telling the story of this statement about blaspheming the Spirit, the occasion for it arises from the account of the unclean spirit divided against himself. It was said of the Lord that he was casting out demons by the prince of demons; the Lord said himself that he cast them out by the Holy Spirit, so that the Spirit who is not divided against himself overpowers and casts out the spirit who is divided against himself; and the person who declines through impenitence to pass over into the peace of this one who is not divided against himself must remain lost with the other one.

This, you see, is how Mark tells the story: *Amen I tell you, that all sins will be forgiven people, and the blasphemies they blaspheme with; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness for ever, but is guilty of an eternal crime.* After relating these words of the Lord, Mark added his own comment, *Because they were saying, He has an unclean spirit* (Mk 3:28,30), to show that that was what had led him to say this, because they had said he was driving out demons by Beelzebub the prince of demons. Not that this was itself the blasphemy that is not forgiven, since this too would be forgiven if it were followed by genuine repentance. But as I said, this was the occasion for the Lord to pronounce this judgment, mention having been made of the unclean spirit. So the Lord showed that he is divided against himself, in contrast to the Holy Spirit,⁷⁹ who is not only not divided against himself, but also makes those whom he gathers together undivided, by forgiving them the sins that are divided against themselves,⁸⁰ and by dwelling in them once they are cleansed, in order that there may be, as it says in the Acts of the Apostles, one heart and soul of the multitude of those who believed.⁸¹ This gift of forgiveness is opposed only by one whose heart is hardened in impenitence. After all, there is also another place where the Jews said of the Lord that he had a demon,⁸² and yet he didn't say anything then about blaspheming the Holy Spirit. That was because they didn't on that occasion taunt him with having an unclean spirit, and so give him the chance to show from their own words that this spirit was divided against himself, as was the case with Beelzebub by whom they said demons could be cast out.

One who opposes an impenitent heart to the unity of the Church

36. But in this reading from Matthew's gospel the Lord disclosed much more clearly what he wanted us to understand here: namely, that the person who speaks a word against the Holy Spirit is the one who opposes an impenitent heart to the unity of the Church, which is the place in which forgiveness of sins is achieved in the Holy Spirit. This Spirit, as we have already observed, is not possessed even by those who carry on and celebrate Christ's sacraments, if they are separated from his gathered flock.⁸³

You see, he first talked about Satan being divided against Satan, and said that he himself was casting out demons by the Holy Spirit (by the Spirit, of course, which is not divided, like that other one, against himself); then, imme-

diately, to stop anyone supposing that the kingdom of Christ was also divided against itself by those who gather their conventicles under the name of Christ, but outside his sheepfold, he went on to say, *Anyone who is not with me is against me; and anyone who does not gather with me scatters* (Mt 12:30). This would show that those who, by gathering outside, preferred in fact to scatter than to gather, did not belong to him. It was only then that he added, *Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven every sin and blasphemy; but blaspheming against the Spirit will not be forgiven* (Mt 12:31). Why "therefore"? Therefore this blasphemy alone against the Spirit will not be forgiven, precisely because whoever is not with Christ is against him, and whoever doesn't gather with him scatters? Yes, "therefore" precisely for that reason. For nobody who doesn't gather with him, in whatever way they may gather under his name, has the Holy Spirit.²⁴

Beware of the unrepentant heart

37. Here in this passage, here above all he compelled us to understand that the only place in which the forgiveness of every sin and every blasphemy can be achieved is in the flock of Christ, which does not scatter. It is of course gathered together in the Holy Spirit, who is not divided against himself like that other unclean spirit. And that's why all the gatherings, or rather scatterings, which call themselves Churches of Christ and are divided against and opposed to each other, and are all hostile to the gathering of unity which is his true Church, lack the right to belong to his flock just because they seem to have his name. They would belong, though, if the Holy Spirit, in whom this flock is assembled, were divided against himself.

It's precisely because this is not the case, however (for whoever is not with Christ is against him, and whoever doesn't gather with him scatters), that people will be forgiven every sin and every blasphemy in this flock, which Christ gathers in the Spirit which is holy and divided against himself. But blasphemy against this Spirit, which means opposing this marvelous gift of God with an unrepentant heart until the end of this life, will not be forgiven. You see, even if people are so dead set against the truth that they struggle against God, speaking not in the prophets but in his only Son (whom for our sakes, in order to speak to us in him, he wanted to be also the Son of man), they will still be forgiven when they turn in repentance to the goodness of God. After all, he doesn't desire the death of the wicked as much as that they should be converted and live,²⁵ which is why he gave the Holy Spirit to his Church, so that anyone whose sins the Church forgives in the Spirit would be forgiven. But any who persist in hostility to this gift, and instead of asking for it by repentance spurn it by being unrepentant—well, it becomes unforgivable; not any and every sin, but the actual forgiveness of sins despised or even attacked.²⁶

And thus a word is spoken against the Holy Spirit, when someone never comes from the scattered to the gathered flock, which has received the Holy Spirit for the forgiving of sins. But any who come and join this gathered flock

with a sincere heart receive forgiveness of sins in the Holy Spirit, even if they are admitted by a bad clergyman who still happens to be a Catholic minister, however false and insincere he may be. This Spirit is active in the Church, even in this time during which it is being threshed like grain on the threshing floor together with the chaff, active in such a way that he rejects nobody's honest confession, is deceived by nobody's pretenses, and he routs the unworthy in such a way that he can even use their ministry to gather in the worthy.

So there's just one sure line of escape from committing the unforgivable blasphemy: beware of an unrepentant heart, and don't imagine that repentance will be any use otherwise than by holding onto the Church, where forgiveness of sins is granted, and the company of the Spirit in the bond of peace is preserved.

Conclusion

38. To the best of my ability, if indeed I have been able to do anything at all, I have dealt with this most difficult of problems, with the Lord's merciful assistance. But anything in the difficulties encountered I have not been capable of grasping must not be blamed on the truth itself, which provides the devout with healthy and salutary mental exercise even when it is concealed, but on my feebleness, on my being unable either to see what needed to be understood, or else to explain it if I did understand. But for anything which I did perhaps manage to track down in my thoughts and set out clearly in my words, you must thank him from whom we all sought, from whom we asked, at whose door we all knocked, so that I might have something to sustain myself on by reflecting on it, and to serve you with by preaching it.

NOTES

1. The scholars differ among themselves about the precise year between 417 and 420. There is no evidence about where it was preached.

The problem set by these verses is indeed one of the thorniest in biblical interpretation. It may help readers, before they launch into trying to see how Augustine deals with it in this interminable sermon, to have the rather briefer comments of the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*. On the text of Mt 12:31-32 we are told: "The saying about blasphemy against the Spirit has long presented difficulty, particularly in Catholic theology, which affirms the possibility of repentance up to the moment of death. This teaching is solidly founded in the New Testament, and this saying of Jesus cannot be understood in a way that contradicts his invitations to repentance. Refusal to recognize the Son of man as Messiah can be forgiven; faith atones for previous denial of faith. . . . Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, however, attributes the activity of the Spirit to some other power. The present activity of God can be attested only through the actions of the Spirit. If these are not recognized, then there is no means by which God can reach man. The one who will not accept the work of the Spirit has made it impossible for himself to recognize the word and the work of God. Only he can be forgiven who confesses that he has something to be forgiven."

On the parallel passage, Lk 12:10 there is a perhaps more illuminating comment, which may

also go a little way to complementing Augustine's failure to say anything very constructive about it in section 34. "This verse has another setting in Mk 3:28 and Mt 12:32. Those who rejected the Son of man, that is, Jesus during his earthly ministry, will be forgiven and given another chance through the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost; but how can one who rejects the Spirit as he offers forgiveness, repentance and renewal be forgiven? As verse 11 will make clear, Luke is speaking within a Christian setting and of the danger of apostasy."

As a sermon, this discourse cannot be regarded as very successful. It is far too long and rambling—and eccentric in some of its exegesis. But theologically it is of great interest and offers a number of valuable doctrinal insights. On the main issue Augustine arrives at what is going to be the almost universal solution of the problem: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the sin of final impenitence. He also gives it an interesting ecclesiological context, which shows that repentance is not just a matter between the individual sinner and God, but involves the whole community of the faithful. The way he puts it is ecumenically rather unsatisfactory (as we have frequently noticed, he cannot be claimed as a forerunner of the ecumenical movement), but the essential ecclesiology is profound and sound. Again, what he has to say about the relations between the three divine persons is of great interest, and in some respects an improvement on what he says about the subject in his great work, *The Trinity*.

2. It is quite certain that he did no such thing. "Your sons" means your followers, just as "sons of the bridegroom" means the bridegroom's companions, in the common Semitic idiom. There were Jewish exorcists (see Acts 19:13), and the implied argument seems to be (in the gospel text) that these were never accused of casting out demons by the prince of demons, so why should Jesus be? Or else, as Augustine goes on here to hint, it was common knowledge that exorcisms were performed by magical arts, which involved the conjuring of mysterious powers (demons), and those who practiced such arts would have to admit that they were nothing nearly as effective as the exorcisms performed by Jesus and his disciples (Acts 19:13, once more).

3. See Rom 9:22-23.

4. The lump rejected (*massa perditionis*) is the whole human race lying under the sentence of original sin, derived from Adam after his primordial sin. The phrase "lump of perdition" is derived both from Rom 9:21, where it is a question of a lump of clay, from which the potter can at will make vessels of wrath or vessels of mercy, and from 1 Cor 5:6.7, where it is a matter of a lump of dough—a little leaven corrupts the whole lump. For Augustine, engaged in his long dispute with the Pelagians, the whole human race had been corrupted by sin, and from this total condemned lump God sets apart the elect to be purified by grace.

It is the same Latin word, *vasa*, translated in this section as "objects," and in the quotation from Mt 12:29 as "things." The traditional translation is "vessels," but it and its equivalents in both Hebrew and Greek had a much wider and more indefinite meaning than that. It can often be translated "instruments."

5. By "we" Paul means "we Jews." Augustine interprets the first person plural as referring to the apostle alone—a common mode of speech for both Paul and Augustine.

6. See 1 Tm 1:13; Tit 3:3.

7. See Acts 9:15.

8. The remark covers all the different heretical and schismatical sects of the time, Arians, Sabellians, Montanists, Novatianists, even perhaps Manichees, though it is doubtful whether he would have regarded these last as Christians. But the principal schismatic sect in Africa was the Donatists, and the phrase "groups of desperate people" (*greges perditorum*, literally "flocks of the lost") is probably referring first and foremost to their fanatical strong-arm men, called Circumcellions.

9. That is, of baptism.

10. See 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23.

11. Juno and Hercules were the Latin equivalents of two of the most popular Phoenician, and hence Carthaginian, deities, probably Astart, the goddess of fertility (Juno in Roman religion presided over childbirth), and Shamash, the sun-god (Hercules was a sun hero, like Samson, whose name derives from Shamash). The mention of these two particular deities may indicate that the sermon was preached in Carthage.

12. The Arians denied the true divinity of the Son or the Logos/Word, saying he is the first of

creatures, God only by courtesy. The Photinians seem to have taught that Christ was only a man, and to have been simple Unitarians. At least that is what Photinus seems to have taught. It is not at all certain that there were any Photinians other than Photinus, who was bishop of Sirmium in what is now Hungary, around 350. He is said to have been an exceedingly learned theologian who compiled a list of heresies (a popular activity in that century), which according to an early Christian historian was remarkably thorough, and included all heresies except his own.

13. With the Donatists readers should now be reasonably familiar. The Maximianists represent a schism within the Donatist schism, Maximian having been elected anti-bishop of Carthage against the "main-line" Donatist, Primian. But this schism was not as extensive or long-lasting as Augustine liked to make out.

14. See 2 Tim 2:19. It is to be noted that after assigning all the other categories to the devil's kingdom, Augustine does not simply identify Catholics with the kingdom of Christ. Merely calling yourself a Catholic will not ensure you belong to his kingdom.

15. That is, about baptism.

16. Eunomians were extreme Arians; against the so-called Semi-Arians, who were prepared to concede that the Son is of like substance to the Father (*homoiousios*, as distinct from the orthodox *homoousios*, of one substance with the Father), they insisted that he is of a substance quite unlike the Father (*anomoios*); hence they were also called Anomoeans.

17. The Macedonians, named after a bishop Macedonius and not after the province of Macedonia, seem to have accepted the consubstantiality (*homoousia*) of the Son, but denied it of the Holy Spirit.

18. The Sabellians, sometimes called Modalists, because they maintained that the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit signify only three modes under which the one God is apprehended by us, were the oldest of these heretical sects, dating from about 200 AD, when they were reacting against statements of the Trinitarian mystery that seemed to imply three gods, and thus impaired what they called the divine "monarchy." Thus yet another name for them is Monarchians.

19. Patripassian, of course, is a coined word meaning "Father-suffer-ite."

20. That is, in a ceremony of reconciliation, equivalent to absolution.

21. See Tit 3:5.

22. The power of the Church, through the ministry of its bishops, to forgive all and any sins committed after baptism had been established, against the Montanists, about the year 200, notably by the bishops of Rome, Zephyrinus and Callistus I. The three sins Augustine has just mentioned, adultery, murder, and apostasy, were the ones traditionally regarded as automatically cutting Christians off from communion with the Church. They were the ones the Montanists and other perfectionists said the Church had no power to forgive after baptism.

23. That is, the Sadducees.

24. That is, to the ordinary congregation, to "the people of God in this or that place," as distinct from sermons to special groups, whether to catechumens on the one hand, or the equivalent of bible study groups and other devout associations on the other.

25. See Mt 7:7, Lk 11:9

26. Augustine's consistent attitude to scripture, expounded at some length in *Teaching Christianity*.

27. A point much less effective in English than in Latin, which has no definite article; so literally the sentence runs, "Blaspheming spirit (no capital letter in the spoken word) will not be forgiven."

28. The text actually says, "so neither . . . as blaspheming every kind of Spirit": *ita non omnis spiritus blasphemiam oportet accipias*. While there appears to be no manuscript evidence of any other reading, it cannot be what Augustine meant, because it fails to draw the conclusion he is drawing. What he meant was, *ita non omnem spiritus* (or *Spiritus*) *blasphemiam*, which is what I have translated. Either he made a slip of the tongue, or his stenographer a slip of the stylus.

29. Hitherto translated as "blaspheming the Spirit." But a more literal translation of *Spiritus blasphemia* is needed here, for a reason that will immediately become clear to the reader.

30. In English we have two words, "tempt" and "test"; the Latin *tento*, like its Greek equivalent, does duty for both. Here and in the next text it has to be translated "tempt" in order to make his argument clear.

31. See Jas 2:19.

32. See Acts 8:9.

33. The popular and the homiletic Christian tradition has always been a little too sure about the non-salvation or damnation of people like Judas and Simon Magus. After all, the story does conclude with Peter urging Simon to repent, and Simon asking him, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

34. See 1 Cor 11:29.

35. See Lk 22:21.

36. Punning on *modus* and *immoderatio*.

37. See 1 Cor 13:12. Beings such as we still are in this life, in which, as Augustine was fond of quoting from Wis 9:15, the perishable body weighs down the soul. The text of Paul is traditionally translated "in a glass darkly." The translation given here is both more literal and more accurate.

38. See 1 Pt 4:8.

39. By appropriating the note of truth to the Son and of goodness to the Holy Spirit, he is rather going beyond what he has said a little earlier about the Spirit being what is common to the Father and the Son. We just have to accept that there are different ways of talking about this most inexpressible aspect of the whole inexpressible mystery. We must, however, avoid thinking of the Holy Spirit being common to the Father and the Son in the same way as the divine nature or essence is common to all three persons. In the latter case, each person severally and all together is/are the divine nature or essence. But neither the Father nor the Son is the Holy Spirit; they "have" him in common, as distinct from "being" him in common. The special relationship by which Augustine prefers to distinguish him from the Father and the Son is that of being Gift; they are jointly and in common the giver of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. See *The Trinity*, V, 12-16.

40. A word-play in the Latin impossible to reproduce in English: contrasting *nasci de Spiritu* with *pasci de Spiritu*. The whole subsequent passage is a complex rhetorical conceit that is quite alien to contemporary English habits of thought or expression.

41. See Rom 5:5.

42. This forest of quotations has rather obscured the point he is making, namely that first comes the gift of forgiveness of sins (coincidental with repentance), and only subsequently the gift of perfect love or charity.

43. See Col 1:13.

44. See Jn 12:31.

45. See Eph 2:2.

46. See Mt 12:25-26. Once again Augustine rather undermines the force of Jesus' argument.

47. See Rom 2:4-6.

48. See Mt 3:2; 4:17. See also Mk 1:15; Mt 5:2.

49. See Mt 28:19.

50. The heretic rejects some of the dogmatic teaching of the Catholic Church, or teaches doctrines that the Catholic Church rejects. The schismatic does not disagree with any particular teaching, but for any number of reasons breaks away from communion or peace with the Catholic Church. It is true of course that the reasons for such a breach may ultimately imply disagreements about doctrine, and so schism can slide into heresy.

51. For example, Hos 1:1; Jl 1:1.

52. A not very helpful tautology, concealed to some extent by the length of the sentence. He is, in fact, working up to the point that this particular sin is the one and only obstacle to the forgiveness of sins.

53. The sentence got even more out of control in the Latin.

54. Mt 12:32.

55. Here, quite clearly, he assumes that the Our Father is addressed to God the Father, the first person of the Trinity. But in other places, *The Trinity*, V, 12 for instance, he considers (wrongly in my opinion) that it is addressed to God indistinctly, without reference to the persons. He should have trusted his preacher's instincts!

56. He is absolutely right: the Hebrew preposition *b*^o, usually translated "in," is often used

instrumentally. Elsewhere I have occasionally suspected that this idiom had come into North African Latin, as spoken by Augustine and his audience.

57. See Ps 78:64; Am 9:1.

58. Jesus here means Joshua, being the form of his name in the Greek Septuagint.

59. See also Mt 17:5; Mk 9:7.

60. See Mt 14:25; Mk 6:48.

61. See Mt 3:16; Acts 2:3; 4:11.

62. For a similar statement of this profound but complex doctrine, stated more succinctly perhaps, see *The Trinity* I, 7.

63. In Acts 4:12 Peter tells the Sanhedrin that "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" than the name of Jesus Christ. So all forgiveness of sins, a basic element in salvation, is somehow or other in the name of Jesus Christ. The Church is the body of Christ; so all forgiveness of sins is somehow or other imparted in or through the Church.

Augustine and his contemporaries, and most of his successors, didn't bother very much about that qualification "somehow or other," and therefore usually took too simply and literally the axiom "Outside the Church no salvation." Nowadays it is the common teaching of the Church that salvation is available (and therefore sins are forgiven) outside the visible communion of the Catholic Church. We had, for example, the decision of the Holy Office in 1949 in the Feeny case, and the consequent excommunication of Father Feeny for refusing to recant his publicly asserted conviction that only Roman Catholics can be saved.

But theologically we have to say that "somehow or other" this forgiveness of sins is related to Jesus Christ and his Church, because Christ is the last Adam, representative of the whole human race, and the Church as his body shares in this universal representation. The person Augustine goes on to consider, who doesn't repent of being outside the Church, is assumed to be one who knows the Church, and is in bad faith about remaining outside.

This rather narrow and defective understanding of Church membership is truly compensated by the outline sketch he goes on to make of what the community, the fellowship, the companionship, the comradeship of the Church truly involves: openness to all nations.

64. See Acts 2:4.

65. I follow the reading of the Maurists, *Quia sicut per linguas consociatio est societas generis humani*. An alternative, . . . *per linguas consociatio constat generis humani*, means much the same thing, though not so obviously.

66. "Sensual" translates *animales*, which translates the Greek *psychikoi*, which means people with "souls" only, not "spirits." Paul treats *psychikoi* as synonymous with *sarkikoi*, "fleshy" or "carnal." It is contrasted with *pneumatikoi*, "spiritual," as in the next quotation from Paul.

67. This looks all too much like explaining the clear by the obscure, the straightforward by the complicated. He is alluding to 1 Cor 12:8, *To one a word of wisdom, to another a word of knowledge in the Spirit*.

68. See Eph 4:3.

69. Literally "fleshy" and "soulish." This shows very clearly how for Paul "flesh" and "soul" were to all intents and purposes synonymous, being jointly contrasted with "spirit." He *never* treats "soul" and "spirit" as synonymous. None of these words, for him, signify substantive parts of the whole human being; rather they indicate two distinct styles of being human, one defective and merely human, the other perfect, divine.

70. See Mt 16:23; Mk 8:33.

71. See Wis 1:5.

72. See Gal 4:22.

73. See 2 Tm 3:5.

74. See Eph 4:3.

75. Reading *vita radicis haberi non potest nisi* with the Maurists. An alternative reading is *vita radices habere non potest nisi*; the invisible life can only have roots in the vine.

76. He apparently now forgets about Luke's context for the saying; at any rate he draws no conclusion from it, and returns in the next section to the context provided by Matthew and Mark.

77. See Mt 26:75; Lk 22:62.

78. See Lk 22:32.

79. The contrast Augustine is presumably thinking of is made in the accounts of Matthew and Luke, where Jesus says, *But if by the Spirit of God/finger of God I cast out demons, know that the kingdom of God has caught up with you* (Mt 12:28; Lk 11:20).

80. For examples of such sins see section 4 above.

81. See Acts 4:32.

82. See Jn 7:20; 8:48.

83. See section 32 above.

84. One cannot help feeling that here the preacher should at least have remarked on the contrary text, Mk 9:40, *Whoever is not against us is for us*. But then the sermon would have lasted even longer!

85. See Ez 33:11.

86. The sentence is as clumsily phrased in the Latin as in the English. The elderly preacher was no doubt getting as tired as his congregation must have been.

The line of thought that sins are not forgiven outside the true Church, and that one way of committing the unforgivable sin is by refusing to come over to it from other so-called Churches, is clearly offensive to ecumenical ears today. It seems not even to contemplate the possibility of invincible ignorance.

While this was a real blemish in Augustine's thought, as in that of most of his contemporaries, we should bear in mind the historical context. It is clear that he has principally in mind the Donatists, and various subsects of theirs. Now at the time this sermon was preached, between 417 and 420, the Donatists had for several years been subjected to severe imperial penal laws, enforced more rigorously since the conference between their bishops and the Catholic bishops in 411. Augustine supported this coercive action (the penalties were financial and economic), and at first thought it was genuinely successful, because it released so many merely nominal or conventional Donatists from staying where they were out of human respect or force of habit. But by 417, even more by 420, when he had encountered the determined (obstinate, he would say) resistance of a number of Donatist congregations, he was disillusioned, if not with the policy of coercion, then with the Donatist reaction. None of this, to be sure, makes his attitude more acceptable—if anything, perhaps less so than ever.

SERMON 72

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 12:33: **EITHER MAKE THE TREE GOOD AND ITS FRUIT GOOD**

Date: 397¹

*If people persist in being bad,
they can't possibly perform good works*

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ has been warning us to be good trees, able to produce good fruit. He said, *Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad. For by its fruit the tree is known* (Mt 12:33). When he says, *Make the tree good and its fruit good*, this is not, of course, a warning but a salutary command, which has to be obeyed. But his saying, *Make the tree bad and its fruit bad*, is not commanding you what to do, but warning you what to avoid.²

He was speaking, you see, against the sort of people who thought they could say good things or perform good works while remaining bad themselves. This, the Lord Jesus says, is not possible, because the person has to be changed first, before the works can be changed in quality. I mean, if people persist in being bad, they can't possibly perform good works; if they persevere in being good, they can't possibly perform bad works.³

He found all the trees bad

2. But was anybody found to be good by the Lord, seeing that Christ died for the wicked?⁴ So he found all the trees bad, but gave all who believe in his name authority to become children of God.⁵ That means that anybody who is a good person today, that is, a good tree, was found to be a bad one and has been made into a good one. And if, when he found them to be bad, he had preferred to uproot the trees rather than to let them remain, would there have been any that did not deserve to be uprooted?

But he came to pay out mercy in advance, so that later on he might pass judgment, according to the terms he was addressed in, *Mercy and judgment I will sing to you, O Lord* (Ps 101:1). So he granted those who believe the forgiveness of sins, he didn't want to foreclose on their old mortgages. He

granted them forgiveness of sins; he made them into good trees. He deferred the axe, he provided the security.⁶

Let us be found bearing fruit

3. John has something to say about this axe: *Already the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire* (Mt 3:10, Lk 3:9). This is the axe the householder threatens to use in the gospel, when he says, *Look, it's now three years I have been coming to this tree and not finding any fruit on it. Now I really should clear the space; accordingly, let it be grubbed up.* And the share-cropper pleads for it: *Master, leave it this year too, I shall dig round it and add a basketful of dung. If it produces fruit, fine; if not, you will come and grub it up* (Lk 13:7-9).⁷

The Lord visited the human race for a kind of three years, that is to say, through three particular ages. The first age, before the law; the second age, under the law; the third is now, which is the age of grace. I mean, if he hadn't visited the human race before the law, where would Abel have sprung from, or Enoch, or Noah, or Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? He wanted to be known as the Lord of these, and while all nations were in fact his, he wanted it to seem as if he were just the God of three men: *I am*, he said, *the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob* (Ex 3:14).

And if he hadn't come visiting in the time of the law, he wouldn't have given the law. After the law the householder came in person;⁸ he suffered, died, and rose again, he gave the Holy Spirit, he had the gospel preached throughout the world. And still some tree has remained unfruitful. There is still some part of the human race, it's still not correcting itself.

The share-cropper pleads; the apostle prays for the people: *I bend my knees*, he says, *to the Father for you, that rooted and founded in love, you may have the power to grasp with all the saints what is the length and breadth, the height and depth; to know also the surpassing knowledge of the love of Christ*,⁹ *that you may be filled up with all the fullness of God* (Eph 3:14, 17-19). Bending the knees, he is pleading with the householder for us not to be uprooted.

So then, because there's not the slightest possibility of his not coming, let us make sure he finds us bearing fruit. Digging round the tree means the humility, the self-abasement of the penitent; every hole dug is low down, a kind of abasement. The basket of dung is the dirt of repentance. After all, what could be dirtier than dung? And yet, if you use it well, what could be more productive?

Let everyone of us be a good tree

4. So let every one of us be a good tree. Don't think you will produce good fruit if you remain a bad tree. There won't be any good fruit, except from a good tree. Change your heart, and the work will change too. Pull up greed, plant love. I mean, just as greed is the root of all evils,¹⁰ so love is the root of all good things.

So why do people mutter and argue with each other and say "What does good

mean?" Oh, if only you knew what good meant! What you want isn't very good; what you don't want to be, that's the real good. For example, you want to enjoy health of body; that's something good, and yet you shouldn't think it is a particularly great good, seeing that it can be enjoyed also by someone bad. You want to have gold and silver; yes, here too I say, it's something good, but only if you use it well. And you won't use it well if you are bad. And thus gold and silver are a bad thing for the bad, and a good thing for the good. Not that gold and silver makes them good, but that, because it finds them good, it is put to good use. You want to get a promotion; that is a good thing, but here, too, only if you use it well. How many people are there for whom promotion has been the occasion of their ruin? And how many people are there for whom promotion has been a means of doing good?¹¹

You want to have good things, and you don't want to be good

5. So let us sort out the differences between these various good things, if we can, because we are talking about good trees. And here the only thing we each have to think about is to turn one's eyes upon oneself, to learn about oneself, to examine oneself, to look at oneself, to seek oneself and find oneself, and then to kill what displeases one and to engraft and plant what pleases one. After all, when you find yourself to be empty of the better goods, what's the point of avidly longing for exterior goods? I mean to say, what's the use of coffers full of good things, if your conscience is empty? You want to have good things, and you don't want to be good!

Don't you see how you ought to blush for your good things, if your house is full of good things, and the only bad thing it has in it is you? I mean, is there anything at all that you would actually like to have bad? Tell me. Well, of course, there's absolutely nothing at all. Not a wife, not a son, not a daughter, not a servant, not a maid, not a country house, not a coat, finally not even a pair of boots, and yet you want to have a bad life! I beg you on my knees, put your life before your boots. Everything around you which your eyes rest upon is elegant and beautiful, it's all precious to you, and you yourself, are you cheap and ugly in your own eyes?

If the good things your house is full of could answer you, these things you have chosen to have and are afraid to lose, wouldn't they cry out to you, "You want to have us good, so we too want to have our master good"? They are silently appealing against you to your master, "Look here, you've given so many good things to this man, and he himself is bad. What good does everything he has do him, when he doesn't have the one who gave him everything?"

The real good

6. So someone is going to ask, admonished by these words of mine, and perhaps pricked in his conscience, he's going to ask what good is, what sort of good, what makes it good. You have rightly understood that that's what you

ought to ask. I will answer your inquiry, and say, "The real good is what you cannot lose against your will. I mean, you can lose your gold even when you don't want to; you can lose your house, your position, your physical health, but the good by which you are really and truly good, you neither receive against your will nor lose against your will."

So now I ask what sort of thing this good is. The psalm has some important advice for us, perhaps it's the thing we are looking for. It says, *Children of men, how long, dull of heart?* How long that tree in its three years' existence? Children of men, how long, dull of heart? What does "dull of heart" mean? *Why love vanity and go seeking falsehood?* And then giving us the reverse side, he tells us what we should go seeking: *Know that the Lord has magnified his Holy One* (Ps 4:3-4).

Christ has already come, he has already been magnified, he has already risen and ascended into heaven, already his name is being preached throughout the whole world; how long, dull of heart? Let times past be enough; now that this holy one has been magnified, *how long, dull of heart?* After that three-year period, what's left but the axe? *How long, dull of heart? Why love vanity and go seeking falsehood?* And still, yes still, even after Christ the Holy One has been magnified, still vanities and pointless, showy, tawdry things are avidly sought after! Truth is already crying out, and vanity is still sought after! *How long, dull of heart?*¹²

The world is getting a severe beating

7. This world is deservedly being severely scourged, since the world now knows the words of the Lord. *And the servant, he says, who does not know his master's will, and does things that deserve a beating, will be beaten lightly* (Lk 12:48). Why? To make him find out his master's will. So, a servant who does not know this will: that was the world, before the Lord magnified his Holy One. It was a servant who did not know his master's will, and so he was beaten lightly. But the servant who already knows his master's will, which is the present situation, ever since the Godhead has magnified his Holy One, and who doesn't do his will, shall be beaten severely.¹³

So why be surprised if the world is getting a severe beating? It's the servant who knows his master's will and still does things that deserve a beating. So it shouldn't rebel against being severely beaten, because if it is unjustly unwilling to listen to God's commands, it will justly have to endure God's revenge. At the very least, it shouldn't complain about his chastising it, when it sees it has earned a beating, if it wants to earn his mercy.¹⁴

NOTES

1. A sermon preached at Carthage between 17 July and 10 August 397, according to the unanimous opinion of the scholars: on evidence, clearly, external to the sermon.

2. In the context, the words of Jesus are neither command nor warning in the moral sense, but a lesson in practical logic and common sense. "Make" in the context means "regard as." They had been making the tree bad and the fruit good by saying that he had been casting out demons (good fruit) by Beelzebub the prince of demons (bad tree). See the previous sermon.

But presumably the passage read that day in the gospel had begun with these words, and had not included the context I have just indicated. And Augustine was not too keen on explaining the context, because it contained the passage about the unforgivable sin which, as he was to confess later (Sermon 71, 8) he had consistently shied away from preaching on.

3. A kind of moral absolutism that doesn't seem to be true to our experience of ourselves or of others. But in the ancient style of discourse which was characteristic of the gospels, and which Augustine is simply echoing, such absolutes were balanced sooner or later by counter-absolutes in the opposite direction.

4. See Rom 5:6.

5. See Jn 1:12.

6. The security on a loan, here paradoxically furnished by the lender to the borrower. In addition to this paradox, there is an untranslatable play on words in the Latin: *Distulit securum; dedit securitatem*. One could attempt, "He deferred the axe, he paid their tax, he gave them *pax*."

7. It is hard to say whether he is quoting rather freely from memory, or using an eccentric version. Very possibly both, but primarily, I think, the latter.

8. So presumably the previous "visits" were assumed to have been made through representative agents. His explanation of the parable (already going a bit astray, because he has listed quite a lot of fruit for the first two years) seems to be influenced by that other parable of the wicked tenants, Mk 12:1-9, where after sending servants to collect the rent, the owner finally sends his son. Perhaps that influence is also why in this parable Augustine calls the vinedresser or gardener, who is clearly a servant of the owner, a *colonus*, which I translate as a share-cropper.

9. This is the only way to translate the Latin of Augustine's version, which is an oddly incorrect translation of the Greek.

10. See 1 Tm 6:10.

11. "Promotion" translates *honor*, which meant public office, and this, for the normally ambitious, meant proceeding up the ladder of public service from lower to higher office, running the *cursus honorum*. "Preferment" would be a more accurate translation, but is too specialized (limited, after Trollope, to an ecclesiastical career in the Church of England), and too old-fashioned.

12. Compare Prv 8:1 and 9:13. He has managed to obscure somewhat the point he is making, to put it at its plainest, the one truly good thing you cannot lose against your will is Jesus Christ, Christ in you, making you Christ-like.

13. See Lk 12:47.

14. The paragraph is presumably referring to unpleasant events at the time the sermon was preached. At the date in 397 the scholars assign to the sermon, these would have been the events of Gildo's rebellion and its suppression, in the African provinces. But the mention of the *world* being severely afflicted suggests something more universal, less local. The most obvious candidate for such a catastrophe would be the sack of Rome by the Goths in 410.

SERMON 72A

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 12:41: *AND BEHOLD, SOMETHING MORE THAN JONAH HERE, ETC.*

Date: 417 or 418¹

The Jewish people and the people of Nineveh

1. Even if we were keen to discuss everything in the passage that has been read from the gospel, my dear brothers and sisters, there would hardly be enough time for each particular by itself; much less is there enough for everything. That the prophet Jonah, who was thrown into the sea and lodged in the belly of a sea monster and vomited up alive on the third day, represented the savior who suffered death and rose again on the third day was indicated by the savior himself. He compared the Jewish people to its disadvantage with the people of Nineveh, because the people of Nineveh, whom the prophet Jonah was sent to with a message of doom, appeased the wrath of God by their repentance and earned his mercy: *And behold, he says, something more than Jonah here;* the Lord Jesus clearly meaning us to understand himself.

Those people heard the servant and corrected their ways; these people heard the master and not only didn't correct their ways, but even went on to kill him. *The queen of the south, he went on, will rise up with this generation in the judgment and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon here* (Mt 12:40-42). It wasn't anything very much for Christ to be something greater than Jonah, something greater than Solomon; after all, he's the Lord, they were servants. The point is, what sort of people must they have been who took no notice of the Lord in their midst, when gentile foreigners listened to his servants?

The quest for the good

2. Then he continues: *But when the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, he walks about through the dry places looking for rest, and he doesn't find it. Then he says I will return to my house which I came from. And he comes and finds it vacant, swept clean and furnished. Then he goes and takes along with him other seven spirits more wicked than himself, and they go in and dwell in*

it and the last state of that person turns out worse than the former. So shall it be with this worst of generations (Mt 12:43-45). If this were to be explained in a way to give you a thorough understanding of it, the sermon would last rather a long time. Still, I will touch upon it briefly, as far as the Lord enables me to, because I don't want to send you away fasting from any understanding of this matter.²

When sins are forgiven in the sacraments,³ the house is cleaned out, but it needs an occupant, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit only lives in the humble of heart. God, you see, says, *Upon whom shall my Spirit rest?* And he answers the question, *Upon the humble and the quiet and the one who trembles at my words* (Is 66:2). So when he becomes the occupant, he fills and guides and leads the person, restrains from evil and spurs on to good, makes justice delightful, so that the person does good out of love for what is right, not out of fear of punishment. No one is capable on their own of doing what I have said. But if you have the Holy Spirit as the occupant of your house, you will find him also assisting you in everything good.

There are some proud people, however,⁴ who, once their sins have been forgiven, rely solely on the free choices of the human will for living a good life, and by that very pride they shut their doors in the Holy Spirit's face, and the house remains apparently cleaned up from the mess of sins, but vacant, with nothing positively good in it. Your sins have been forgiven, you have been cleared of evils, but it is only the Holy Spirit who will fill you with good things. And he is repelled by pride. You are relying on yourself, he leaves you to yourself; you trust in yourself, you are handed over to yourself. But once that greed, which made you bad, has been driven out of a person, that is to say, from your consciousness when your sins were forgiven, it wanders through desert places looking for rest, and not finding any rest, that greed comes back to the house, finds it cleaned up, brings with it other seven spirits more wicked than itself, and the last state of that person will be worse than the first.

He brings seven others with him. What's the meaning, though, of *other seven*?⁵ So does it mean that the unclean spirit too is sevenfold?⁶ What is all this about? Well, the number seven signifies totality. It had all gone out, it had all come back, and if only it had come back alone! What's the meaning of *He takes along with him other seven*? Ones he didn't have when he was bad, these are the others he will have now that he is spuriously good. Pay attention, as I try to explain what I am saying, if I can, as far as God helps me to. The Holy Spirit is presented to us as sevenfold in his activity, so that he may be in us *The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and courage, of knowledge and piety, and of the fear of God* (Is 11:2-3). Now set against this sevenfold good the opposite sevenfold evil: the spirit of folly and error, the spirit of rashness and cowardice, the spirit of ignorance and impiety, and the spirit of pride against the fear of God. These are seven wicked spirits; who are the other seven more wicked still?

Another seven more wicked still are found in hypocrisy: one evil spirit of folly, another worse one of pretended wisdom; an evil spirit is the spirit of error,

another worse one is the pretense of truth; an evil spirit is the spirit of rashness, another worse one is the pretense of counsel; an evil spirit is the spirit of cowardice, another worse one is the pretense of courage; an evil spirit is the spirit of ignorance, another worse one is pretended knowledge; an evil spirit is the spirit of impiety, another worse one is the pretense of piety; an evil spirit is the spirit of arrogance, another worse one is pretended reverence. Seven were not to be borne; who could put up with fourteen? So it necessarily follows that when you add to malice the pretense of truth, the last state of a person is worse than the first.

The mother and brothers of Jesus

3. While he was saying all this to the crowds—I am carrying on with the gospel—his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wishing to speak to him. Someone brought him the message, saying, look, your mother and your brothers are outside, they wish to speak to you. And he said, Who is my mother, or who are my brothers? And stretching out his hand over his disciples, he said, These are my mother and my brothers. And whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, that one is a brother to me, and a sister and a mother (Mt 12:46-50). This is all I wanted to talk about; but because I was unwilling to pass over the previous passage in silence, I have a feeling I have taken up rather a lot of time.

You see, the passage I have just recited to you presents us in a very intricate and knotty sort of way with the problem: how could Christ the Lord, with any sense of filial duty, so snub his mother, and not any old mother either, but such a mother as to be a virgin mother, on whom he conferred motherhood without depriving her of her maidenhead; a mother who conceived as a virgin, gave birth as a virgin, remained her whole life long a virgin. It was such a mother as that whom he snubbed, to stop maternal affection from interfering with the work he was doing and obstructing it.

What was he doing, in any case? He was talking to people, pulling down old selves, building up new ones,⁷ setting souls free, releasing prisoners, enlightening blind minds, doing a good work, doing it enthusiastically in word and deed. And in the middle of all this along comes a message about family affection! You heard how he answered. Why should I repeat it? I hope you mothers hear it too, and don't obstruct the good works your sons are doing with family affection. I mean, if you want to be obstructive and to barge in on them while they are busy, and in this way at least interrupt some work that ought not to be delayed, then you should be snubbed by your sons. I say it boldly, you should be snubbed, filial duty requires you to be snubbed. And if a son is concentrating his attention on some good work and therefore ignores his mother when she comes bustling in, what right has she, married woman or widow, ever to be angry with him, when Mary the virgin was ignored in this way?

But I suppose you are going to say to me, "So you're comparing my son to Christ, are you?" No, I'm neither comparing him to Christ nor you to Mary. So

Christ the Lord did not condemn maternal affection, but he did demonstrate by his own great example that even mothers must be ignored for the sake of God's work. He was teaching by talking, and he was teaching by taking no notice. The reason he was prepared to take no notice of his mother was to teach you, where God's work is concerned, to take no notice even of your father.

Christ born of a woman

4. After all, couldn't Christ the Lord have become man without a mother, seeing that he was able to do so without a father? If it was necessary, indeed because it was necessary, for the one who made man to become man for the sake of man, consider and call to mind what he made the first of men from, the means he was able to adapt to the institution of the human race at the beginning; well, couldn't he afterward adapt to his personal use the same kind of means for the restoration of the human race? Would it have been difficult for the Wisdom of God, the Power of God,⁹ the only-begotten Son of God, would it have been difficult for him to make the man whom he was to attach to himself from whatever material he wished? Angels showed themselves to men as men. Abraham provided holy angels with food, he invited them to eat as men, and he didn't only see them, he also touched them, seeing that he washed their feet.¹⁰ So the angels were scarcely producing phantomlike illusions, were they? So if an angel could exhibit a true human appearance when he wished,¹¹ couldn't the Lord of angels make a true human being to take to himself from whatever he wished?

But he didn't wish to have a human being as father, to avoid coming to mankind by means of sexual desire;¹² he wished however to have a human being as mother, in order, by having a mother among men, to teach men a useful lesson by snubbing her for the sake of God's work.¹³ He wished to adopt the male sex in himself, and he was happy to honor the female sex in his mother. You see, right at the beginning the woman too sinned, and gave the man sin to drink; each partner was taken in by the devil's deceit. If Christ, then, had come as a man without any acknowledgment of the female sex, women would have despaired of themselves, particularly because it was through that woman that the human race fell. In fact he honored both sexes, he acknowledged both, he took both to himself. He was born of a woman; don't despair, men; Christ was happy to be a man. Don't despair, women; Christ was happy to be born of a woman.

Let both sexes come running together to the salvation Christ brings; let the male come, let the female; in faith there is neither male nor female.

So Christ is teaching you to ignore your parents, to love your parents. You see, you only love your parents properly and devotedly when you do not put your parents before God. *Whoever loves*—they are the Lord's own words—*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me* (Mt 10:37). It seems as though by these words he was advising you not to love; in fact, if you pay careful attention, he was advising you to love. After all, he could have said, "Whoever loves father or mother is not worthy of me." But he didn't say

that, or he would have been speaking against the law he gave himself. I mean, he himself gave that law through Moses his servant, where it is written, *Honor your father and your mother* (Ex 20:12). He didn't promulgate a contrary law, but he reinforced that one. He taught you to get the order right, without undermining your filial obligations. *Whoever loves father or mother—yes, but more than me.* So they should love, but not more than me. God is God, man is man. Love your parents, oblige your parents, honor your parents, but if God calls you to something greater, which could be obstructed by parental affection, get things in the right order, do not turn love upside down.¹⁴

Did Christ have a mother?

5. Given the obvious truth of this teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, would you believe it, but the Manichees actually worked out a ridiculous argument with which they tried to prove that the Lord Jesus Christ didn't have any mother. This, you see, is their sense, or rather their nonsense, that the Lord Jesus didn't have a human mother, and they maintain it against the gospel, against the light of Truth himself. And just see how they argue their case. "Look," they say, "he says so himself." What does he say? "*Who is my mother who are my brothers?* He himself," they say, "denies it, and you want to impose on him something he denies; he says 'Who is my mother or who are my brothers,' and you say, 'He has a mother.'

You fool, you stubborn, argumentative, rightly hated mule!¹⁵ Tell me, how do you know the Lord said *Who is my mother or who are my brothers?* You deny Christ had a mother, and you attempt to prove your point from his having said *Who is my mother or my brothers?* If someone else got up and said that Christ the Lord said nothing of the kind, how would you prove him wrong? Answer, if you can, the person who denies that Christ said this. The way you prove him wrong will prove you wrong yourself. I mean, Christ himself didn't whisper in your ear, did he, that he actually said this? Answer me, so you can be proved wrong by your own mouth, answer, so you can prove that Christ said this.

I know what he's going to say: "I will take the book, open the gospel, recite his words, written in the holy gospel." Fine, fine; I will grab you with the gospel, I will tie you up with the gospel, I will gag you with the gospel. Recite from the gospel whatever you think supports your case. Open it, read, *Who is my mother?* A bit higher up you will read why he said this: *Someone brought him a message: Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside.* I'm not yet pressing you, I'm not yet gripping you, not yet gagging you, you can still say, "He was of course a false messenger, he was suggesting untruths. That's why the Lord contradicted the false messenger. I mean, after getting the message, he replied, *Who is my mother?* This was as much as to say, 'You say, Your mother's standing outside'; I say, 'Who is my mother?' Whom do you want us to believe," he says, "the messenger's insinuation, or Christ's rejection of the message he brought?"

So listen, I still have some questions to ask you. Keep hold of the gospel, don't toss me the volume aside. Hold on to it, allow the gospel its authority. If you don't allow it, you will have no means of proving that the Lord said, *Who is my mother?* Since, however, you will attribute a proper authority to the gospel, observe what I am going to ask you. A little earlier on I had asked you how you knew whether Christ really said, *Who is my mother?* What came before that? "A messenger had said to Christ, *Your mother's standing outside.*" Before the messenger said this, or rather to provide him the occasion for saying it, what came before that? I insist you read it. I see you are now afraid to read it.

The Lord answered and said, Who said that? I don't mean, who said *Who is my mother?* You will answer, of course, that the Lord said it. Who said, *The Lord answered?* You will be answering, no doubt, "The evangelist said it." Was what this evangelist said true or false? You will say, I suppose, "Was what true or false?" *The Lord answered and said to him* is what the evangelist said; was that true or false? If you say it's not true, what the evangelist said, that the Lord answered, then how do you know that the Lord said, *Who is my mother?* If, however, it's because the evangelist said he said it, that you claim to prove that the Lord said *Who is my mother?* then you can't prove that the Lord said this unless you believe the evangelist. Now then, if you believe the evangelist (because you are not saying anything to me if you don't believe the evangelist), read what this same evangelist said just above.

Authority of the gospels

6. How long I'm taking over you! How long I'm keeping you on tenterhooks! It will be a kindness to finish you off quickly. Attend closely, look at it, read it. I see you don't want to. Here, give me the book, I'll read it. *While he was saying all this to the crowds.* Who's saying this? The evangelist, and if you don't believe what he says, then Christ said nothing either. But if Christ did say *Who is my mother?* then what the evangelist wrote is true. Just see what he said earlier on: *While he was saying all this to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wishing to speak to him.* That messenger hasn't yet brought him any message, the one you can say was lying. Notice what the message is he was going to bring, observe what the evangelist said first: *While the Lord was saying all this to the crowd, his mother and his brothers were standing outside.* Who is saying this? The evangelist, on whose word you believe that the Lord said *Who is my mother?*

But if you don't believe this statement like the other one, then the Lord did not say *Who is my mother?* But in fact the Lord did say *Who is my mother?* So trust and believe the one who said that the Lord said *Who is my mother?* You see, the one who said that the Lord said *Who is my mother?* is the same person as the one who said, *While he was saying all this, his mother was standing outside.* "So why did he deny he had a mother?" He didn't do that at all. Understand it correctly; he didn't deny he had a mother, but he put the work he was doing before her.

When all is said and done, the only point here is to find out why the Lord said, *Who is my mother?* The first point to notice is that he did have one, about whom he could say, *Who is my mother?* He had one, she was standing outside, wishing to talk to him. "Tell me how you know this." The evangelist says so, and if I don't believe him, then the Lord doesn't say anything. So he had a mother. "But what's the meaning of *Who is my mother?*" It means, "Compared with this work I'm doing, who is my mother?" If you see someone who has a father in danger, and say to him, "Let your father get you out of it," and he knows his father is not in a position to get his son out of that jam, won't he answer you, without the slightest disrespect to his father, and with simple truth, "Who is my father? For what I'm wanting, for what I am aware of needing right now, what is my father?" So compared with what Christ was doing, releasing those in chains,¹⁶ giving light to blind minds, building up inner selves,¹⁷ constructing a spiritual temple for himself, what and who is his mother?

But if you insist on thinking that Christ didn't have a mother on earth, just because he said, *Who is my mother?* then his disciples didn't have fathers on earth either, because the same Lord said to them, *Do not call anyone your father on earth.* They are the Lord's own words: *Do not call anyone your father; for you have one Father, God* (Mt 23:9). It's not that they didn't have fathers, but when it comes to being born again, you must look for the Father of rebirth. You are not being asked to condemn the father of your first birth, but to put the Father of rebirth before him.

*It means more for Mary to have been a disciple of Christ
than to have been the mother of Christ*

7. But look here, my brothers and sisters, concentrate more, I beg you, on what follows, concentrate your attention more on what Christ the Lord said as he stretched out his hand over his disciples: *This is my mother and my brothers; and whoever does the will of my Father who sent me, that person is a brother to me and a sister and a mother* (Mt 12:40-50). Didn't the Virgin Mary do the will of the Father? I mean, she believed by faith, she conceived by faith, she was chosen to be the one from whom salvation in the very midst of the human race would be born for us, she was created by Christ before Christ was created in her. She did, yes of course holy Mary did the will of the Father. And therefore it means more for Mary to have been a disciple of Christ than to have been the mother of Christ. It means more for her, an altogether greater blessing, to have been Christ's disciple than to have been Christ's mother. That's why Mary was blessed, because even before she gave him birth, she bore her teacher in her womb.¹⁸

Just see if it isn't as I say. While the Lord was passing by, performing divine miracles, with the crowds following him, a woman said, *Fortunate is the womb that bore you.* And how did the Lord answer, to show that good fortune is not really to be sought in mere family ties? *Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it* (Lk 11:27-28). So that's why Mary too is blessed,

because she heard the word of God and kept it. She kept truth safe in her mind even better than she kept flesh safe in her womb. Christ is truth, Christ is flesh; Christ as truth was in Mary's mind, Christ as flesh in Mary's womb; that which is in the mind is greater than what is carried in the womb.

Mary is holy, Mary is blessed, but the Church is something better than the Virgin Mary. Why? Because Mary is part of the Church, a holy member, a quite exceptional member, the supremely wonderful member, but still a member of the whole body. That being so, it follows that the body is something greater than the member. The Lord is the head, and the whole Christ is head and body. How shall I put it? We have a divine head, we have God as our head.

Be the mother of Christ

8. So then, my dearest friends, look to yourselves; you too are members of Christ, you too are the body of Christ. Take thought to how you can be what he said: *Look, there are my mother and my brothers.* How are you to be Christ's mother? *And whoever hears, and whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, that person is a brother, a sister and a mother to me.* For example, I can understand brothers, I can understand sisters; it's because there is one inheritance, and therefore Christ in his mercy, while being the only Son, did not wish to be alone as the Son, but wished us to be heirs of the Father, his own fellow heirs. That inheritance, you see, is such that it cannot be reduced in value by any number of co-heirs.

So I can understand how we are the brothers of Christ, how holy and faithful women are Christ's sisters. But how can we understand being the mothers of Christ? What now? Have we the nerve to call ourselves the mothers of Christ? Indeed we do have the nerve to call ourselves the mothers of Christ. I mean, I have called you all his brothers and sisters, so why shouldn't I dare call you his mother too? But what I certainly haven't got the nerve to do is to deny what Christ said.

Come on now, friends, think of how the Church, which is plain enough, is the bride of Christ; what's more difficult to understand, but is true all the same, is that she is the mother of Christ. The Virgin Mary came first as a representative figure of the Church. How, I ask you, can Mary be the mother of Christ except by giving birth to the limbs and organs of Christ? You people, to whom I'm speaking, you are the limbs and organs, the members, of Christ. Who gave you birth? I hear you answering to yourselves, "Mother Church." This holy and honorable mother is like Mary in that she both gives birth and is a virgin. That she gives birth I can prove by pointing to you; you were born of her; she gives birth to Christ, because you are the members of Christ.

I have proved she gives birth; now let me prove she is a virgin. The divine evidence does not let me down; no, it certainly doesn't. Come out and stand before the people, blessed Paul. Be a witness on behalf of my assertion; cry out, and say what I want to say: *I have betrothed you to one husband to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.* What does this virginity consist in, how is he afraid

it may be corrupted? Let the one who has mentioned the virgin tell us. *I have betrothed you to one husband to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ, but I am afraid, he says, that as the serpent led Eve astray with its cunning, so too your minds, he says, may be corrupted from the chastity which is in Christ* (2 Cor 11:2-3).¹⁹

Preserve that virginity in your minds; virginity of the mind is the integrity of Catholic faith. In the same way as Eve was corrupted by the serpent's talk, so must the Church remain a virgin by the gift of the Almighty. And so, just as Mary gave birth in her womb as a virgin to Christ, so let the members of Christ give birth in their minds, and in this way you will be the mothers of Christ. It isn't something out of your reach, not something beyond your powers, not something incompatible with what you are. You became children, become mothers too. You were the mother's children when you were baptized, then you were born as members of Christ. Bring whomever you can along to the bath of baptism, so that just as you became children when you were born, you may likewise be able, by bringing others along to be born, to become mothers of Christ as well.²⁰

NOTES

1. A sermon preached some time in 417 or 418; there is no evidence to indicate where it was preached, but the easy familiarity which the preacher seems to have with his congregation could possibly make Augustine's own church of Hippo the most likely place. Actually, the sermon was clearly on the whole passage, Mt 12:38-50.

2. There seems to be an allusion here to Mk 8:3, Mt 15:32, the beginning of the story of the feeding of the four thousand.

3. He doesn't mean a variety of sacraments, baptism or penance, but rather the "sacraments of initiation," the great combination of baptism, confirmation and eucharist, celebrated mainly at Easter and Pentecost.

4. He is referring to the Pelagians, who denied that we need the grace of the Holy Spirit to enable us to do good. For them it was all done by will power.

5. *Alios septem*. It seems that he takes this, rather willfully, as meaning something slightly different from *septem alios*, "seven others." He takes it as signifying "another seven," as implying therefore a first seven. This explains the curious interpretation he goes on to give.

6. Like the Holy Spirit.

7. See Col 3:9.

8. He is making a contrast, impossible to express in English, between *mulier* (a woman not a virgin), and *virgo* (virgin). The implication is that the honorable status of a *mulier*, even married or widowed, is still less honorable than that of a *virgo*, and therefore that a *mulier* is less entitled than a *virgo* to take umbrage at a snub. Perhaps it's just as well that English is incapable of expressing this contrast! The reader is left with the more acceptable point that if the Virgin Mary didn't take umbrage at being snubbed by her son, other mothers shouldn't do so either.

9. See 1 Cor 1:24.

10. See Gn 18:1-8.

11. He avoids suggesting that angels could, or did, become men, by saying they exhibited a true

human appearance, appearing as truly human not only to the eyes and ears of observers, but also to the sense of touch. They weren't wraiths, but they weren't men either.

12. If one had asked Augustine what was wrong with God becoming incarnate through sexual desire, he would have answered that even though sexual desire as such, as a drive created by God, is good, nonetheless it has been so corrupted or depraved by the sin of our first parents that it can never be free from a certain inordinate quality, and that furthermore it acts as the transmitter, so to say, of original sin. This is not an element in the theology of either sexuality or of original sin that survives in the common teaching of the Church today.

13. He is being deliberately shocking of course, with a deadpan expression on his face, no doubt, but with a twinkle in his eye. He goes on to give what we could call the real reason in the sentences that follow.

14. The right order of love, what or whom you should love more than what or whom, is a constant preoccupation of Augustine's moral theology. See especially *Christian Instruction* I, 22-30, and within these chapters 27 and 28 in particular. St Thomas Aquinas takes up the theme in his *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae, q. 26.

15. The Manichees were indeed hated, execrated by public opinion. It is disconcerting to find Augustine supporting this kind of odium—one of the defects of the style of rhetoric in which he had been educated. The Manichees presumably denied that Christ really had a mother, because they thought all material, bodily being was evil. They would also have denied that Christ was really a man, or at least that he had a real body. They may not have included the body in their concept of man.

16. It is evident that he is speaking metaphorically of the chains of sin, or of Satan; perhaps he had in mind the woman bound by Satan these eighteen years (Lk 13:16).

17. See Eph 3:16, 4:16.

18. He is probably thinking of the *Magnificat*, and of Mary being inspired to declaim it by the child in her womb.

19. See Gn 3:1-6.

20. For other treatments of this whole theme, see *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 10, 3; *Holy Virginity* 3, 3; *Sermons* 93, 4; 213, 8; *Expositions of Psalms* 147, 10.

SERMON 73

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 13: WHERE THE LORD JESUS EXPLAINS THE PARABLES OF THE SOWER

Date: 426-430.¹

The two episodes of the sower

1. Both yesterday and today we heard our Lord Jesus Christ telling us parables about a sower. Those of you who were here yesterday will remember it today. Yesterday we had the reading about the sower who was scattering the seed, so that some fell on the path, and the birds ate that; some fell in rocky places, and that dried up in the heat; some among thorns, and that was choked and couldn't bear fruit; and some on good soil and bore fruit a hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold.²

Today the Lord again told another parable about a sower, who sowed good seed in his field. While people were sleeping an enemy came and sowed cockle over it. When it was still in the blade, this didn't show; but when the grain of the good seed began to show, then the cockle also became obvious. The servants of the householder were shocked when they saw so many cockles in amongst the good crop, and wanted to pull them up, and were not allowed to, but were told, *Let them both grow until the harvest* (Mt 13:24-30).

The Lord Jesus Christ also explained this parable, and said the sower of the good seed was himself, while pointing to the devil as the enemy who sowed the cockle, to the end of the world as the time of harvest, and to the whole world as his field.³ What did he say, though? *At harvest time I shall say to the reapers, First gather the cockle together for burning, but store my wheat in the barn* (Mt 13:30). Why be in such a hurry, he says, you servants so full of zeal? You see the weeds among the wheat, you see bad Christians among the good ones; you want to pull out the bad ones; take it easy, it isn't harvest time yet. Let that come and find you being wheat. Why all this indignation, why take it so ill, the bad being mixed up with the good? They can be with you in the field, they won't be in the barn.

Parables—one thing can be called by many names

2. Now you remember those three things mentioned yesterday, where the seed didn't come to anything, the path, the stony places, the thorny places; they are the same as the cockle. They are just called different things in different parables. You see, when comparisons are made, it means the proper meaning isn't expressed, it isn't the real thing, but something like the real thing that is expressed. I know only a few of you have understood what I'm saying, but I'm talking for the sake of you all. In straightforward cases a path is a path, stony places are stony places, thorny places are thorny places; they are what they are, because they are called by their proper names. But in parables and comparisons one thing can be called by many names; so it isn't nonsense for me to tell you: "That path, those stony places, those thorny ones are bad Christians; and these are also cockle."

Isn't Christ a lamb? Isn't Christ also a lion? Among animals, wild and domesticated, what is a lamb is a lamb, what's a lion is a lion; each is Christ. Properly speaking, each is quite different from the other; in the comparison he is each of them. More than that, it can happen in comparisons that things which are miles apart from each other are called by the same name. What could be further apart from each other than Christ and the devil? Yet Christ is called a lion, and so is the devil. Christ as a lion: *The lion has conquered, from the tribe of Judah* (Rv 5:5). The devil as a lion: *Do you not know that your adversary the devil goes about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour* (1 Pt 5:8). So he's a lion and he's a lion; he's a lion for its courage, he's a lion for its ferocity; he's a lion to conquer, he's a lion to harm. The devil is a snake, the ancient serpent (Rv 12:9); were we being ordered to imitate the devil, when our shepherd said to us, *Be simple as doves, cunning as serpents* (Mt 10:16)?

Christians who live bad lives

3. So yesterday I had words for the path, words for the rocky places, words for the thorny places, and I said, "Change your ways while you can; turn the hard places with the plow, remove the stones from the field, pull up the thorns from the field. Don't have a hard, obstinate heart, in which the word of God will die off very quickly. Don't have thin soil, in which charity won't strike deep root. Don't choke the good seed with worldly anxieties and greedy ambitions, the good seed that is scattered among you by the labors of myself and my colleagues. Yes of course, it's the Lord who sows the seed, but we are his workmen. But be good soil. I said it yesterday, and I say it to all of you today: Let one bring forth a hundredfold, another sixtyfold, another thirtyfold. More grain in one, less in another, but all will go into the barn.

That's what I said yesterday, today I have some words for the weeds; but the weeds are the very sheep. O you bad Christians, O you who fill the Church and weigh it down with your bad lives! Straighten yourselves out before the harvest comes along. Don't say, *I sinned, and what happened to me?* (Sir 5:4). God hasn't lost his power, but what he requires from you is repentance.⁴ I'm saying

this to you who are bad, and yet Christians for all that. I'm saying it to the weeds. You see, they are in the field, and it can well happen that those who are weeds today are wheat tomorrow. And so I am also addressing the wheat.

Christians who live good lives

4. O you Christians who lead good lives, who sigh as the few among the many, groan as the few among the very many! The winter will pass, the summer will come, look, it will soon be harvest time. The angels will come, who are able to make the separation, and cannot make a mistake. We at this time are like those servants⁵ about whom it says, *Do you want us to go and gather them?* You see, if it could possibly be so, we didn't want anyone bad to remain among the good. But we were instructed, *Let them both grow until the harvest.* Why? "Because you are still in the condition of being able to be misled." Anyway, listen to this: *Lest perhaps, while you want to pull up the weeds, you also pull up the wheat at the same time* (Mt 13:28-30). "What good will you do? Won't you be spoiling my harvest with your busy interference? The reapers are coming," and he explained who the reapers are: *The reapers are angels* (Mt 13:39).

We are men and women; the angels are reapers. We too, of course, if we finish the course, will be equal to the angels of God;⁶ but for the moment, while we are getting hot under the collar against bad people, we are still just human beings. And for the moment we should listen to the words, *Therefore whoever thinks he stands should take care he doesn't fall* (1 Cor 10:12). I mean, do you really imagine, my dear brothers and sisters, that these weeds don't come up here into the sanctuary? Do you imagine they are only down there, and not up here too? I hope to goodness I'm not one. *But for me it is a very small thing to be judged by you* (1 Cor 4:3). I must tell your graces plainly that in the sanctuaries of the church there are wheat grains and there are weeds, just as among the laity there are grains of wheat and there are weeds.

So let the good put up with the bad; let the bad change their ways and imitate the good. Let us all, if we possibly can, belong to God, all in his mercy get safely through the wickedness of this world. Let us seek good days,⁷ because we are in the middle of bad days; but let us take care in these bad days not to blaspheme,⁸ so that we may be able to reach the good days.

NOTES

1. A sermon probably delivered at Hippo, in 410 according to one scholar, more precisely between 19 and 24 June of some year between 426 and 430 according to others. The direct, down-to-earth style, and the brevity, do rather suggest the later date, and the old man in his seventies.

2. See Mt 13:3-8.

3. See Mt 13:37-39.

4. A neat word play in the Latin: *potentiam . . . poenitentiam*, "power . . . repentance." It can scarcely be reproduced in English, but one could perhaps render, "God has not lost his power to sentence, but what he requires from you is repentance."

5. He has in mind principally the bishops and the clergy.

6. See Mk 12:25.

7. See Ps 34:12; 1 Pt 3:10.

8. Blaspheming, as he is thinking of it here, would be what the good may be tempted to do in their indignation at the continued existence, and especially at the continued prosperity, of the wicked. See, for example his treatment of Ps 73 in Sermons 15A and 48.

SERMON 73A

ON THE MAN WHO SOWED GOOD SEED IN HIS FIELD, IN THE GOSPEL
ACCORDING TO MATTHEW 13

Date: 400-411¹

Tolerate in the field what you will not have with you in the barn

1. We have heard the holy gospel, and Christ the Lord speaking in the gospel; let me speak about it whatever he grants me. I would doubtless find it hard work, my dear brothers and sisters, to explain this parable to you. But fortunately the one who told the parable has explained it himself and so saved us a lot of trouble. The reader, sure enough, read the gospel as far as where the Lord said, *First collect the weeds, and bind them in bundles for burning; but store the wheat in the barn* (Mt 13:30). Afterward, however, *his disciples*, as it says in the text, *approached him and said to him, Expound for us the parable of the weeds* (Mt 13:36). And he that is in the bosom of the Father did in fact make it known.² *The one who sows good seed, he said, is the Son of man*, meaning himself. *The field is the world, the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom, while the weeds are the sons of the evil one. The enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world, the reapers are the angels.* So when the Son of man comes, *he will send his angels, and they will collect all the scandals from his kingdom and cast them into the furnace of blazing fire; there, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the just shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom* (Mt 13:37-43). I have spoken the words of Christ the Lord, which were not read, but that's how they are written.

So then the Lord has explained to us the parable he told. Consider what we choose to be in his field; consider what sort of people we are found to be at the harvest. The field, you see, which is the world, is the Church spread throughout the world. Let those who are wheat persevere until the harvest; let those who are weeds change themselves into wheat. This, you see is the difference between people and real ears of wheat and real weeds, because with those things growing in a field whatever is wheat is wheat, and whatever are weeds are weeds. But in the Lord's field, which is the Church, what used to be grain sometimes changes into weeds, and what used to be weeds sometimes change into grain; and nobody knows what's going to happen tomorrow.

That's why the workers who were rather cross with the householder, and wanted to go and pull up the weeds, were not allowed to; they wanted to remove them, they weren't allowed to separate the weeds. They did the job they were capable of, they left the business of sorting out to the angels. And in fact they didn't want to leave the sorting out of the weeds to the angels; but the householder, who knew them all and knew that the business of sorting out had to be put off, ordered them to tolerate the weeds and not sort them out. *No, he said, when they asked, Do you want us to go and collect them? No, lest perhaps while you wish to collect the weeds, you also root out the grain at the same time* (Mt 13:28-29). "So, Lord, will the weeds too be together with us in the barn?" *At the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather the weeds, and bind them in bundles for burning* (Mt 13:30); tolerate in the field what you will not have with you in the barn.

Don't be tomorrow what you are today

2. Listen, dearest grains of Christ; listen, Christ's precious ears of wheat; listen, Christ's dearest corn. Take a look at yourselves, go back to your consciences, interrogate your faith, interrogate your love, stir up your consciences. And if you discover that you are good grain, let the thought occur to you, *Whoever perseveres to the end will be saved* (Mt 10:22). Any of you who on shaking up their consciences find themselves among the weeds must not be afraid to change. The command hasn't yet been given to cut, it isn't the harvest yet; don't be today what you were yesterday, or at least don't be tomorrow what you are today.

What's the good of your saying you'll change some time? God has promised you pardon once you have changed, he hasn't promised you tomorrow. Whatever sort of person you are as you depart from the body, that's the sort you will be as you come to the harvest. Some people or other died, they were weeds; have they a chance of becoming wheat over there? Here in the field wheat can be made out of weeds, or weeds out of wheat, here that is possible. But elsewhere, that is after this life, is the time for receiving the consequences of what you have done, not for doing what you haven't done.

But any who have been like weeds and have decided to separate themselves from the field of Christ the Lord will not become wheat; after all, wheat would surely have stayed. What has wheat got to fear from weeds? *Let them both grow until the harvest* (Mt 13:30), says the householder. Let them grow together; the reapers don't make mistakes. They know what to make their bundles from and throw them on the fire. Bundles can't be made of wheat and thrown on the fire. No, these bundles represent the sorting process; Arius has his bundle there, Eunomius has his bundle there, Photinus has his bundle there, Donatus has his bundle there, Manes has his bundle there, Priscillian has his bundle there.³ All these bundles will be thrown on the fire; the grain needn't worry, they will rejoice unmixed in the barn.

The enemy has sown weeds everywhere

3. Is there anywhere, though, where that enemy has not sown weeds? Has he found any cornfields anywhere, and not scattered weeds in them? Do you imagine he has sown them among the laity and not among the clergy, or the bishops? Or sown them among married men and not among those who have made profession of celibacy? Or sown them among married women and not among consecrated nuns? Or sown them in the houses of laypeople and not in communities of monks? He's scattered them everywhere, sown them everywhere. Has he left anything unmixed?

But thanks be to God, who will be pleased in due course to sort things out, and who cannot be mistaken. It will not, I'm sure, have escaped the notice of your graces, that weeds are to be found in all kinds of harvests, even those in the most exalted and distinguished circles. They are to be found even among professed religious. And you say, "Imagine, in that place, have bad people been found even there, have bad people been found even in that community?" But of course, bad people have been found everywhere, but the bad will not reign for ever with the good.

Why be surprised at finding bad people in a holy place? Don't you know that the first sin in paradise was disobedience, and that that was the sin by which the angels fell? Did they pollute the heavens? Adam fell; did he pollute paradise?¹ One of Noah's sons fell; did he pollute the just man's house?² Judas fell; did he pollute the band of the apostles?³ Sometimes, though, people are considered by human estimation to be grain, and in fact they are weeds; and others are reckoned to be weeds, but in fact are really grain.

It's because the truth is usually concealed in this way that the apostle says, *Do not judge before the time, until the Lord comes and lights up the things hidden in darkness; and he will make public the thoughts of the heart; and then each one will have praise from God* (1 Cor 4:5). Human praise is a passing thing; people sometimes praise someone bad without realizing it; people sometimes accuse someone holy without knowing it. May God pardon them for their ignorance, and come to their assistance in their difficulties!

NOTES

1. A sermon preached in the year 400/411, without any indication of where it was preached.

2. See Jn 1:18.

3. For Arius and Photinus see Sermon 71, note 12, under Arians and Photinians, and for Eunomius, see note 16.

Manes, a Persian of the third century, was the founder of the Manichee religion; people differ about whether it should be regarded as a Christian heresy or a distinct religion. Priscillian was a Spaniard nobleman from Galicia in the northwest of the peninsula. What his heresy, if any, was precisely, it is very hard to say. In fact he seems to have been more of an enthusiastic, perhaps rather

fanatical, ecclesiastical troublemaker (in the eyes of Spanish bishops, some of whom were distinctly worldly weeds in high places!). He tried to reform the clergy in what is now Portugal, he preached as a layman, he encouraged women to play an active part in Church life and worship. He was probably a charismatic rigorist, not unlike Montanus two centuries earlier, and like him he and his followers may have flouted, without actually rejecting, the authority of bishops. He himself, though, was elected bishop of Avila in 380. Anyway, he and his colleagues were condemned by a synod at Saragossa, and by their archbishops, and received no comfort from Saint Ambrose in Milan or Saint Damasus in Rome when they appealed to them. Priscillian was unwise enough to appeal to the emperor (a usurper called Maximus, as it happened) in Trier; and there Maximus had him put to death as a Manichee (which he certainly wasn't) in 386. This act was received with outrage by the Catholic world, especially by John Chrysostom in the East and Ambrose in the West, and the worldly Spanish bishops who had engineered it were repudiated and deposed. Priscillianism continued to be a kind of ragbag heresy, to which anything particularly disliked by the establishment was attributed (rather like Communism in the McCarthy era) for a few centuries more.

4. See Gn 3.

5. See Gn 9:20-27.

6. See Mk 14:11, also *Te Deum*, verse 7.

SERMON 74

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 13:52: *THEREFORE EVERY SCRIBE LEARNED IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD, ETC.*

Date: unknown¹

Who is the scribe?

1. The gospel reading obliges me to inquire and to explain to your graces, as far as the Lord enables me to do so, who precisely is *the scribe experienced in the kingdom of God, who produces from his treasury new things and old* (Mt 13:52). That's how the reading ended, with the new things and old of the experienced scribe. Now we know that the people the ancients called scribes, following the style of our scriptures, were those who had a professional knowledge of the law. It was such persons, you see, who among that people were called scribes, not such as are nowadays so called in judges' chambers or in city administrations.²

I mean, we shouldn't come to school unprepared; we ought to know in what sense to take the words of the scriptures. Otherwise, when something is heard from the bible which is normally understood in another secular sense, hearers may be misled, and by taking for granted what they have been used to, may fail to understand what they have heard. So the scribes were people with a professional knowledge of the law, who were responsible for preserving and expounding, or even for copying and knowing the books of the law.³

The scribes are not instructed in the kingdom of God

2. It's this kind of people that our Lord Jesus Christ rebukes for having the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and neither going in themselves nor letting others go in either;⁴ that's how he criticizes the Pharisees and the scribes, teachers of the law of the Jews. In another place he says about them, *Do what they say, but do not do what they do; for they preach, and do not practice* (Mt 23:3). Why are you told, *They preach and do not practice*, if not because there are some people in whom the apostle's words are verified, *You preach against stealing, and you steal; you speak against adultery, and you commit adultery, you abominate idols, and you commit sacrilege, you boast of the law, and you*

dishonor God by transgressing the law. For the name of God is blasphemed because of you among the Gentiles (Rom 2:21-24)? It's certainly about people like that, isn't it, that the Lord says, *For they preach, and do not practice.* So they are scribes, but not ones *experienced in the kingdom of God.*

The chair of Moses

3. One of you may possibly say, "And how can a bad person speak good things? Seeing that it's written, in the Lord's own words, *The good man from the good treasury of his heart produces good things, and the bad man from the bad treasury of his heart produces bad things. Hypocrites, how can you speak good things when you are bad?* (Mt 12:35.34; Lk 6:45). Here he says, *How can you speak good things, when you are bad?*; there he says, *Do what they say, but do not do what they do, for they preach and do not practice.* If they preach and do not practice, they are bad; if they are bad, they cannot speak good things; so how are we to do what we hear from them, since we cannot hear good things from them?"

Notice please, your graces, how this problem is solved. Anything bad people produce from themselves is bad; anything bad people produce from their hearts is bad; that after all is where the bad treasury is. On the other hand, anything good people produce from their hearts is good, because that's where the good treasury is. So how were those bad people producing good things? Because they were sitting in the chair of Moses.

Unless he had first said, *They occupy the chair of Moses* (Mt 23:2), he would never have ordered us to listen to bad people. You see, what they produced from the bad treasury of their hearts was one thing; quite another what they boomed out from the chair of Moses, like a judge's heralds. What the herald says is never attributed to the herald, if he is speaking in the presence of the judge.⁵ What the herald says in his own home is one thing, what he utters after hearing it from the judge is quite another. After all, willy-nilly, the herald gives tongue even to the sentence passed on his friend. Again, willy-nilly, he gives tongue even to the acquittal of his enemy. Let him give tongue from his heart: he acquits his friend, sentences his enemy. Let him give tongue from the judge's bench: he sentences his friend, acquits his enemy.

Let the scribes give tongue from their hearts: you will hear, *Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we shall die* (1 Cor 15:32).⁶ Let them give tongue from the chair of Moses: you will hear, *You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not commit theft; you shall not utter false testimony* (Ex 20:13-16); *honor father and mother* (Ex 20:12); *you shall love your neighbor like yourself* (Lv 19:18). What you've got to do is what the chair proclaims through the mouth of the scribes, not what comes through the heart of the scribes. In this way, you see, you will do justice to each of the Lord's statements, instead of just complying with one and offending against the other. Father, you understand that there is a harmony between them; you observe that one is perfectly true, because indeed *the good man from the good treasury of his heart produces good things,*

and the bad man from the bad one produces bad things; and so is the other, because those scribes would not be speaking good things from the bad treasury of their hearts, but they would still be able to speak good things from the treasury of the chair of Moses.

Heart of the Pharisee

4. So you won't be worried either by those words of the Lord when he says, *Every tree is known by its fruit. They don't gather grapes from thorns, do they, or figs from thistles?* (Lk 6:44). So the Jewish scribes and Pharisees were thorns and thistles; and yet, *Do what they say, but do not do what they do.* So a grape or two is sometimes gathered from thorns, and a fig from thistles, in the way I have given you to understand in the discussion we have just had.⁷ After all, grape vines sometimes entwine themselves in a hedge of thorns, and bunches of grapes hang from the thorn bush. When you hear the word "thorns" you are likely to pooh-pooh the grapes. Look for the root of the thorn, and see where you find it. Trace the root of the bunch hanging there, and see what you find. In this way you can see how one belongs to the heart of the Pharisee, and the other to the chair of Moses.

Pass over to the Lord, for the veil to be removed

5. But why were they like that? Because *a veil*, he says, *is placed over their hearts* (2 Cor 3:15), and they don't see that *the old things have passed away and all things have become new* (2 Cor 5:17). That's why they were like that, and whoever else is like that even now. What makes things old? That they have been preached for a long time. What makes things new? That they belong to the kingdom of God. So the apostle himself explains how the veil is taken away: *But when you pass over to the Lord, the veil will be taken away* (2 Cor 3:16).

So the Jew who doesn't pass over to the Lord doesn't have the sights of his mind fixed on the end—just as at that time, in this comparison, the children of Israel did not fix the sights of their eyes on the end, that is to say, on the face of Moses. You see, the shining face of Moses was a symbol of the truth; he put a veil over it because the children of Israel were still unable to gaze on the shining splendor of his countenance.⁸ This symbol or representation is being canceled. You see, that's what the apostle says: *Which are being canceled* (2 Cor 3:13).⁹

Why are they being canceled? Because when the emperor comes his images are set aside.¹⁰ The image is shown respect when the emperor is not present; but wherever he whose image it is happens to be, the image is removed. So images were offered for respect before the coming of our emperor, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the images have been set aside, the presence of the emperor shines in all its glory. That's why the veil will be removed whenever anybody passes over to the Lord.¹¹

You see, the voice of Moses could be heard through the veil, but the face of Moses could not be seen. In the same way even now, the voice is there for the

Jews to hear through the voice of the Old Testament scriptures; they hear their voice, they don't see the face of the one speaking. So do they want the veil to be taken away? Let them pass over to the Lord. When that happens, you see, the old things aren't taken away, they are stored in the treasury, so that you can now be a scribe experienced in the kingdom of God, producing from your treasury neither new things only nor old things only. I mean, if you produce only new things or only old things, you are not a scribe experienced in the kingdom of God, producing from your treasury new things and old. If you say them and don't do them, you are producing them from the chair, not from the treasury of your heart. And I'm telling your graces the truth: everything produced from the old is lit up and illuminated by the new. That's why you must pass over to the Lord, for the veil to be removed.

NOTES

1. The place where this sermon was preached and its date cannot be determined. In fact, the sermon is really about the problem raised by the text *Do what they say, but do not do what they do; for they preach but do not practice* (Mt 23:3), when it is compared with that other text, *A good man from the good treasury of his heart produces good things, and a bad man from the bad treasury of his heart produces bad things. Hypocrites, how can you speak good things when you are bad?* (Mt 12:35-34; Lk 6:45). Augustine is just using the text given here in the heading, which was the gospel that had just been read, as a peg on which to hang his sermon on another point. The actual peg is the word "scribe."

2. Judges' clerks and secretaries in city halls were called "scribes." The title persists in the administrative structure of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, and perhaps in other Reformed Churches. In the Damon Runyan dialect of Broadway it is also given to journalists, notably to the scribe Waldo Winchester.

3. The law, of course, is the law of Moses, its books being Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

4. See Lk 11:52, Mt 23:13.

5. See Sermon 44, note 10.

6. Quoting Is 22:13, see Lk 12:19.

7. The text reads "... in the way he has given you to understand, etc.": *sicut dedit tibi*. I have taken the liberty of changing *dedit* to *dedi*; a scribal error could easily explain *dedit*. If Augustine meant the Lord by "he," then he would almost certainly have said, *sicut Dominus dedit tibi*.

8. See Ex 34:29-35.

9. Paul's use of the episode from Exodus 34 is rather complicated. 2 Cor 3:13 reads ... so that the children of Israel might not gaze on the end of that which was being canceled (or fading). By this he presumably meant the law, the whole old dispensation, which was being canceled by being fulfilled in Christ. It seems too that this is how Augustine interpreted him. The only peculiarity of his version (or it may have been a quirk of his memory) is that the verb is in the plural: so that it would have read ... of the things which were being canceled. By these he would have understood all the provisions of the ceremonial law, which Jews still observed.

10. Statues of the emperor were not just public ornaments in the cities of the Roman Empire; they represented his presence, his authority, and on public occasions like the holding of courts or the celebrations of games they would doubtless be accorded marks of respect. One presumes that

when Augustine says that they were set aside whenever the emperor visited a city in person, he means that these marks of respect were no longer offered to the images but to the emperor himself. So too with Christ and his "images," the old law and its observances.

11. See 2 Cor 3:16.

SERMON 75

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 14:24-33: BUT THE BOAT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SEA WAS BEING TOSSED ABOUT BY THE WAVES, ETC.

Date: 400¹

Jesus in the boat

1. The reading of the gospel which we have just heard appeals to the humility of us all, to see and acknowledge where we are, and to what destination we should be hurrying. You see, that vessel carrying the disciples, battling in the waves against the wind, must mean something. Nor was it for no reason at all that the Lord left the crowds and went up the mountain to pray by himself; and then coming to his disciples found them in distress, as he himself was walking on the sea, and reassured them by getting into the vessel, and calmed the waves.²

Why, though, should it be surprising if the one who established everything in existence can also calm everything down? All the same, after he had got into the boat, its passengers came and said, *Truly, you are the Son of God* (Mt 14:33). But before they had this evidence of who he was, they had been troubled when they saw him on the sea; they said, you see, *It's a specter!* (Mt 14:26). But he, by getting into the boat, allayed the mental turmoil in their hearts, where doubt was putting their minds in greater danger than their bodies were in from the waves.

We should stay in the boat

2. In everything, though, that the Lord did, he was advising us how we should live here. It's clear that in this world every single person is a foreign traveller, though not everybody is very keen to return to the home country. Now by the very nature of the voyage we are bound to endure turbulence and storms, but it's essential that at least we should stay in the boat. I mean to say, if there's danger in the boat, without the boat there's certain destruction. However powerful the shoulders of the swimmer in the ocean, sooner or later the vastness of the sea will defeat him, and he will be swallowed up and drowned.

So it's essential we should stay in the boat, that is, that we should be carried on the wood, to be enabled to cross this sea. Now this wood, on which our

feebleness is carried, is the Lord's cross, with which we are stamped and reclaimed from submersion in this world. We suffer from seasickness, but the one who will come to our aid is God.

The prayer of Christ on the mountain

3. As for the Lord leaving the crowds and going up to pray alone on the mountain, that mountain represents the heights of heaven. Leaving the crowds, you see, the Lord alone ascended into heaven after his resurrection, and there he *intercedes for us* (Rom 8:34) as the apostle says. So there is some meaning in his leaving the crowds and going up the mountain to pray alone. I mean, so far he alone is the firstborn from the dead,³ at the Father's right hand after the resurrection of the body, our high priest and advocate of our prayers.⁴ The head of the Church is up above, so that the rest of the body may follow at the end. So if he is interceding for us, on the top of the mountain so to say, way above the highest peak of all creation, he is praying alone by himself.

Keep yourself in the ship, and turn to God with your requests

4. Meanwhile the vessel carrying the disciples, that is, the Church, is being tossed about and battered by the storms of temptations and trials; and there's no easing up of the contrary wind, that is, of the devil's opposition to her, but he goes on making every effort to prevent her from reaching calm waters. But the one who is interceding for us is greater than he is. For in this turbulent situation in which we find ourselves struggling, he gives us confidence by coming to us and reassuring us. The one thing he has to do is stop us from shaking ourselves loose in our agitation in the boat, and hurling ourselves into the sea. Because even if the boat is being agitated and tossed about, still it is a boat. It alone carries the disciples, and receives Christ on board. Sure, it's in distress and danger in the sea, but without it we all perish immediately.

So keep yourself in the ship, and turn to God with your requests. With sailors, you see, when every other plan fails, when the vessel doesn't answer the helm, and cramming on more sail is more dangerous than useful, when all human efforts and endeavors have been tried and found unavailing, then all that's left to them is the urgent pouring out of their voices to God in prayer.⁵ Well now, if God enables seafarers to come safely to port, is he going to leave his Church to her fate, and bring her through to the final haven of rest?

Absence of the Lord

5. And yet, my dear brothers and sisters, the only thing that causes really serious trouble and agitation in this ship is the absence of the Lord. When you are firmly settled in the Church, can you experience the absence of the Lord? When can you find the Lord absent? When you are overcome by some strong desire.

Take, for example, what is said somewhere in a symbolical sense: *Do not let the sun go down upon your anger, or give the devil any room* (Eph 4:26-27). It should not be understood of this sun which is the most sublime of the heavenly bodies visible to us, and which we share the sight of with the animals, but of that light which can only be seen by the pure hearts of the faithful, according to the text, *That was the true light which enlightens every man who comes into this world* (Jn 1:9). This light of the visible sun, after all, enlightens even the tiniest and most short-lived insects. So the true light is justice and wisdom,⁶ which the mind ceases to see when it is overcome by the turmoil of anger, as by a cloud; and then it's as though the sun is going down upon a person's anger.

So it is that when in this ship too Christ is absent, we are each of us being tossed about by our own storms and iniquitous desires. The law says to you, for example, *You shall not bear false witness* (Ex 20:16; Dt 5:20). If you know what the truth of the evidence is, you have light in your mind; but if you are overcome by greed for sordid gain, and decide in your heart of hearts to bear false witness for the sake of it, then you are already beginning to be tossed about by the storm in the absence of Christ. You are being heaved up and down by the waves of your avarice, you are being endangered by the storm of your desires, and with Christ apparently absent, you are on the verge of sinking.⁷

Turning back

6. What really has to be guarded against is the ship going off course and turning back. This happens when people give up hope of heavenly rewards, and turn under the distorting pull of greed to things that can be seen but pass away. You see, people who are being troubled and tempted by their passions, and yet keep their sights on the realities of the inner life, do not despair like that, but pray for their offenses to be forgiven and remain determined to win through and sail across the rage and fury of the sea. But those who allow themselves to be so deflected from their true selves that they say to themselves, "God doesn't see, because after all he doesn't think about me, or care whether I sin," they are turning the bows right around, running before the squall, and being driven back where they came from. There are, after all, a great many ideas that can occur to human hearts; and when Christ is absent the ship is beset by the dangerous currents of this world and its many storms.

Fourth watch of the night

7. The fourth watch of the night, though, is the end of the night, seeing that a watch consists of three hours.⁸ So it means that it's already the end of the world, with the Lord coming to help us and being seen to walk upon the waters.⁹ For although this vessel is still being beset by squalls of trials and temptations, it can for all that see God glorified walking over all the surges of the sea, that is, over all the sovereign powers of this world.

Previously, you see, when he was showing us an example of humility in the

flesh, it was said with reference to his passion that the waves of the sea rose mightily¹⁰ against him,¹¹ to which he yielded voluntarily for our sakes, so fulfilling the prophecy, *I came into the depth of the sea, and the tempest overwhelmed me* (Ps 69:2). Thus he didn't rebut the false witnesses, nor the savage roar of the crowd, *Have him crucified!* (Mt 27:21). He didn't use his power to quell the raging hearts and stop the mouths of the furious mob, but he bore it all with patience. They did to him whatever they wanted, because *he became obedient unto death, even death on a cross* (Phil 2:8).

Afterward, though, when he had risen from the dead, in order to pray alone for his disciples gathered in the Church as in a ship,¹² and borne up by faith in his cross, as by wood, and threatened by the trials and temptations of this world as by the waves of the sea, his name began to be honored in this same world, in which he had been discarded, accused, and put to death. Thus the one who, by his sufferings in the flesh, had come into the depth of the sea, and the tempest had overwhelmed him, was now trampling on the necks of the proud by the honor given his name, as on the spray and froth of the waves. So it is that we now see the Lord walking over the sea, and behold all the rage and savagery of this world cast down beneath his feet.

Errors of the heretics

8. But in addition to the dangers of the storm we also have the errors of the heretics. People are never lacking who will try to seduce the minds of those in the boat, by saying that Christ was not born of the virgin,¹³ and that he didn't have a real body, but only seemed to other people's eyes to be what he really wasn't. And these heretical opinions have sprung up when the name of Christ was already being glorified among all nations, with Christ, so to say, already walking on the sea.¹⁴ The disciples said, *It's a spectre!* But he steadied them against these pestilential ideas with his own words, saying, *Have faith; it's really me, don't be afraid* (Mt 14:26-27).

It's out of a kind of pointless fear, you see, that people have formed these ideas about Christ, when they observed the honor shown him and his greatness; and they don't consider that if he could rightly be glorified like that, he could be born like that; it's as though they were frightened out of their wits at seeing him walking on the sea.¹⁵ This action illustrated and symbolized his surpassing dignity; and they treat it as the appearance of a spectre. But when he says *It's really me*, what else is he saying but that what is not real is not in him? And so if he showed flesh, flesh it really was; if bones, they were real bones; if wounds, they were real wounds. After all, *In him it was not a case of "Yes and No"; in him it was just "Yes"* (2 Cor 1:19), as the apostle says. That's where these words come from, *Have faith; it's really me, don't be afraid*.

What it amounts to is, "Don't be so awestruck by my dignity that you wish to deprive me of any reality. Even if I walk on the sea, even if I have the haughty surges of the world, like furious waves, under my feet, still I have appeared as a real human being, still it is true what my gospel tells about me, that I was born

of the Virgin, that being the Word I became flesh, that I was telling the truth when I said, *Feel me and see, that a spirit does not have any bones, as you can see that I have* (Lk 24:39); that the hands of the doubter touched the real traces of my wounds.¹⁶ Therefore, *It's really me; don't be afraid.*"

It's really me; don't be afraid

9. But this business of the disciples thinking he was a spectre doesn't only point to these people; it doesn't only indicate those who deny that the Lord really had human flesh and who sometimes even upset the passengers in the ship with their blind and twisted reasoning. It also points a finger at those who think that the Lord told lies about some things, and who don't believe that what he threatened the wicked with will ever come about. As though he were truthful in parts and a liar in parts, like a spectre showing in his words, like something that is and it isn't. But those who rightly understand his meaning when he says, *It's really me, don't be afraid*, from now on believe all the Lord's words, and dread the punishments he threatens just as much as they hope for the rewards he promises. Just as it's true what he is going to say to those placed at his right hand: *Come, blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the beginning of the world*, so it's equally true what those put on the left are going to hear: *Go into the eternal fire, which has been prepared for the devil and his angels* (Mt 25:34, 41).

This opinion too, you see, which people entertain, that what Christ threatened the wicked and the rakes with isn't really true, arises from their seeing many nations and countless multitudes subject to the authority of his name. As a result, Christ seems to them to be a spectre, because he was walking on the sea. That is to say, the reason they assume he was lying when he threatened such punishments is that it hardly seems possible he could let such countless peoples perish, who have submitted to the supreme authority of his name. But they should listen to him saying, *It's really me.*

So the ones who needn't be afraid are those who believe that Christ always spoke the truth, and who not only set their hearts on what he has promised, but also take care to avoid what he has threatened. Because even if he does walk over the sea, which means that all the races of humanity established in this world have submitted to him, all the same he is not a spectre, and therefore he is not lying when he says, *Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 7:21).

Peter walking on the water

10. So what now is the significance of Peter being so bold as to come to him over the water? Peter, you see, often represents the Church. So what else are we to suppose is meant by *Lord, if it is you, order me to come to you over the water* (Mt 14:28), but, "Lord, if you are truthful and never lie at all, let your Church too be glorified in this world, because prophecy foretold this about you? So let

her walk over the water, and in this way may she come to you, she to whom it was said, *The rich among the people will sue for your favor* (Ps 45:12).

But the Lord is not subject to the temptations of human praise, while human beings in the Church are often thrown off balance by human praise and fame, and are on the verge of going under. That's the meaning of Peter shaking with alarm in the sea, aghast at the tremendous force of the storm. I mean, who wouldn't be alarmed by the words, *Those who call you happy lead you astray, and disturb the paths of your feet* (Is 3:12)? And because the conscience struggles against the desire for human praise, it is a good thing in such a plight to turn to prayer and supplication; or else it could happen that after being lulled by praise, you are overturned and sunk by being reprimanded. Cry out, Peter, as you stagger in the waves, and say, *Lord, save me*. The Lord, you see, is stretching out his hand. He does indeed rebuke you and say, "Little faith, why did you doubt?" (Mt 14:30-31). Why didn't you keep your eyes on the one you were aiming at and make straight for him, and in this way boast only in the Lord?"¹⁷ And yet he does snatch you from a watery grave, and because you are admitting your weakness and imploring him to help you, he doesn't allow you to perish.

When the Lord was taken aboard the boat, their faith was made fast and all doubts and hesitations laid to rest; the stormy sea was stilled, and thus they came to the safety of *terra firma*. Then they all worship him, saying, *Truly, it's the Son of God you are* (Mt 14:33). This, you see, is what everlasting joy consists of: recognizing and loving transparent Truth, and the Word of God, and the Wisdom through which all things were made,¹⁸ and his extraordinary loving kindness.

NOTES

1. A sermon preached before 400; it is impossible to say where.

2. See Mt 14:22-25.

3. See Col 1:18.

4. See Heb 7:24-25; Rv 8:3.

5. While Augustine does of course have in mind sailors and sea voyages in general (he had himself sailed to Italy and back, before and just after his conversion), it is more than likely that he was also thinking here of three biblical accounts of distress at sea: Jonah 1; Ps 107:23-32; Acts 27:13 onward.

6. For Augustine this is another way of saying Christ. But it is as justice and wisdom that he, the Word made flesh of John's prologue, enlightens every person coming into the world.

7. The application of the whole extended metaphor is beginning to wobble a little. The ship has shifted from representing the Church to representing the individual Christian.

8. See Mt 14:25. Nowadays, I believe, a watch at sea lasts four hours.

9. What Augustine is saying is that we are already living in the last age of the world; the end is in sight; see 1 Cor 10:11. Like Paul he accepts the Jewish idea that the coming of the Messiah, the Christ, ushers in the *eschaton*, the end of all things. But the facts of Christian history require of Christianity a rather more complex and subtle notion of the end than prophetic Judaism had.

10. I have emended the Latin text from *evaruerunt*, "faded away," to *evaluerunt*. The first seems to make no sense at all in the context. But it was a more common word, and sounds practically the same.

11. See Ps 93:3; Gn 7:19.

12. See above, section 3.

13. Not denying the doctrine of the virgin birth but denying that Christ was ever born at all. He is referring here and in the following sentences to the Manichees, though the opinion described is earlier than Manes (about 250), and goes back to the Docetists of the early second century: "Docetists," from the Greek word "to seem," precisely because they said Christ only seemed to be a human being (or have a human body), but really wasn't (or didn't).

14. With Manes, the founder of Manichaeanism, in the middle of the third century.

15. It was indeed a kind of fear that prompted heresies of this kind: fear of demeaning the honor of the divinity. They thought the idea of an incarnation truly shocking. To reject the shocking is to show a kind of fear.

16. See Jn 20:27.

17. See 1 Cor 1:31.

18. Truth, Word, Wisdom are three names or titles of Christ.

SERMON 76

AGAIN ON MATTHEW 14:24-33: ABOUT THE LORD WALKING ON THE SURFACE OF THE SEA, AND ABOUT PETER STAGGERING

Date: 410-412¹

Peter, figure of the Church

1. This gospel that has just been read about Christ the Lord, and how he walked over the surface of the sea, and about the apostle Peter, and how, by growing afraid as he walked, he staggered, and by losing confidence began to submerge, until by confessing he again emerged; this gospel is advising us to take the sea as meaning the present age and this world, and the apostle Peter as representing the one and only Church. Peter, you see, is first in the class of the apostles, and the readiest in expressing love of Christ, and is often the one who answers for them all. Thus when the Lord Jesus Christ was inquiring who people said he was, and the disciples told him the various opinions people held, and the Lord again asked them, *But you, who do you say that I am?*—it was Peter who answered, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God* (Mt 16:15-16).

Then the Lord said to him, *Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona, because it is not flesh and blood that revealed it to you, but my Father who is in heaven.* Then he added, *And I say to you.* As much as to say, “Because you said to me, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*, I in turn say to you, *You are Peter* (Mt 16:17-18).” Previously, of course, he was called Simon; this name of Peter was bestowed on him by the Lord, and that with the symbolic intention of his representing the Church. Because Christ, you see, is the *petra* or rock; Peter, or Rocky, is the Christian people. I mean, the basic name is “rock.” Therefore Rocky is so called from rock, not the rock from Rocky; just as Christ is not so called from Christian, but Christian from Christ. So, *You, he says, are Peter, and on this rock, which you have acknowledged, on this rock, which you recognized when you said You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, I will build my Church;* that is, on myself, the Son of the living God, *I will build my Church* (Mt 16:18). I will build you on me, not me on you.

The Church built on Christ

2. There were people, you see, who wanted to build on human beings merely, and they would say, *I'm Paul's man, I'm Apollo's, I'm Kephas'*—that's Peter, or Rocky . . . And others, who didn't want to be built on Rocky, but on the rock, said, *But I'm Christ's*. When, however, the apostle Paul realized that he had been chosen and Christ had been ignored, he said, *Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you, Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?* (1 Cor 1:12-13). Not in Paul's name, nor in Rocky's either, but in the name of Christ, so that Rocky might be built up on the rock, not the rock on Rocky.

Peter called blessed

3. So then, this self-same Peter, blessed by being surnamed Rocky from the rock, representing the person of the Church, holding chief place in the apostolic ranks, no sooner had he heard that he was blessed, no sooner had he heard that he was Rocky, no sooner had he heard that he was to be built on the rock, than on hearing also about the Lord's coming passion, which the Lord said was going to happen pretty quickly, he expressed his displeasure. He was afraid of losing by death the one he had confessed to be the fountain of life. He was shocked, and said, *Far be it from you, Lord; this must not happen. Be easy on yourself, God;*² I don't want you to die. Peter said to Christ, "I don't want you to die"; but what Christ said was better: "I want to die for you."

Anyway, he immediately rebuked him, having shortly before praised him; and having just called him blessed, he now called him Satan. *Get behind me, Satan,* he said; *you are a scandal to me, for you do not share God's ideas, but men's* (Mt 16:22-23). What does he want to make us into out of what we are, if he blames us in this way for simply being human? Do you want to know what he wants to make us into? Listen to the psalm: *I said, you are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High.* But by having merely human ideas, *You, however, shall die like men* (Ps 82:6-7). It's the very same Peter, just now blessed, next minute Satan, all in a single moment, within a few words. You're surprised at the difference between the names; consider the reason for the difference. Why be surprised that just now he was blessed and next minute Satan?

Consider the reason why he was blessed: *because flesh and blood did not reveal it to you, but my Father who is in heaven* (Mt 16:17). That's why you are blessed, *because flesh and blood did not reveal it to you.* You see, if flesh and blood had revealed it to you, it would have come from your own idea. But *because it was not flesh and blood that revealed it to you, but my Father who is in heaven*, it comes from my ideas, not yours. Why from mine? Because *all that the Father has is mine* (Jn 16:15). So there you are, you have heard the reason why he was blessed, and why Peter, or Rocky.

But why that name that makes me shudder, which I refuse to repeat? Why else, but because of what was your own idea? *For you do not share God's ideas, but men's* (Mt 16:23).

Peter represents the weak and the strong

4. By observing this member of the Church ourselves, let us try and distinguish in our own lives what comes from God's ideas, and what from our own. Then we shan't stagger, then we shall be founded on the rock, then we shall be solid and steady against the winds, the storms of rain, the floods,³ namely the trials and temptations of this present age.

However, notice that man Peter, who was the symbolic representative of us all: now he's trusting, now he's tottering; one moment he's acknowledging Christ to be immortal, the next he's afraid of his dying. It's because the Church of Christ in the same sort of way has strong members, and also has weak members. It can't do without its strong members, nor without its weak ones. That's why the apostle Paul says, *But we who are strong should bear the burdens of the weak* (Rom 15:1).

Now Peter, in saying *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God* (Mt 16:15), represents the strong. But in his being filled with alarm, and his staggering, and not wanting Christ to suffer because he was afraid of death and didn't recognize life, he represents the weak members of the Church. So in that one apostle, that is, in Peter, first and chief in the ranks of the apostles, in whom the Church was symbolized, each kind of member had to be symbolized too, that is to say, the strong and the weak; because without the one or the other there is no Church.

Peter could do what the Lord did, not on his own but in the Lord

5. So this is where the words that have just been read come in: *Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you over the water* (Mt 14:28). *If it's you, tell me to come;* because I can't do it on my own, but only in you. He acknowledged the difference between what he could contribute himself and what that other person could, by whose will he believed he could do what no human weakness can do. So, *If it is you, tell me to come;* because when you give the order, it will happen. What I can't do by mere self-reliance, you can by a mere command. And the Lord said, *Come* (Mt 14:29). And without the slightest hesitation, at that word of command, at the Lord's presence in support, at his presence to direct, without the slightest reluctance Peter jumped down onto the water and began to walk. He could do what the Lord did, not on his own but in the Lord.

For once upon a time you were darkness, but now light—yes, but in the Lord (Eph 5:8). What nobody can do in Paul, nobody in Peter, nobody in any other of the apostles, this anybody can do in the Lord. That's why it was right and helpful of Paul to make nothing of himself and much of Christ when he said, *Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?* (1 Cor 1:13). So, not in me, but with me; not under me, but under him.

The only ones who get strength from God are those who are aware of having weakness from themselves

6. So Peter walked over the water at the Lord's bidding, knowing that he didn't have the power to do this on his own. By faith he was enabled to do what

human weakness would be quite unable to. That shows what the strong members of the Church are like. Examine this example, listen to it, understand it, act on it. After all, we don't have to deal with the strong to make them weak, but we have to deal with the weak to help them become strong.

Now many people are prevented from becoming strong by assuming that they are strong already. The only ones who will get strength from God are those who are aware of having weakness from themselves. *A voluntary rain God is setting apart for his inheritance* (Ps 68:9)—Why are you rushing on ahead, those of you who know what I am going to say?⁴ Moderate your speed, so that the slow coaches can catch up. I've said it once, and I'll say it again: the only ones who get strength from God are those who are aware of having weakness from themselves. So, *A voluntary rain*, as the psalm says, *a voluntary rain*; not one we have earned, but a voluntary one. So, *A voluntary rain God is setting apart for his inheritance, for indeed it was weakened; you, however, have perfected it*. This is because you have set apart a voluntary rain, paying no attention to our human deserts, but only to your own grace and mercy. So the inheritance was weakened, and acknowledged that it was weak in itself, so that it might become strong in you. It wouldn't have been strengthened if it hadn't first been weakened, so that it could be strengthened by you in you.⁵

Paul, little in himself, great in the Lord

7. Take a look at that little piece of this inheritance, Paul; see how he was weakened enough to say, *I am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God*. So why are you an apostle? *By the grace of God I am what I am. I am not fit, but by the grace of God I am what I am*. Paul was weakened; you, however, have perfected him. And now, because the grace of God is what it is, see what follows: *And his grace in me was not fruitless, but I labored more than all of them*. Take care you don't lose by overconfidence what you have earned by weakness. That's fine, really fine: *I am not fit to be called an apostle; by his grace I am what I am; and his grace in me was not fruitless*; all perfectly splendid. But *I labored more than all of them* sounds as if you have begun to give yourself credit for what a short while ago you had been attributing to God. Admit it, and continue, *Not I, though, but the grace of God with me* (1 Cor 15:10).

Good, weak man; you will be most strongly raised up, because you are not ungrateful. You are the same old Paul, little in yourself, great in the Lord. You are the one who asked the Lord three times that the sting in the flesh, the angel of Satan by whom you were being knocked about, should be taken from you.⁶ What answer did you get? What did you hear when you made this request? *My grace is sufficient for you; for my power is perfected in weakness* (2 Cor 12:9). Indeed he was weakened; you, however, have perfected him.

Peter's strength was in the Lord

8. So too with Peter. *Bid me*, he says, *come to you over the water*. As a man I'm game for it, but it's not a man I'm asking. Let the God man command, so that Peter can do what he can't do just as a man. *Come*, he said. And he got down, and began to walk over the water; and Rocky was able to do it, because the rock had given the order. There you have what Peter could do in the Lord; what about in himself? *When he saw the force of the wind, he grew afraid; and as he began to sink, he cried out, Lord, I am undone, deliver me* (Mt 14:28-30).⁷ He placed his confidence in the Lord, he was enabled to act by the Lord; he staggered as a man, he came back to the Lord.

If ever I said, My foot has slipped. It's a psalm speaking, the words of a sacred song; and if we recognize them, they can be ours too; indeed if we want them to be, they are our words too. *If ever I said, My foot has slipped.* Why else should it have slipped, but because it's mine? And how does it continue? *Your mercy, Lord, came to my help* (Ps 94:18). Not my capacity, but *your mercy*. I mean, would the Lord turn his back on him when he staggered, after listening to him when he made his first request? What about that text, *Whoever called upon the Lord and was neglected by him* (Sir 2:10)? Or that other one, *And everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved* (Jl 2:32; Acts 2:21; Rom 10:13)? He stretched out his right hand straightforwardly to help, lifted up the sinking man, and rebuked him for his sinking heart: *Little faith, why did you doubt?* (Mt 14:31). You relied on me, and then you doubted me.

*The only one who can deliver you from the death of the flesh,
is the one who died in the flesh for you*

9. Goodness me, brothers and sisters, but it's time this sermon came to an end. Think of the world and this age as the sea, the gale force wind, and a great storm. For each one of us the storm is our desires. You love God; you're walking on the sea, the swell of the world is under your feet. You love the world; it will swallow you. It knows how to engulf its lovers, not how to bear them up. But when your thoughts are pitching and rolling with desires, in order to overcome your desires call upon the divinity of Christ. Do you only suppose the wind is against you when things are going against you in the world? I mean, it's when there are wars, and riots, and famine, and epidemics, when some private disaster happens to any individual, that we suppose the wind is in our teeth, that we suppose God must be invoked. But when the world is smiling on us with its transient well-being, it's as if the wind were not against us.

Don't consult the tranquillity of the times on this point; consult instead your own passions and desires. See if there's any tranquillity in yourself; see if some inner wind is not blowing you off course; see about that. It is a matter of considerable virtue to struggle with good fortune, to prevent it from leading you astray and corrupting you, to prevent good fortune itself from being your ruin. As I say, it's a matter of great virtue to wrestle with good fortune; and it is a matter of great good fortune not to be overcome by good fortune. Learn to

trample on the world, remember to trust in Christ. And if your foot has slipped, if you stagger, if there are some things you don't manage to subdue, if you begin to sink, say, *Lord, I'm undone, deliver me.* Say, *I'm undone*, in order not to be undone. You see, the only one who can deliver you from the death of the flesh is the one who died in the flesh for you.

Turning to the Lord, etc.

NOTES

1. A sermon preached some time between 410 and 412, with no precise indication about where.

2. Here Augustine is giving a more literal translation of the Greek than his text had. The Greek is not the usual phrase for "Far be it," or "God forbid." Clearly, Augustine appreciated the idiomatic force of the Greek, roughly equivalent, perhaps, to the English "Steady on, there," or "Easy, there, ease up."

3. See Mt 7:24-25; Lk 6:48.

4. Here, evidently, the more precocious members of the congregation shouted out what they knew was the preacher's favorite interpretation of this very obscure psalm text. I suspect they shouted the one word, "Grace." He interprets it like that in *The Trinity*, IV, 2, and in *Expositions of the Psalms* 133 (132), 3, 10. This was a sermon preached to the people. But in his exposition of the psalm here quoted, which was dictated, not preached, in 415, he interprets the voluntary rain as meaning the law.

Had his enthusiastic interrupters just heard him use this text like this in that sermon, and in others, no doubt, which have not survived, or had some of them already read the fourth book of *The Trinity*? If the latter, this would strongly suggest that the sermon was preached at Hippo, because none of the books of *The Trinity* had yet been published by 410-412. This means that the few copies of it that there were would have been kept in the bishop's library in Hippo.

5. The inheritance is understood, quite correctly, to be the people of Israel.

6. See 2 Cor 12:7-8.

7. Augustine's free quotation is influenced by Mt 8:25, in the other story about a storm at sea.

SERMON 77

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 15:21-28: JESUS, ON DEPARTING FROM GENNESARET, WITHDREW INTO THE REGIONS OF TYRE AND SIDON, AND A CANAANITE WOMAN, ETC.

Date: unknown¹

The Canaanite woman, an example of humility

1. This Canaanite woman, whom the gospel reading has just introduced to us, offers us an example of humility, and a model of parental devotion; she shows us how to rise from lowliness to the heights. Now she was not, it is clear, from the people of Israel, from whom the patriarchs and the prophets came, and the ancestors in the flesh of our Lord Jesus came, and the Christ, from whom came the virgin Mary herself, who gave birth to Christ. So this woman didn't come from that people, but from the gentiles. Because, as we heard just now, the Lord withdrew into the regions of Tyre and Sidon, and then a Canaanite woman who came from those parts begged most insistently for the favor of a cure for her daughter, who was being badly plagued by a demon. Tyre and Sidon were not cities of the people of Israel, but of the gentiles, though near neighbors of that people.

So she was calling out, absolutely determined to obtain the favor, and she was knocking loudly; and he was pretending to ignore her, not in order to refuse her a kindness, but in order to inflame her desire; and not only to inflame desire, but also, as I said, to recommend humility. So she was calling out, and the Lord apparently wasn't listening, but in reality he was silently thinking up what he was going to do. The disciples pleaded for her with the Lord, and said, *Let her go, because she is crying after us.* And all he says is, *I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Mt 15: 23-24).

Sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel

2. Here with these words the question arises: how did we come from the gentiles into Christ's sheepfold, if he was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel? What's the meaning of this profoundly mysterious maneuver by which the Lord, knowing full well why he had come, which was of course to have a

Church among all nations, said he had only been sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel?

So we are given to understand that he was bound to show his bodily presence, his birth, his performance of miracles, the wonder and the force of his resurrection within that people; that so it had been ordained, so presented from the beginning, so foretold and so fulfilled, because Christ Jesus had to come to the people of the Jews to be seen, to be slain, and to win from among them those whom he had already foreknown. You see, that nation wasn't just condemned in a lump, it was winnowed. There you had the big heap of chaff, there too the hidden value of the grain; stuff there to be burned, much there to fill the barn with. After all, where else are the apostles from, where's Peter from, and the rest of them?

With a single sentence Christ laid Saul low, raised Paul up

3. Where is Paul himself from, who was previously Saul? That is, previously proud, afterward humble. I mean, when he was Saul, he had got his name from Saul. Now Saul was a proud king; in his reign he persecuted the humble David.² So when the one who was afterward Paul was still Saul, he was naturally still proud, still a persecutor of the innocent, still the ruin of the Church.³ He had received letters, you remember, from the high priests, as a person on fire with zeal for the synagogue and the relentless foe of all things Christian, authorizing him to bring any Christians he might find to court, so that they could be punished. While he's on the way, while he's breathing out slaughter, while he's thirsting for blood, the voice of Christ from heaven lays the persecutor low, raises the preacher up.⁴

This fulfilled in him what was written in the prophet, *I will strike, and I will heal* (Dt 32:39).⁵ What God strikes, you see, is that in people which lifts up itself against God. The surgeon isn't being heartless when he lances the tumor, when he cuts or burns out the suppurating sore. He's causing pain; he certainly is, but in order to restore health. It's a horrid business; but if it wasn't, it wouldn't be any use.

So with a single sentence Christ laid Saul low, raised Paul up; that is, he laid low a proud man, raised up a humble one. I mean, what was the point of his changing his name, and wanting afterward to be called Paul when he had previously been called Saul, if not that he realized that the name of Saul had been a name of pride in him, while he was busy persecuting?⁶ So he chose a humble name, to be called Paul, that is, Tiny.⁷ Later on he boasts of this name, and urges humility on us, when he says, *I myself am the least of the apostles* (1 Cor 15:9).

So where did this man come from, where else but from the Jewish people? That's where the other apostles came from, where Paul came from, where those came from about whom this same Paul informs us that they saw the Lord after his resurrection. He says, you remember, that he was seen by almost five hundred brethren at once, of whom several remain until now, but some have fallen asleep (1 Cor 15:6).

Peter's preaching

4. From the same people also came those who were cut to the heart as Peter was speaking, urging on them the meaning of the passion, resurrection and divinity of Christ;⁸ the occasion being when he had received the Holy Spirit, and when all those upon whom the Holy Spirit came were speaking in the languages of all nations.⁹ Well, those who were listening were Jewish people, and they asked for his advice about being saved, realizing that they were guilty of the blood of Christ, because it was they who had crucified him, they who had killed him, and now in the name of this man they had killed they saw such wonderful things happening, they saw the presence of the Holy Spirit.

So they asked for advice, and they got their answer: *Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; and your sins will be forgiven* (Acts 2:38). Who could despair of having their sins pardoned, when those guilty of killing Christ were pardoned that crime? They were converted from among the Jewish people; they were converted and baptized. They approached the Lord's table and drank in faith the blood they had shed in frenzy. And just how thoroughly and perfectly they were converted is shown by the Acts of the Apostles. For they sold everything they possessed, and laid the price of their goods at the feet of the apostles; and distribution was made to each as each had need; and nobody called anything his own, but all had everything in common.¹⁰

And they had, as it says, one soul and one heart toward God (Acts 4:32).¹¹ There you have the sheep about whom he said, *I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Mt 15:24). It was to them that he presented himself in person, for them as they raged against him that he prayed when he was crucified, saying, *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing* (Lk 23:34). The doctor understood the madmen killing the doctor while out of their minds, and by killing the doctor unwittingly, making themselves a remedy. You see, we have all been cured by the killing of the Lord, redeemed by his blood, delivered from famine by the bread of his body. So this is how and why Christ presented himself in person to the Jews. This is what he meant by saying, *I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*; it was to present them with his body in person, not to ignore and pass over the sheep he had among the nations.

Jesus sent his disciples to the nations

5. You see, while he didn't go to the nations himself, he sent the disciples. And that was the fulfillment of what the prophet said, *A people I never knew has served me* (Ps 18:43). Notice how profound, how clear, how explicit a prophecy it is: *A people I never knew*—that means one I had not presented myself to in person—*has served me*. How? It goes on, *The moment it heard, it obeyed me* (Ps 18:44); that is, it wasn't by seeing but by hearing that they came to believe.¹² And it was to call and gather together the nations that the apostle Paul was sent, so fulfilling what we have just been singing, *Gather us from the nations, that we may confess to your name, and glory in your praise* (Ps 106:47). That man Tiny, made into the Greatest,

not by his own efforts but by the one he used to persecute, was sent to the nations, a sheep-stealer turned shepherd, a wolf turned sheep. That least of the apostles was sent to the nations, and labored much among the gentiles,¹³ and it was by means of him that the gentiles came to believe. His letters are the proof of this.

The woman suffering from an issue of blood

6. You have the same point too, most mysteriously prefigured in the gospel. The daughter of a synagogue official had died, her father was begging the Lord to come to her; he had left her sick, and in grave danger. The Lord was on his way to visit and cure the sick girl; meanwhile news of her death was brought, and her father was told, *The girl is dead, don't trouble the master any further* (Lk 8:49). But the Lord knew he could raise the dead, and didn't deny a ray of hope to the desperate man, but said to him, *Don't be afraid, only believe* (Lk 8:50).

Well he was on his way to the girl, and on the road some woman or other managed to squeeze in among the crowds; she was suffering from an issue of blood, and during a long illness had spent everything she had on doctors, and all for nothing.¹⁴ When she touched the hem of his garment, she was cured. And the Lord said, *Who touched me?* (Lk 8:45). The disciples were astonished (they didn't know what had happened), and they could see he was being jostled by the crowd, and that he was worried about one woman who had touched him lightly,¹⁵ so they answered, *The crowd is jostling you, and you say, Who touched me?* (Mk 5:31). And he repeated, *Someone touched me* (Lk 8:46).

The point is, these people are jostling, she touched. Thus the body of Christ is jostled rudely by many, touched by few for their well-being. *Someone touched me*, he said, *for I was aware of power going out from me* (Lk 8:46). But when the woman saw she had not escaped notice, she threw herself down at his feet, and confessed what had happened. After all this he proceeded on his way, arrived at the place he was going, and brought the girl back to life, the synagogue president's daughter, whom he found dead.

Figurative language of symbol

7. It happened, of course, and all took place as it's told. And yet all the things done by the Lord had some meaning; if I may say so, they were like visible words which mean something. This is most obvious in the case of his looking for fruit on a tree outside the season, and cursing the tree so that it withered, because he didn't find any.¹⁶ Unless this act is taken to be symbolic, it can only be reckoned wanton folly; first, looking for fruit on that tree, when it wasn't the season for fruit on any tree; next, even if it had already been the season for fruit, how was the tree to blame for not having any fruit on it? But because it meant that he was looking not only for leaves but for fruit, that is, not only for people's words but for their deeds, by withering it up when he only found leaves he indicated the punishment you get when you can make good speeches, but refuse to do good deeds.

So too in this case, then. Because of course it is a mysterious symbolic act. He has foreknowledge of everything, and he says, *Who touched me?* The creator becomes like an inexperienced learner, and he asks the question even though he knows the answer not only to this but to all other questions. There obviously is something that Christ is saying to us, in the figurative language of symbol.

The meaning of the figurative language

8. That daughter of the synagogue president stood for the Jewish people, for whose sake Christ had come, so that he said, *I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Mt 15:24). That woman, on the other hand, who suffered from the issue of blood, represented the Church from among the nations, to which Christ was not sent to be present in the body, He was on his way to the former, he was intent on restoring her to health, when this one runs up first and touches his hem, seemingly without his knowledge; that is, she is cured by one who is apparently absent. He says, *Who touched me?*, as though to say, "I don't know this people." *A people I never knew has served me* (Ps 18:43). *Someone touched me; for I was aware of power going out from me* (Lk 8:46); that is, "of a discharge of the gospel that has filled the whole world."

But what was touched was the hem, a small part of the garment at its lowest end. Take the apostles as being Christ's garment; Paul was its hem, that is, the last and the least of them. Yes, he said both these things about himself: *I am the least of the apostles* (1 Cor 15:9).¹⁷ He was called after all the rest, he came to believe after all the rest, he did more healing than all the rest. The Lord was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But a people he had never known was also going to serve him, was going to obey him the moment it heard of him; so he didn't pass over it in silence, even while living there in the house of Israel. You see, it's the same Lord who says somewhere, *I have other sheep which are not of this fold; I must bring these along too, that there may be one flock and one shepherd* (Jn 10:16).

The persevering voice of the Canaanite woman

9. That's where this woman came from;¹⁸ that's why she wasn't really being ignored, but only having her case deferred. *I was only sent*, he said, *to the lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Mt 15:24). And she kept on calling out, persevering, knocking, as though she had already heard the advice, "Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you." She kept on and on, she knocked. You see, when the Lord said these words, *Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you* (Mt 7:7), he had just said a moment before, *Do not give what is holy to dogs, nor throw your pearls down in front of pigs, lest perhaps they trample them with their feet, and turn around and tear you to pieces* (Mt 7:6);¹⁹ that is, lest after showing their contempt for your pearls, they start molesting you. So don't throw down for them things they despise.

Why are the pagans called dogs?

10. "And how are we to tell," let's suppose they answered, "who are the pigs, who are the dogs?" We are shown how in the case of this woman. You see, as the woman kept on pestering him, he gave her this answer, "*It isn't right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs* (Mt 15:26). You're a dog, you're one of the gentiles, you worship idols (I mean, there's nothing more common than for dogs to go licking stones). So, *it isn't right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.*"

Now if she had gone away at these words, it would mean she had come up as a dog and gone off as a dog; but by knocking she was turned from a dog into a human being. She kept on asking, you see, and used this apparent insult to show her humility, and thus obtained the kindness she was asking for. I mean, she wasn't upset or indignant at being called a dog because she asked for a favor and pleaded for a kindness; but she said, "Yes, Lord; you've called me a dog. Sure, I'm a dog, I acknowledge my proper name. Truth is speaking; but that doesn't mean I have to be turned away from receiving a favor. Of course I'm a dog; *but even the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters* (Mt 15:27). It's only a tiny little favor I'm wanting; I'm not jumping up on the table, I'm just looking for crumbs."

In the Canaanite woman humility is being recommended

11. Notice how forcefully humility is being urged upon us. The Lord had called her a dog; she didn't say, "I'm not"; she said, "I am." And at once, because she admitted she was a dog, the Lord said, "*O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you have asked* (Mt 15:28). You have admitted you are a dog, I now acknowledge you as a human being. *O woman, great is your faith!* You've asked, you've sought, you've knocked; receive, find, let it be opened to you."

So notice, brothers and sisters, how it is above all humility that is being recommended to us in this woman who was a Canaanite, that is, who came from the gentiles and was a type, which means a representation, of the Church. The Jewish people, on the other hand, found itself excluded from the gospel because it was bloated with pride at having been worthy to receive the law, at having been the nation that produced the patriarchs,²⁰ and also the prophets, at Moses the servant of God having performed such great wonders in Egypt, as we heard in the psalm,²¹ and at his having led the people through the divided waters of the Red Sea, and then received the law, which he gave to the people. There was plenty for the Jewish nation to get pleased with itself about, and it was as a result of this pride that it was unwilling to humble itself before Christ the author of humility, the deflater of swollen heads, the divine doctor, who being God became man for this very purpose, that in him we human beings might acknowledge our humanity.

A great medicine. If this medicine can't cure pride, I don't know what will. He's God, and he becomes man; he lays aside his divinity; that is, he sort of puts it in a safe deposit; that is to say, he hides what was his very own, and appears

openly in what he had taken on. He becomes a human being, though he is God; and we human beings don't admit to being human, that is, we don't acknowledge we are mortal, we don't admit we are fragile, we don't admit we are sinners, we don't acknowledge we are sick, and so at least, being sick, go looking for a doctor, What is much more dangerous, we imagine we are perfectly well!

The humility of the pagans

12. So it was for this reason that that people did not approach him, that is, because of pride; and they were said to be natural branches broken off from the olive tree, that is, from the people begotten of the patriarchs; that means the Jews deservedly rendered unfruitful by the spirit of pride, and into that olive a wild olive was grafted. The wild olive is the people coming from the gentiles. But the apostle says that the wild olive was grafted on the olive, while the natural branches were broken off.²² They were broken off because of pride, the wild olive was grafted in because of humility.

It was such humility this woman showed when she said, "Yes, Lord; I am a dog, I'm eager for the crumbs." It was the same sort of humility that made the centurion acceptable, the one who wanted his servant cured by the Lord, and when the Lord said, *I will come and cure him*, answered, *Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed* (Mt 8:7-9). *I am not worthy that you should come under my roof*. He wasn't receiving him under his roof, he had already received him in his heart. The more humble he was, the greater his capacity, the fuller he became. Hills, after all, shed water, valleys are filled.

What next, what did the Lord reply after he had said, *I am not worthy that you should come under my roof*? To those who were following he said, *Amen, I tell you, I have not found such faith in Israel* (Mt 8:10); that is, in this people to whom I came, *I have not found such faith*. What did he mean by "such"? So great. What made it great? It became the greatest from the smallest, that is, from humility. *I have not found such faith*; like a grain of mustard seed, which is all the hotter, the more fervent, for being so minute.²³ So the Lord was already grafting the wild olive into the olive tree. He was doing it when he said, *Amen, I tell you, I have not found such faith in Israel*.

The kingdom of heaven

13. Finally, see how it goes on. *Therefore I tell you* (because I haven't found such faith in Israel, that is, such humility together with faith): *Therefore I tell you that many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 8:11). *They will recline*, he said, meaning they will take their rest.

We shouldn't, you see, imagine real material banquets there, or desire anything like that in that kingdom, which would amount not to changing vices into virtues but to bolstering up the vices. It's one thing, after all, to desire the

kingdom of heaven for the sake of wisdom and eternal life; quite another to desire it for the sake of earthly well-being, as though we could have it there with greater luxury than ever. If you think you're going to be rich in that kingdom, you are not eliminating your greed, but just changing it.

And yet, you know, you will be rich, and only there will you really be rich. Here, you see, it's your need that amasses most property. Why do the rich have so much? Because they need so much; it's as though greater need acquires greater supplies. But there, need itself will die. There you really will be rich, when you won't be needing anything. After all, you can't say that you are rich and an angel is poor, because he doesn't possess cattle and wagons and households. Why? Because he doesn't need them; because the stronger he is, so much the less needy. So there are riches there, and true riches.

And you shouldn't be dreaming about banquets there like those of this world. The banquets of this world, you see, are daily medicines; they are necessary for a kind of sickness of ours which we are born with. Anyone can experience this sickness when meal times have come and gone. Do you want to see how serious this sickness is, so serious that like a high fever it can kill you in seven days?²⁴ No, you shouldn't think of yourself as healthy. Immortality will be real health. Here it's just one long illness. Because you prop up your diseased state with daily doses of medicine, you think you are healthy. Take away these medicines, and see what you can do.

Born to die

14. After all, from the moment we are born, we are bound to die. This disease is bound to lead to death. This is certainly the sort of thing doctors say when they examine sick people. For example, this one has got dropsy, he's dying; this disease cannot be cured. He's got elephantiasis; this disease too is incurable. He's consumptive; who can cure that? He's bound to perish, he's bound to die.

That's it, the doctor has already said it; he's got TB, there's nothing for it, he'll die. And yet sometimes the person with dropsy doesn't die of it, and the person with elephantiasis doesn't die of it, and the person with TB doesn't die of it. But when it comes to being born, everybody is bound to die of that. That's what you die of, it can't be otherwise. Both doctor and lay person state this, and even if you die a bit later, does that mean you don't die?

So when will you find true health, except when you find true immortality? So if it's true immortality, no corruption, no fading away, what need will there be there for nourishment? So when you hear, *They will recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob*, don't get your belly ready, but your intelligence. You will have your fill there; the belly of the inner self has its own proper food. It's with reference to this belly that we are told, *Blessed are those who are hungry and thirsty for justice, since they will be satisfied* (Mt 5:6). And they really will be satisfied, so that they will never be hungry again.

Grafted onto the olive tree

15. So the Lord was already grafting in the wild olive when he said, *Many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*, that is, they will be grafted onto the olive tree. You see, the roots of this olive are Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. *But the children of the kingdom*, that is the unbelieving Jews, *will go into the outer darkness* (Mt 8:12). The natural branches will be broken off, so that the wild olive may be grafted in.

But why were the natural branches rightly broken off? Pride. And the wild olive rightly grafted in? Humility. That's why this woman said, *Yes, Lord; for even the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters*; and why she heard in reply, *O woman, great is your faith!* (Mt 15: 27-28). So too with the centurion: *I am not worthy that you should come under my roof. Amen I tell you, I have not found such faith in Israel* (Mt 8:8,10). Let's learn, or let's keep, humility. If we haven't got any yet, let us learn it; if we do have it, don't let's lose it. If we haven't yet got it, let's get it, and be grafted in. If we already have it, let's keep it, and not be broken off.

NOTES

1. There is nothing to tell us where or when this sermon was preached.

2. See 1 Sm 18:29.

3. See Acts 7:58.

4. Acts 9:1-9.

5. It's odd he should ascribe this text from Deuteronomy to "the prophet." He would normally refer to this book as "the Law," or possibly as "Moses." It looks as if he vaguely had in mind a passage like Isaiah 1, or Jeremiah 30—which could indeed be summed up by this line from the song of Moses in Deuteronomy.

6. If so, it took him quite a time to realize it, because the change didn't take place (Acts 13:9) until a few years after his conversion.

7. *Paulus* means "little." According to Acts 13, Saul seems to have taken the name from his protector in Cyprus, the governor Sergius Paulus. The *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, on this passage, pointedly dismisses Augustine's whole exegesis of the change of name, and also says it probably had nothing to do with Sergius Paulus. But Luke does mention it in connection with that illustrious person—surely deliberately.

I leave out the next sentence: *Paulum enim minimun est, paulum nihil aliud est quam parvum:* "For Paul means tiny; *paulum* is exactly the same as small."

8. See Acts 2:37.

9. See Acts 2:1-4.

10. See Acts 4:32-35.

11. The words "toward God" (*in Deum*) seem to be Augustine's own addition (or else a peculiarity of the text of his copy of Acts in Hippo), since there is no evidence for them in any ancient Latin version. But he puts them in (in the form of *in Deo*, "in God") at the beginning of his rule, where they probably are his personal gloss on the text, and it would seem likely that they creep

into his sermons from there (see also *Expositions of the Psalms* 92 [93], 8; 98 [99], 11; 102 [103], 4). On this supposition we could at least say that this sermon is later than the composition of the rule.

12. Compare Jn 20:29.

13. See 1 Cor 15:9-10.

14. See Mk 5:26.

15. Rather roughly put. They didn't know he had been touched lightly by a woman.

16. See Mk 11:13-14.

17. That he was last, as well as least, he had just said in verse 8; but Augustine doesn't quote that verse.

18. We are back with the Canaanite woman now. Augustine considers these different stories together in other sermons too, especially 62 to 63A, in most of which he also deals with the story of the centurion's servant.

19. For a similar association of these texts with this story, see Sermon 60A.

20. He is really rather careless about this, because of course it was the patriarchs that produced the nation.

21. Ps 106 is the psalm which he said earlier (section 5) they had just been singing. But this is mainly a psalm about the sins of the people in the desert, not something to be proud of. Ps 105 is an account of the wonders performed in Egypt. It is possible they sang them both, though they are both very long psalms.

22. See Rom 11:17. It seems that Augustine is just hinting at his unease over Paul having got the regular horticultural technique the wrong way round; cultivated, olive-bearing branches are grafted onto wild olive stocks, not *vice versa*.

23. See Mt 13:31.

24. It's clear Augustine had no experience of hunger strikes. But perhaps if you include drinking nothing as well as eating nothing, seven days will be long enough to finish you off. Evidently, in any case, the congregation got the point, and he didn't have to elaborate further.

SERMON 77A

DISCOURSE ON THE CANAANITE WOMAN ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

Date: 414-416¹

We live in need of pardon

1. This woman who called out after the Lord, you have just heard how she sought, she asked, she knocked, and the door was opened to her. So she is teaching us to seek, that we may find; to ask, that we may receive; to knock, that the door may be opened to us.² So what's the meaning of the Lord's being unwilling to grant her what she was asking for? Surely he wasn't just being hard-hearted? No, but he was putting off giving, because he knew when he would give what was asked. He wasn't refusing her his help, he was intensifying her desire.

So let us call out to him what we have just been singing: *Have mercy on me, God, have mercy on me because in you has my soul put its trust* (Ps 57:1).³ *Have mercy on me, God*, he says. Why? *Because in you has my soul put its trust*. This, he says, is the sacrifice I offer you, so that you may hear me: *because in you has my soul put its trust. Whoever hoped in the Lord, and was left in the lurch?* (Sir 2:10). Even great saints are subject to temptation, and however much progress we make in God, we live in need of pardon. Was it little lambs, and not the rams of the flock that the Lord Jesus taught how to pray? It was his disciples, our apostles, the very leaders of the flock, whose children we are, of whom it is said, *Bring to the Lord the children of rams* (Ps 29:1); yes, it was these rams he was teaching to pray, when he told them to say, *Forgive us our debts* (Mt 6:12). If this is a daily prayer, then we live in need of pardon. All our sins were forgiven us in baptism, and we live in need of pardon. We make progress if our hope is nourished in God and strengthened by his aid to enable us to put a brake on all covetousness. Let's keep on fighting; our struggles are known to him, and he knows how to be both a spectator and a helper.⁴

Living in peace

2. When the apostle was read, you heard him say, *We know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal*. Notice who is saying what. *The law, he says, is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For I do not know what I am doing.*

What's the meaning of *I do not know?* I don't find it acceptable, I don't approve. *For it's not how I will that I act, but what I don't want, that is what I do. But if it's what I don't want that I do, I agree with the law, that it is good* (Rom 7:14-16). What's the meaning of *I agree with the law?* That what I don't want is what the law doesn't want. So when I act in a way I don't like, and don't like what the law doesn't like, I am agreeing with the law, that it is good.

But the law is spiritual, I am carnal. So what's going to happen? We are doing what we don't like; and if we commit all sorts of evil, are we going to go unpunished? Heaven forbid! Don't make yourself a promise like that, O child of Adam consider how it goes on: *But if it's what I don't want that I do, it's now not I performing that thing, but sin that lives in me* (Rom 7:16-17). What is he calling sin, but the covetousness of the flesh? And in case you should say that this is no concern of yours, he specifies for that very reason, *sin that lives in me*. "Then what's the meaning of *it's not I performing that thing?*" It means, I covet in the flesh, I don't consent in the mind. The flesh covets, the mind doesn't consent; there you have the battle. Continue, with your struggle, and ask the Lord your God for help. Continue, with your struggle, and call out what that woman did, *Lord, help me* (Mt 15:25). Continue, with your struggle, and call out what you have been singing, *Have mercy on me, God, have mercy on me* (Ps 57:1). Here's the sacrifice: *in you has my soul put its trust.*

In baptism iniquity is blotted out, but infirmity remains; in the resurrection, though, there will be no iniquity, and infirmity will be eliminated, *when this mortal nature has put on immortality, and this perishable nature has put on imperishability, and the saying will come true as it is written, Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, death, is your challenge?* (1 Cor 15:54-55).⁵ And if the challenge of death is our struggle, *it's now not I performing that thing, but sin that lives in me*. It's the covetousness of the flesh that he calls sin; I covet, but I don't consent with the mind, and covetousness does not cease to incite me to evil. That's the challenge of death.

The time when our external enemy the devil will be under our feet is when the internal enemy, covetousness, has been healed, and we shall be living in peace. What sort of peace? The sort that *eye has not seen, nor ear heard* (1 Cor 2:9). What sort of peace? The sort that no imagination can conceive and no quarreling intrude on. What sort of peace? The sort about which the apostle said, *And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts* (Phil 4:7). About this peace the prophet Isaiah says, *O Lord our God, give us peace, for you have given us everything you promised* (Is 26:12). You promised Christ; you have given him to us. You promised his cross and the shedding of his blood for the forgiveness of sins; you have given them to us. You promised his ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit from heaven; you have given them to us. You promised us a Church spread throughout the world; you have given it. You promised there would be heretics to try us and put us through our paces, and that the Church would triumph over their errors; you have given this. You promised the abolition of the idols of the heathen; you have given it. *O Lord our God, give us peace, for you have given us everything you promised.*

The daily combat

3. Meanwhile, until we come to that peace, where we shall have no enemies, we must go on fighting long and faithfully and strenuously, in order to earn the victor's crown from the Lord God. The apostle James says, *Let no one say when he is tempted that he is being tempted by God.* He means temptation in the sense of seduction.⁶ God, he goes on, *is a non-tempter⁷ of evils, but he himself tempts nobody; but each one of us is tempted by being lured and enticed by our own covetousness. Then when covetousness has conceived, it brings forth sin, and when sin has been accomplished it begets death* (Jas 1:13-15). So each one of us is tempted by our own covetousness; therefore let us fight, and resist, and not consent, not allow ourselves to be lured by it, nor allow it to conceive anything it may bring forth. Look, it's like this: covetousness coaxes and coddles, it excites, it urges you on, it positively requires you to do something bad; don't consent, and it doesn't conceive. If you think it all over willingly and with pleasure, then it conceives; it will bring forth, and you will die.

Notice what this apostle said: *When sin has been accomplished, it begets death.* Sin may be sweet, but death is bitter. Beware the sweetness of sin, or you may experience the bitterness of death;⁸ beware covetousness, even if there's no question of doing anything, still, as regards talk, even. You enjoy hearing something you ought not to hear, saying something you ought not to say, thinking about something you ought not to think about. Nothing is swifter than thought; it has unbelievable wings; it shakes itself free of the heart, and passes to the tongue. Evil is thought of even before it's spoken. Don't stand there; a thought has crept in; go away from there, move off somewhere else, don't loiter there. You aren't planning to do wrong; why do you enjoy thinking about something you don't want to do?

My dearest brothers and sisters, anyone who is innocent of those big sins should hesitate to persist in these smaller ones about which the Lord says, *Say, forgive us our debts.*⁹ However great the progress you make, you still have that covetousness in you. So, until death is swallowed up in victory, say, *Forgive us our debts.* Say this about past matters, about deeds, about words, about thoughts. What about future matters? Listen, and say what comes next: *Lead us not into temptation* (Mt 6:12-13). *Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation* (Mt 26:41). What's the meaning of entering into temptation. Consenting to a bad desire. You've consented? You've entered; at least be quick to come out. Before you get to sinning, kill your consenting. Rejoice that you haven't done it; repent of having thought of it.

Keep yourselves from every kind of evil

4. Brothers and sisters, let us be wise of heart; let us fear God,¹⁰ who makes such wonderful promises, and such terrible threats. This life must come to an end sooner or later. You can see how people pass away from here every day. Death can be delayed, it can't be eliminated. Willy-nilly, this life must come to an end; let us long for the one that has no end, and the only way to get to that

life is through death. So don't let's be afraid of something that is going to come sooner or later anyhow; let's be afraid, rather, of something which, if it comes and catches us in sins, can drag us off not to temporal but to everlasting death, from which may God preserve us all, both you and me.

O man or woman, whoever you are, aren't you afraid of dying for eternity? You behave in such a way as to be punished or to die for endless time. Let fear of this death teach you how much to be dreaded is that future death. You are afraid of death; will you get out of dying? Willy-nilly, death must come. You're afraid of death; you ought to be more afraid of sin, because it's through sin, you see, that the soul dies; sin is the enemy of your soul. You can be released, though, from sin, at any time. But once released from the corruptible shackles of the flesh, take care you are not chained up in the shackles of hell. Once released, you should be free, not a slave.

Beware of fraudulent dealings, prompted by that covetousness which is called avarice; beware of making disreputable profits, prompted by the covetousness which is called avarice, because this avarice is the root of all evils (1 Tm 6:10), as scripture says. Beware of drunkenness, beware of adultery, theft, lying, bearing false witness. Keep yourselves from blasphemy, from heathen charms and spells and every kind of superstition. Keep yourselves from usury and extortionate interest; don't have anything to do with money-lenders, give them a wide birth. The day will come when they are told, *Your money perish with you* (Acts 8:20). The day of judgment will come, when on account of that money and with that money they will burn in everlasting fire, *where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Mt 8:12). That money will bear witness against them. Don't give money in that way, don't receive it in that way, or you will find yourselves on the day of judgment rendering a bad account of yourselves to God. I mean, what will they get out of it—except, for the sake of some money which they are either going to lose while still alive or to leave behind when dead, the loss of their souls which they cannot redeem from pawn? As the holy gospel says, *What does it profit a person, if he gains the whole world, but suffers the loss of his own soul? Or what will a person give in exchange for his soul?* (Mt 16:26)

So be on your guard, my brothers and sisters, against usury and charging extortionate interest, and don't say, "And what are we going to live on?" This is not a way of earning a living, but of earning death. Don't say, "And what are we going to live on?" There are other employments by which people can support themselves. Don't do something which God forbids, don't live on that, O wretched, and miserable, and unhappy creature! You observe that that is what you live on, and you don't observe that that is what you may die of. "And what," you say, "shall I live on?" I can be asked the same question by the whoremonger, I can be asked it by the bandit. Is that a good justification for banditry, or for carrying on the pimping trade, that people who do such things get their living by them? Woe to the wretches who get their living by such means, because these are the means by which they get their death. It is better to be a beggar than to live by unlawful means. In the last resort it is better you should die, than by

living on unlawful earnings do something that earns you the torments of everlasting death. This death puts an end to pain; that death continues in eternal pains. Please, really believe, and understand, and fear; keep yourselves from every kind of evil. Be keen to study the word of God, make it your pleasure to hear what God wills, and what God promises to those who do his will. And that what he commands may be done, let us beseech God, and God will help us.¹¹

NOTES

1. A sermon preached, it is generally agreed, between 414 and 416, no telling where. Apart from the opening sentence, and one brief quotation later on, there is no reference to this story in the sermon at all. The story is just a peg on which to hang a very effective sermon about perseverance in the Christian combat, and our need to pray for help in that lifelong warfare.

2. See Mt 7:7.

3. See Sermon 20A for another treatment of this psalm verse.

4. The picture is that of gladiatorial combats in the amphitheater. The modern equivalent would be the boxing ring. The particular spectators Augustine would have had in mind, if he had been familiar with the boxing ring, would be the judges. In the world of the amphitheater, he is thinking of the dignitary, the governor or even emperor, who is presiding over the games. In this case he breaks all the rules of sportsmanship, and joins in the fight on the side of those he favors—against sin and Satan of course, not directly against other people.

5. See Is 25:8; Hos 13:14.

6. As distinct from the sense of "trial," which was possibly the dominant sense of the Latin *tentatio*.

7. The Latin turns a Greek passive form, meaning "untemptable," into an active form, *intendant*. But it is just possible that this word was understood in a passive sense, so that it would mean "untempted by evil," like the Greek.

8. See 1 Sm 15:32.

9. The Latin is rather ambiguous and obscure. I have emended *hesitar*, "hesitates," to *hesiter*, "should hesitate."

10. See Ps 111:10.

11. The seriousness and urgency of his attack on usury, on taking interest on loans, will doubtless surprise modern readers, used as we are to the whole business of banking. But perhaps we should ask ourselves, in these days of the "third world debt problem," when the problem is almost wholly caused by spiraling rates of interest, whether Catholic moral teaching has not too readily jettisoned the biblical prohibition of usury, which was certainly strongly maintained right up to the Renaissance and Reformation. Would it not be salutary for modern financiers and bankers to observe Augustine's comparison of their profession with those of the pimp and the bandit?

SERMON 77B

ON THE CANAANITE WOMAN

Date: unknown¹

What progress the Canaanite woman made in a single moment!

1. You know from the gospel, my dear brothers and sisters, how the Canaanite woman extracted by her persistence what she couldn't get by just asking for it once; and how the Lord, by putting her off, was toning up her desire, not refusing her a favor. You see, he knew what a peak of perfection her insistent demand would bring her to, because he was himself training her precisely for that. He started by calling her a dog; afterward, *woman, great is your faith* (Mt 15:28). On gaining the favor she had begged, she departed joyfully. But first she was changed, and only then made joyful. Changed how much? From a dog into a woman. And what sort of woman? One whose faith was great. She certainly pushed hard; what progress she made in a single moment! That's why the Lord put her off, the Lord who also told us *to pray always, and not lose heart* (Lk 18:1).

That, you see, is a statement of the Lord's, exhorting us to pray. Every day people pray, religious people never miss the times of prayer.² As the apostle too says, *Always rejoicing, praying without breaking off* (1 Thess 5:16-17). That's the same as, *One ought always to pray, and not lose heart*. In another place the Lord himself says, *Ask, and you will be given; seek, and you will find; knock, and it shall be opened to you* (Mt 7:7). That's what this Canaanite woman did; she asked, she sought, she knocked, she received.

But she did this in order to get her daughter cured of the demon, and she obtained it; her daughter was cured from that moment. Was she going to go on asking for that, once her daughter was cured? Until she got her request, she went on seeking, asking, knocking; she got it, she was overjoyed, she went away. I don't know what it is, but it must be something stupendous for which it is necessary to pray always, and not lose heart. Something much more than a daughter's health is immortal life. That's what we've got to pray for till the very end, as long as we are living here, until we find ourselves living without end, when there will be no more asking, but only rejoicing.

Your prayers are all different because your desires are all different

2. So now, *one ought always to pray and not lose heart*. One prays for this, another for that. Your prayers are all different because your desires are all different. You are all, so to say, equal in your sighs and groans; but the one who hears them has allotted you various wishes. One person, like that Canaanite woman, asks God for the restoration to health of his ailing son; a woman asks for her husband, a husband for his wife; everyone prays for the sick. There's nothing wrong with this sort of prayer.

Other people pray, groan, solicit, seek, ask, knock, to become rich; and the greater their yearning and greed, so much the more fiery and frequent is such prayer. And in fact they actually think that this is what the Lord had in mind when he said, *Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you; for everyone who asks receives, and the seeker shall find, and to the one who knocks it shall be opened* (Mt 7:7-8). The miser hears this, and every day asks for nothing else but to get rich. But forget the miser; poor people also hear this; they pray, ask seek, knock to become rich. And sometimes they spend a lot of time at this, and don't find a single moment when they actually receive anything, and so they say to themselves, "What did the Lord mean by it when he said, *Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you; for everyone who asks receives, and who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it shall be opened?* What have we poor wretches done, that we should ask and not receive?"

What are we to say to such people? Did the Lord tell a lie? Did scripture tell a lie? Perish the thought. Not even avarice dares say this to itself; so can loyal devotion say what greed doesn't venture to say?

Do not be sad when you are not heard

3. So what are we going to say to someone like that? Keep on asking, keep on pressing, keep on knocking, because it was not without reason that he said, *Everyone who asks receives*. Pray as much as ever you can, ask, knock, persevere, and you shall be rich. So he spends more time than ever at his prayers, and expires in poverty; he has received nothing, found nothing he can leave his children. Does that mean that all the effort he has put into asking, seeking, and knocking has gone for nothing? It hasn't gone for nothing. So to such people who have not yet . . .³ alive, what are we to say, but "Change your prayer. And why, please, are you asking, seeking, knocking to get from being poor to being rich? Haven't you listened to the apostle saying, *Those who wish to become rich fall into temptation, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge a man into destruction and ruin* (1 Tm 6:9)? That's precisely what you were asking for. But your Father, whom you were asking for this, was kind enough to refuse what you were asking for, to preserve you from going down to destruction and ruin. So there you are, change your prayer."

I mean to say, you don't give your child everything it asks for either. If your little boy asks for a knife he may cut himself with, or if he cries and stamps with

rage to make you lift him up on a horse, will you do it? Will you have the nerve to? Isn't it better he should remain whole, and weep, rather than be crippled and wept for? So if you, who are evil, know what is good to give to your child,⁴ how much more is your Father, who is always good, doing you a favor when he doesn't give you something, and you don't realize it? You can't help being a child of God; he's not passing you over; be a child of his, and stop worrying.

When the apostle Paul was being knocked about by an angel of Satan to stop him getting above himself, as he confesses himself—I mean, when would I ever dare to say such a thing about an apostle?—he says about this angel of Satan, *For this reason three times I begged the Lord to take him away from me, and he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you; for my power is made perfect in weakness* (2 Cor 12:7-9). Well, why are you begging for this, Paul? Isn't it so that all may be well with you? Leave it to your maker to insure in ways you don't understand that all will be well with you. Is a plaster doing you any harm when it stings? It's on your side, because it is healing you. So if the apostle Paul asked, and was not heard, why should you, my friend, be sad when you aren't heard? Perhaps, you see, you are asking for something which it is not suitable for you to receive.

The apostle asked and did not receive; the devil asked and did receive

4. It's a wonderful thing, my brothers and sisters: the apostle asked, and did not receive; the devil asked and did receive; the apostle wasn't heard, and the devil was. What justice! Indeed, what marvelous justice! "And when," he asks, "was the devil heard," Haven't you read, or heard, how the demons were heard, and allowed to go into the pigs?⁵ Or haven't you read, or heard, how the devil requested permission from the Lord to test his servant Job, and received it?⁶ It's a wonderful business; the devil asked, and Job is handed over to him. He's handed over, yes, but to be proved; he's handed over, certainly, but to be tested; he's handed over, but to be weighed up, and then held up to posterity as a model. The devil received him, yes, but to be put to confusion.

So you can see that it isn't always a good thing to get what you ask for. So change your prayers, so that without anything to worry about you may receive what is good. Change your prayers, correct your desires. I'm speaking to those who desire temporal things, in order to get rich quick.

What we should ask for

5. Notice what Jeduthun was asking for, the one whose words we have been singing: *Hear my prayer*, he says, *give ear to my tears* (Ps 39:12).⁶ He wasn't asking for riches, was he? He didn't have a wound in his body, did he, which he was requesting a cure for? And where shall we discover what he was asking for, or with what desires he was exerting himself in prayer, or for what longings he was shedding the tears that he wanted heard? Where else can we discover his desire, but in his own words? *My substance*, he says, *is as nothing before*

you. Nevertheless, total vanity is every man living. And now, what is my expectation? Is it not you, Lord? And my substance is before you always (Ps 39:5-7).

A moment before he had said, *And my substance is as nothing before you.* Mortal substance is as nothing before you; but because after this life I am going to receive immortality, for the sake of which I wish you to hear my tears, my immortal substance will be before you always. There's desire for you, there's what to ask for, there's what to desire, there's what to pray for; there's what we ought to pray for always, until we depart from here, and not lose heart.

Tears are the blood of the heart

6. Some of you, perhaps, may say, "What did Jeduthun mean when he said, *Give ear to my tears?* I mean, tears are seen, not heard; tears flow, they don't make a noise." No, but they do have their voices, in the same sort of way as the blood of Abel had its voice.⁷ If the blood of a murdered man had a voice that reached the Lord, the tears of a man praying have one too, they certainly do. Tears, you see, are also the blood of the heart. So when you are requesting eternal life, when you say, *Thy kingdom come* (Mt 6:10), where you can live without any cares, where you can live for ever, where you need never grieve for a friend or fear an enemy: when that is what you are asking for, cry, shed your blood inwardly, slaughter your heart in sacrifice to your God. That's what it means to say one ought always to pray and not lose heart; the meaning of what the Lord's Prayer teaches: *Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done as in heaven also on earth* (Mt 6:9-10), so that we may be the equals of your angels.

What a thing to desire! What human mortal would dare to desire it, if God had not so graciously promised it? Pray; it's a great thing you are praying for, but the one who promised it to you is greater. It's difficult, what he promised, for a human being to become an angel, nothing more so; but all things are possible to God.⁸ You think it something tremendously difficult, for a man to become an angel; doesn't it strike you as difficult, much more difficult in fact, and much more incredible, for the only Son of God to become man? That human beings can become angels is doubted by man, for whose sake God became man!⁹

Do you really doubt you can receive what you ask for, when you have a guarantee like that, one who graciously made himself your debtor for nothing? You haven't made God a loan, or invested any money in him, or put him in your debt in any way. Whatever you have, you have from him, don't you. And whatever you are going to receive, aren't you going to receive it from him? He was prepared to make himself your debtor, and what a debtor too! He wrote out a bond, he gave a guarantee. His bond is the divine scripture, his guarantee is the death of Christ, his promissory note is the death of Christ. He gave the death of his Son to the ungodly; has he refused the death of his Son to the godly and the faithful?

*Don't just ask, seek, and knock with your voices,
but also with your morals*

7. Don't worry, dear brothers and sisters; you will receive. Ask, seek, knock, you will receive, you will find, the door will be opened to you. Only don't ask, seek, and knock just with your voices, but also with your morals; do good works, without which you certainly have no business to lead this life. Wipe out your sins by daily good works. Not even slight sins are to be treated lightly. They are nothing very big, of course, but they do pile up, they make a heap; they pile up and make a lump. Don't shrug them aside because they are tiny, but be apprehensive if they are many. What could be tinier than drops of rain? And in quantity they soak the fields, they fill the rivers. Don't shrug your slight and tiny sins aside, or they may form a heap and crush you.

Look, sea water seeps little by little through the seams of a ship, and yet it fills the bilges; if it isn't pumped out, it sinks the ship. But if there's a huge wave, it will come like a mountain and swamp the ship at a stroke, and destroy it. That's what murderers are like, that is to say, grave sins like adultery and fornication, blasphemies and perjury. They are big sins, they swamp you at a stroke. But those tiny sins, without which human life cannot be lived, trickle in little by little imperceptibly through the seams of human frailty, and flow into the bilges. Imitate the sailors, whose hands never rest, and nothing is left in the bilges. Don't let your hands rest, I'm saying, but from good works. But still there is that trickle into the bilges, because the seams of human frailty remain; and therefore the bilges have to be pumped out again. You see, if your hands don't stop pumping out by good works, that day will find you clean and ship-shape; and you will come without anything to worry about to that life which Jeduthun was longing for, when he said, *Give ear to my tears*.

(End of the sermon about the Canaanite woman)

NOTES

1. No date or place can be fixed for this sermon, which survives in only one manuscript. There are slightly more references to this woman than in the last sermon, but this is in fact a sermon on the need to pray always and not to lose heart, and on the problem of unanswered prayer.

2. Is this a very early use of the term *religious* to designate people dedicated to the religious life, monks and nuns? It looks rather as if it is.

3. There is a gap here in the one surviving manuscript of this sermon. The missing words would presumably have gone something like this: "... died, but are still . . ."; in the Latin, . . . *mortuo, qui adhuc . . .* It is unlikely that it was a larger section of the text that had been effaced.

4. See Mt 7:11; Lk 11:13.

5. See Jb 1:11-12; 2:4-6.

6. The psalm is ascribed in its title to Jeduthun. In his exposition of this psalm Augustine says that the name means "Leaping over them." But he doesn't make use of that notion here, though it would have suited his purpose.

7. See Gn 4:10.
8. See Mt 19:26.
9. By human beings becoming angels he means no more than what he said at the end of the previous paragraph, becoming the equals of angels. He isn't thinking of the angelic nature, only the angelic status, and condition of immortality.

SERMON 77C

FRAGMENT OF A SERMON ON THE TEXT, *IF ANYONE WISHES TO COME AFTER ME,
LET HIM DENY HIMSELF* (MT 16:24)

Date: unknown¹

Correction with love

When a person sees someone who is living a bad life, making a gift perhaps to the Church, and doesn't correct him, he is running away in spirit. What constitutes "running away in spirit"? Being afraid. Fear is a kind of inner flight. Why is he afraid? Because he's a hireling.² He's afraid the other person may take being corrected badly, and not give what he usually does. He sees the wolf coming, that is to say, the devil breaking the neck of the person who is living a bad life, and he flees in spirit, he refrains from salutary correction, being full of fear. But the one who is a true shepherd and cares for the sheep doesn't let him get off scot-free, and does what the apostle says: *Correct the trouble-makers, encourage the faint-hearted, etc.* (1 Thess 5:14).

So a pastor, or anyone who calls himself a pastor, shouldn't imagine it's a godly act of not returning evil for evil, when it's much rather a matter of returning evil for good. After all, the other person, ruffianly sinner though he is, is giving the Church some of his goods; but the bishop, the so-called pastor, is returning him evil for good by withholding from him suitable correction.

But all this, of course, has to be done out of love; so because people sometimes regard those who correct them as their enemies, that's why, after saying *Correct the trouble-makers*, he added, *Encourage the faint-hearted*. Perhaps, you see, after being corrected, the person may be very upset and begin to lose heart; that's when encouragement is needed. *Give support to the weak*, in case they fall through weakness. If weakness makes them stagger, charity should clasp them to its bosom in support. And after saying this he added in conclusion, *Be sure not to return anyone evil for evil* (1 Thess 5:14-15). So correction, if it is offered, is not evil. But what does the good sheep say, when it is corrected by its superior? *The just man will reprove me in kindness* (Ps 141:5).

NOTES

1. There is nothing to tell us where or when this sermon was preached. This fragment survives as a quotation by Saint Bede, commenting on 1 Thessalonians. It is presumably Bede who informs us that the sermon was on the text of Mt 16:24. The fragment does not indicate this at all.

2. See Jn 10:12.

SERMON 78

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 17:1-8: AFTER SIX DAYS JESUS TOOK ALONG PETER AND JAMES AND JOHN, HIS BROTHER, ETC.

Date: unknown¹

The vision on the mountain

1. We must examine and discuss, dearly beloved, this vision which the Lord staged on the mountain. You see, he had just said about it, *Amen I tell you, there are some of those standing round here, who will not taste death, until they see the Son of man in his kingdom* (Mt 16:28; Lk 9:27).² It's from there that the reading just recited begins: *After he had said this, six days later he took along Peter, John and James, and went up the mountain* (Lk 9:28; Mt 17:1). They were three of those about whom he had said, *There are some here who will not taste death, until they see the Son of man in his kingdom.*

There's a real problem here. I mean, that mountain was hardly to be understood as the kingdom. What's a mountain to one who possesses the heavens? Something we not only read about, but can also in a certain fashion see with the eyes of the imagination. He called his kingdom what in several places he calls the kingdom of heaven. Now the kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of the saints. For, *The heavens declare the glory of God.* About these heavens the psalm continues, *There are no utterances nor discourses whose voices are not heard. Their sound has gone forth to the whole earth, and their words to the ends of the world* (Ps 19:1.3-4). Whose, but the heavens'? So those of the apostles, then, and of all the faithful preachers of God's word. These heavens will reign with the one who made the heavens. To demonstrate this, observe what happened.

Allegorical meaning of Christ's transfiguration

2. The Lord Jesus himself shone as brilliantly as the sun; his garments became as white as snow, and Moses and Elijah were talking to him. There was Jesus himself, brilliant as the sun, signifying that he is the light which enlightens every person coming into this world.³ What this sun is to the eyes of the body, that he is to the eyes of the heart; what this is to bodies, he is to hearts.

As for his garments, they are his Church. You see, unless garments are held

in place by the person they clothe, they fall down. Of these garments one of the least and last hems, so to say, was Paul.⁴ He says himself, you see, *For I am the least of the apostles*, and elsewhere, *I am the last of the apostles* (1 Cor 15:9.8). And in a garment the hem is the last and least part. Accordingly, just as that woman who was suffering from an issue of blood touched the Lord's hem, and was healed,⁵ so too the Church which comes from the gentiles was healed and saved at the preaching of Paul.

What's surprising about white garments symbolizing the Church, when you hear the prophet Isaiah saying, *Even if your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow* (Is 1:18)? As to Moses and Elijah, that is to say, the law and the prophets, what do they avail unless they are conversing with the Lord? Unless they bore witness to the Lord, who would read the law, who the prophets? Notice how neatly the apostle puts it: *For through the law comes knowledge of sin; but now without the law, the justice of God has been manifested*—that's the sun⁶—attested by the law and the prophets (Rom 3:20-21)—that's the brilliance.

Peter's desire

3. Peter sees all this, and making human judgments as a mere man, he says, *Lord, it is good for us to be here*. He was finding the crowds a dreadful bore, he had discovered the solitude of the mountain, where he could have Christ to himself as the bread of the spirit. Why go down from there to toil and trouble, while he was experiencing there for God such sacred affection, and hence such virtuous dispositions?⁷ He wanted everything to be fine and dandy for him, and so he added, *If you like, let us make here three tabernacles*,⁸ *one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah* (Mt 17:4).

The Lord made no reply to this; and yet Peter got his answer. For while he was speaking, a shining cloud came and overshadowed them. He was proposing three tabernacles; the heavenly reply showed us that there is only one, which a merely human judgment was eager to divide: the Word of God as Christ, the Word of God in the law, the Word in the prophets. Why are you proposing, Peter, to divide it up? You ought rather to be joining together. You are proposing three; understand there is really one.

The kingdom of God is in the Church

4. So while the cloud was overshadowing them all, and after a fashion making a single tabernacle for them, a voice boomed out from the cloud, saying, *This is my beloved Son*. Moses was there, and there too was Elijah; it didn't say, "These are my beloved sons." The only Son is one thing, you see, adopted sons another. Our attention was being directed to the one who was the boast of the law and the prophets. *This, he says, is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; hear you him* (Mt 17:5). Because you have heard him also in the prophets, and you have heard him in the law. And where, indeed, haven't you heard him?

When they heard this, they fell to the ground. Now we are being shown that the kingdom of God is in the Church. Here is the Lord, here the law and the prophets. But the Lord is present in person as Lord, while the law is present in the person of Moses, prophecy in the person of Elijah. They, however, are there as servants, as attendants. They are like water pots, he is like the spring. Moses and the prophets spoke and wrote, but it was from him they were filled up, when they poured out their message.

A gift, a promise

5. But the Lord stretched out his hand, and raised them up from where they were lying. Then *they saw nobody but Jesus only* (Mt 17:7-8). What does this signify? You heard, when the apostle was being read, that *we see now by a mirror in a riddle, but then it will be face to face* (1 Cor 13:12). And tongues will come to nothing,⁹ when what we now hope for and believe will come to pass. So the fact of their falling to the earth signified that we die, because flesh was told, *Earth you are, and into earth shall you go* (Gn 3:19). But when the Lord raised them up, it signified the resurrection. After the resurrection, what use will the law be to you, what use the prophets? That's why Elijah does not appear, why Moses doesn't appear. What does remain for you is, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (Jn 1:1). What does remain for you is *that God may be all in all* (1 Cor 15:28).

Moses will be there, of course, but no longer the law. We shall also see Elijah there, but no longer as a prophet. For the law and the prophets bore witness to Christ, that it was necessary for him to suffer, and on the third day to rise again from the dead, and to enter into his glory.¹⁰ What he promised to those who love him will find its fulfillment there: *Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him*—and as though he were asked, “What will you give him, seeing that you will love him?”—*and I will show myself to him* (Jn 14:21).

A tremendous gift, a tremendous promise. God isn't keeping some special reward of his for you; he's keeping himself. You miser, why isn't what Christ promises enough for you? You consider yourself rich, and if you haven't got God, what have you got? Someone else is poor, and if he's got God, what hasn't he got?

Peter's mission

6. Come down, Peter. You were eager to go on resting on the mountain; come down, *preach the word, press on in season, out of season, censure, exhort, rebuke in all long-suffering and teaching* (2 Tm 4:2). Toil away, sweat it out, suffer some tortures, so that by means of the brightness and beauty of right and good activity, you may come to possess in charity what is to be understood by the Lord's white garments. We heard the praises of charity, you see, when the apostle was being read: *It does not seek its own advantage* (1 Cor 13:5). It does not seek its own advantage, because it gives away what it possesses.

Somewhere else the same thing is said in a more dangerous way, if you misunderstand it. You see, the apostle is instructing the faithful members of Christ in the same charity or love, and he says, *Let no one seek his own, but the other person's profit* (1 Cor 10:24). I mean, when avarice hears this, it plans its fraudulent schemes, to run rings around someone else in business, under the pretext of seeking another person's profit; seeking to get its hands on what belongs to another, not on its own. Avarice must curb itself, justice must step out; let us listen, and understand properly. He's addressing charity when he says, *Let no one seek his own, but the other person's profit*. But as for you, you avaricious miser, if you object, and insist on reducing this precept to mean this, that you should covet what belongs to someone else, then give up what is your own. But if I know you at all, you want to have both what is yours and the other person's. You cheat, to get hold of someone else's property; then let yourself be robbed, and lose your own. You don't want to seek what is your own, but you grab what belongs to someone else. If you do that, you are not acting rightly. Listen, you grasping miser, pay attention. In another place the apostle explains to you more unambiguously these words of his here, *Let no one seek his own, but the other person's profit*. He says about himself, *I am seeking what is useful, not to me but to the many, that they may be saved* (1 Cor 10:33).

Peter didn't understand this yet, when he was eager to live with Christ on the mountain. He was keeping that for you, Peter, after death. But now he himself says to you, "Go down to labor on earth, to serve on earth, to be despised, crucified on earth." Life came down, to be killed; bread came down, to go hungry; the way came down, to grow weary on a journey; the fountain came down, to experience thirst; and are you refusing to endure toil? Don't seek your own profit. Have charity and love, preach the truth; then you will arrive at eternity, where you will find security.¹¹

NOTES

1. This sermon was probably preached on the second Sunday of Lent; there is no indication about where, or in what year.

2. Augustine, in this paragraph, is quoting very freely, and in fact mixing up the versions of Matthew and Luke.

3. See Jn 1:9.

4. This conceit of comparing Paul to the hem of Christ's garment is happy enough when the garment is said to represent the apostles, as in Sermon 77, 8. But where the garments are identified with the Church, as here, it is not so satisfactory.

5. See Lk 8:44.

6. Because Christ is "the sun of justice, with healing in its wings." Augustine almost certainly has in mind here this text from Mal 4:2.

7. A passage of characteristic rhyming rhetoric, impossible to reproduce in English: *Uiquid inde discederet ad labores et dolores, habens in Deum sanctos amores, et ideo bonos mores?*

8. I keep this rather clumsy word here, because in the gospels there is an undoubted allusion to the Jewish feast of tabernacles, although Augustine does not here pick up the allusion.

9. See 1 Cor 13:8.

10. See Lk 24:26-27. 44-46.

11. Another piece of fourfold rhyming rhetoric: *Habe caritatem, praedica veritatem; tunc per-venies ad aeternitatem, ubi invenies securitatem.*

SERMON 79

AGAIN ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 17:1-8 WHERE JESUS SHOWED HIMSELF ON THE MOUNTAIN TO THE THREE DISCIPLES

Date: 425-430¹

Let us hear

When the holy gospel was read, we heard about the great vision on the mountain, where the Lord Jesus showed himself to the three disciples, Peter, James, and John. *His countenance shone brilliantly like the sun*; that symbolizes the glory of the gospel. *His garments became as white as snow* (Mt 17:2); that symbolizes the purification of the Church, which is told through the prophet, *Even if your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow* (Is 1:18). Elijah and Moses were talking to him, because the grace of the gospel is attested by the law and the prophets; the law represented by Moses, the prophets by Elijah, to put it very briefly. There are, you see, some favors of God received through the holy martyr, which have still to be recounted.² So let's listen.

Peter thought it would be a good idea to make three tabernacles,³ one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Christ. He was delighted with the solitude of the mountain; he was tired of the rough and tumble of human affairs. But why was he proposing three tabernacles? It can only have been because he was still unaware of the unity of law, prophets, and gospel. Anyway, a cloud soon put him right. *While he was talking, it says, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them.* There you are, the cloud formed one tabernacle; why were you looking for three?

And a voice from the cloud: This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; this one you must hear (Mt 17:5). Elijah speaks, but *this one you must hear*. Moses speaks, but *this one you must hear*. The prophets speak, the law speaks, *but this one you must hear*, he being the voice of the law and the tongue of the prophets. He was to be heard in them; he appeared, when he judged the time to be ripe, in himself. *This one you must hear.* This one let us hear. When the gospel was speaking, imagine it was the cloud; from it a voice boomed out to us. This one let us hear; let us do what he says, let us hope for what he has promised.

NOTES

1. A sermon probably preached at Hippo, probably between 19 and 24 June, any year between 425 and 430.
2. Almost certainly Saint Stephen, whose relics, recently brought to North Africa, were credited with a great many miracles.
3. See note 8 of the previous sermon.

SERMON 79A

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL IN WHICH JESUS WAS TRANFIGURED ON THE MOUNTAIN

Date: unknown¹

*Those who will not taste death, until they see
the Son of man in his kingdom*

1. Before the Lord revealed himself on the mountain, as we heard when the holy gospel was read, he had said, *There are some of those standing around here who will not taste death, until they see the Son of man in his kingdom* (Mt 16:28). Now we know that the Lord Jesus Christ is going to come at the end of the world as judge, and to give the kingdom to those on his right, punishment to those on his left;² he is going to come, as we profess in the creed, to judge the living and the dead. But all those who were standing around him when he was speaking have fallen asleep, when the inexorable terms of death overtook them, and they are only going to see the Lord as judge in his kingdom, when the time of the resurrection comes. So what does he mean by saying, *There are some of those standing around here who will not taste death, until they see the Son of man in his kingdom?*

It's plain that the passage of the gospel which comes next has solved the problem. For he took three others with him up the mountain, Peter and James and John, and in their presence he transfigured himself,³ so that his face shone like the sun in its splendor.⁴ So they were among those standing around, who were not going to taste death until they saw the Lord in his kingdom. Now all of us will be shining as splendidly as the sun at the end of the ages, and that is the splendor that the Lord displayed in himself. His members will shine as the head has shone. It is written that *He will transfigure the body of our lowliness to the same form as the body of his glory* (Phil 3:21).

There he was himself on the mountain, shining like the sun, and he had not yet risen. He hadn't yet tasted death, but he was God in the flesh, and by his divine power he did whatever he wished with the flesh that had not yet been raised from the dead. I mean, to show you that it isn't pride in us to hope for such a thing ourselves, listen to him, and stop doubting. When he was explaining the parable of the weeds, he said, *The one who sows good seed is the Son of*

man. The field is the world. As for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one. The enemy who sowed it is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world, while the reapers are the angels. So when the end of the world comes, then will the Son of man send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all scandals and cast them into the furnace of flaming fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. What about the wheat? Listen to what comes next. Then shall the just shine like the sun in the kingdom (Mt 13:37-39.41-43). And it's because they will be like that in the kingdom that the Lord said, There are some of those standing around here who will not taste death, until they see the Son of man in his kingdom (Mt 16:28).

Peter's proposal

2. But now, my dear brothers and sisters, what's the meaning of all the rest? Moses and Elijah appeared, they placed the Lord in between them, and began a conversation with him. Saint Peter was delighted with the solitude, he had grown tired of the turbulent, troublesome human race. He saw the mountain, he saw the Lord, he saw Moses, he saw Elijah. The only people there were precisely people who were not on the make.⁵ He was delighted with this quiet, leisurely, blissful life, and said to the Lord, *Lord, it is good for us to be here.* Why go down the mountain to be subjected to all that turbulence? Why not rather decide to enjoy ourselves here? *It is good for us to be here. Let us make here three tabernacles,*⁶ if you tell us to: one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.⁷

Peter still didn't know what he ought to be saying; he wanted to divide things. He thought what he said was a good idea. But what did the Lord do? He fetched a cloud from heaven, which covered them all; it was his way of saying to Peter, "Why do you want to make three tabernacles? Here's a single one for all of us." Then they heard a voice from the cloud, *This is my beloved Son;* this was to make sure they didn't compare Moses and Elijah with him, and suppose that the Lord was to be taken just as one of the prophets, while he was in fact the Lord of the prophets. *This is my beloved Son; hear you him.* Terrified by this voice, they fell to the ground. *But the Lord came and raised them up, and they saw nobody but Jesus only (Mt 17:5-7).*

The symbolism of the mystery of the transfiguration

3. If the Lord enables me to, let me explain the symbolism of this great mystery. Moses and Elijah are talking with the Lord. In Moses we have the law, in Elijah the prophets. When we put forward anything from the gospel, we back it up from the law and the prophets. And Moses and Elijah are speaking with the Lord, but the attendants are on either side, the sovereign in the middle. What's the meaning of Moses and Elijah speaking with the Lord? Listen to the apostle: *Through the law, he says, comes knowledge of sin; but now without the law the justice of God has been manifested (Rom 3:21).* There you have the Lord together with Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets bearing witness to him.

But when we rise again, what need will there be for the law, what need for the prophets? We won't be looking for supporting evidence, because we shall see him face to face, as he is,⁸ but when will this be? After the resurrection. That's why those who fell down rose up again, and saw the Lord alone.

NOTES

1. There is no indication of where or when this sermon, which survives in one manuscript, was preached.
2. See Mt 25:34.41.
3. We usually talk about Jesus being transfigured in the passive voice, and that indeed is how the gospel states it in the Latin as well as the Greek text. Augustine's use of the reflexive here is therefore significant; it illustrates how his primary awareness of Jesus is always of him as God the Word. He is the agent of his own transfiguration.
4. See Mt 17:12.
5. . . . *Qui sibi non faciebant*. A difficult phrase; literally, "who were not making for themselves." I assume it to be a colloquial idiom, like the English one I have translated it with. "People on the make" is what Augustine is suggesting Peter found most of "the turbulent human race" to be.
6. See Sermon 78, note 8.
7. See Mt 17:4.
8. See 1 Cor 13:12; 1 Jn 3:2. Augustine does not himself allude directly to these texts here, but in this kind of context he always has them in mind.

SERMON 80

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 17:18-20:
WHY COULD WE NOT CAST HIM OUT, ETC.
ON PRAYER

Date: 410¹

The apostles' unbelief

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ rebuked even his disciples for unbelief, as we heard when the gospel was read just now. When they said, *Why could we not cast him out?* he replied, *Because of your unbelief* (Mt 17:19-20). If the apostles were unbelievers, who is a believer? What are the lambs to do if the rams stumble? However, the mercy of the Lord was not denied them for their lack of faith; instead he rebuked them, nursed them along, perfected them, decorated them.²

After all, they were themselves aware of their weakness, and so as we read somewhere in the gospel, they said to him, *Lord, give us more faith* (Lk 17:5). *Lord*, they say, *give us more faith*. The first thing that stood them in good stead was knowledge, knowing what they had too little of; they were even more fortunate in knowing where to look for it. *Lord*, they say, *give us more faith*. See how they were carrying their hearts, so to say, to the wellhead, and knocking to get it opened up,³ so that they may fill them up there. He wanted to make them knock at his door in order to exercise them in desiring, not to rebuff them in their knocking.

Keep on asking

2. After all, dear brothers and sisters, do you imagine that God doesn't know what your needs are? And as he knows what we lack, he knows in advance what our desires are. In any case, when he was teaching his disciples the Lord's Prayer,⁴ he warned them not to be garrulous in prayer, and said, *Do not be garrulous; for your Father knows what you need before you ask him for it* (Mt 6:78). Now the Lord is saying something else.⁵

So what's the situation? Because he didn't want us to talk a lot in prayer, he told us, *Do not talk much when you pray; for your Father knows what you need before you ask him for it*. Well, if our Father knows what we need before we

ask him for it, why should we talk even a little? What's the point of any prayer, if our Father already knows what we need? He says to someone, "Don't go on and on asking me; after all, I know what you need." "If you know, Lord, why should I ask at all? You don't want me to make a longwinded request, in fact you are telling me practically to make none at all."

And what about that other place? The one who says *Don't talk a lot in prayer* says somewhere else, *Ask and you will be given*. And in case you should suppose that it was only casually and by the way that you were advised to ask, he added, *Seek and you will find*; and in case you should reckon that this too was just said in passing, notice what he threw in next, notice how he clinched the matter: *Knock and it will be opened to you* (Mt 7:7). Yes, notice how he kept on adding things; in order for you to receive he wanted you to ask; for you to find, he wanted you to seek; for you to enter in, he wanted you to knock.

So how can this be? Since our Father already knows what we need, why are we to ask? Why are we to seek, why are we to knock? Why should we tire ourselves out asking and seeking and knocking, just to inform someone who already knows it all? In another place we have the Lord's words that we *ought always to pray, and not grow weary* (Lk 18:1). If we ought always to pray, how can he say *Do not be garrulous*? How can I be praying always if I've got to finish quickly? Here you tell me to finish quickly, here you tell me *to pray always and not to grow weary*. What can it mean?

Well, in order to sort this one out too, you must ask, seek, knock. You see, the reason the door is shut is not to rebuff you, but to exercise your wits. So, my friends, I'm obliged to urge on both you and myself to prayer. What I mean is that in all the many evils of this present life the only hope we have is in knocking by prayer, and in believing and being firmly convinced that your Father doesn't give you what he knows is not good for you. I mean you know, of course, what you desire; but he knows what's good for you. Think of yourself as being under a doctor, and as being sick which is in fact the case; this whole life of ours is, after all, a sickness; and a long life is nothing but one long sickness. So think of yourself as being ill under a doctor. You have suddenly had the lovely idea, the lovely idea of asking the doctor to let you have a glass of wine. There is no reason you shouldn't ask, because it may possibly do you no harm, and it may be good for you to get it. Don't hesitate to ask; ask, don't think twice about it. But if you don't get it, don't feel bad about it. If this holds good when you are under the care of a human doctor, concerned with your body, how much more so under the care of the divine doctor, the creator and restorer of both your body and your soul?

Go to the heavenly doctor

3. So then, seeing that in this chapter of the gospel the Lord exhorts us to prayer after saying *It was because of your unbelief that you could not cast out this demon*, he exhorted them to prayer, you see, by concluding like this: *This kind is only cast out by fasting and prayers* (Mt 17:19.21; Mk 9:29). if a person

is to pray in order to cast out someone else's demon, how much more to cast out his own avarice? How much more to cast out his own habit of drunkenness? How much more to cast out his own loose living? How much more to cast out his own uncleanness?

How many things there are in us which, if they persist, bar our entry into the kingdom of heaven! Just think, brothers and sisters, how urgently people beg doctors for merely temporary health, how if someone is desperately ill he's neither slow nor shy about clinging to the man's feet, about washing the expert surgeon's feet with his tears. And what if the doctor tells him, "The only way you can be cured is if I tie you down, cauterize, wield the knife"? He will answer, "Do what you like, only cure me." How keenly he must long for a few days' volatile health, as fleeting as the morning mist, if for its sake he is willing to be tied down, and cut open, and burnt, and kept from eating what he likes and drinking what he likes and when he likes! He endures all this, just to die a little later; and he is reluctant to put up with a little suffering in order not to die ever! If God, the heavenly doctor in charge of us, said to you, "Do you want to be cured?" wouldn't you say, "Yes, I do"? Or perhaps you wouldn't say it, because you think you are perfectly well, and that means your illness is worse than ever.

Christ came to the sick, he found all of us sick

4. Take, for instance, two sick people; one pleads with the doctor in tears, the other, delirious in his sickness, pours scorn on the doctor. The doctor can hold out hope to the one who is crying, but can only wring his hands over the one who is laughing at him. Why? Because the more certainly he imagines himself to be well, the more dangerously ill he is shown to be.

That was the case with the Jews. Christ came to the sick, he found all of us sick. We should none of us flatter ourselves on our health, or we won't present ourselves to this doctor. *For all have sinned, and are in need of the glory of God* (Rom 3:23). So since he found all of us sick, there have been two kinds of sick people. Some have come to the doctor, clung to Christ, listened to him, honored him, followed him, been converted. He has received them all, without any revulsion, to treat them, and has treated them free, curing them by his divine omnipotence. So when he has taken them in and joined them to himself for treatment, they have been jubilant.

But the other kind of sick people, who were already delirious in their wickedness illness and didn't know they were ill, were insolent toward him because he took in the sick, and they said to his disciples, *Look what sort of man your teacher is, eating with sinners and tax-collectors.* He, of course, knew what they were and what he was,⁷ so he answered them, *It's not people who are well that need a doctor, but people who are sick.* And he goes on to show them whom he means by those who are well and those who are sick. *I did not come,* he says, *to call the just, but sinners* (Mt 9:11-13). "If sinners don't approach me", he is saying, "what was the point of my coming? Who did I come for?" If all are fit and well, why should such a doctor ever come down from heaven? Why should

he make us up a remedy, not from his medicine chest, but from his own blood?

So that kind of sick people who were less seriously ill, who were aware of being ill, clung to the doctor in order to be cured. But those who were dangerously ill were insulting toward the doctor and dismissive of the sick. And in the end, how far did their frenzy carry them? To seizing the doctor, binding him, scourging him, crowning him with thorns, hanging him up on a tree, killing him on a cross. Why be surprised? The sick slew the doctor, but the doctor, once slain, cured them of their frenzied delirium.

The words of the doctor hanging on a cross

5. From the start, you see, on the cross itself he did not forget his role, but demonstrated his patience to us, and gave us the example of loving our enemies. He saw them seething round him, and being the doctor he knew what their disease was, knew they had lost their wits in a delirium or frenzy, and so he immediately said to the Father, *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing* (Lk 23:34). Do you imagine those Jews weren't really an evil-minded, bloodthirsty, cruel mob, hostile to the Son of God? And do you imagine that those words were just empty and ineffective, *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*? He saw them all, but he recognized there those who would later be his own.

Finally, he died because it was appropriate that by his death he should slay death. God died, to strike a balance in a kind of celestial bargain, to prevent humanity seeing death. Christ, you see, is God, but he didn't die in that aspect in which he was God. It's the same person who is God and who is man, since Christ is one person, God and man. The human was taken on that we might be changed for the better, it didn't drag God down to an inferior mode of being. I mean, he took on what he was not, he did not lose what he was. So since he was both God and man, wishing us to live by what was his own, he died by what was ours. In himself, you see, he had nothing to die with; but then we had nothing to live by.

What was he then, this one who had nothing to die with? *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (Jn 1:1). Look for something that God can die with, and you won't find it. We, however, die, being flesh; humanity carrying sinful flesh.⁹ Look for something that sin can live by, and it doesn't have anything. So he couldn't have death by what was his very own, nor could we have life by what was our very own. But we have life from what is his, he has death from what is ours.

What an extraordinary tradeoff.⁹ What did he give, and what did he get? When human traders go trading it is to exchange goods. Trading in olden days, you see, was barter or exchanging goods. A person gave what he had, and got what he didn't have. For example, he had wheat and didn't have barley; someone else had barley and not wheat; the first one traded some wheat which he had for some barley which he didn't have. How much would it be worth for a greater quantity of one commodity to make up for its lesser value? So here you have

one trader offering barley to get wheat; and at the other end of the scale, one offering lead in order to acquire silver. But he has to give a lot of lead against a little silver. Another offers wool, to acquire cloth. We can't possibly list them all. But no one, surely, offers life to acquire death.

So the words of the doctor hanging on the cross were not in vain. You see, in order to die for us, because the Word couldn't die, *The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us* (Jn 1:14). He hung on the cross, but in the flesh. There's the cheapness which the Jews despised; there's the dear love¹⁰ by which the Jews were set free. It was for them, after all, that he said, *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*. And those words were not ineffective. He died, he was buried, he rose again. After spending forty days with his disciples, he ascended into heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit he had promised on those who were expecting him. They were filled with the Holy Spirit they received, and began to speak with the tongues of all nations. Then the Jews who were present, thunderstruck at simple, uneducated men, whom they knew to have been brought up among them in one language, speaking in Christ's name all languages, well they were shaken to the core. Then when Peter spoke they learned where this gift came from. That man bestowed it, who had hung on the cross. That man bestowed it, who had been laughed at as he hung on the cross so that seated in heaven he might give the Holy Spirit. They heard, they believed, those about whom he had said, *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*. They believed, they were baptized, and they underwent conversion. What sort of conversion? The blood of Christ, which they had shed in fury, they drank in faith.

Call upon the Lord when we stumble and stagger in this life

6. So, to conclude this sermon where we began it, let us pray, and put all our trust in God; let us live as he commands us, and when we stumble and stagger in this life, let us call upon him as the disciples called upon him, when they said, *Lord, increase our faith* (Lk 17:5). Peter too was full of confidence, and staggered; yet he wasn't ignored and allowed to drown, but given a helping hand and set on his feet. Just what, after all did he place his confidence in? It wasn't in himself, it was in the Lord. How's that? *Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you over the water*. The Lord, you remember, was walking over the waters. *If it is you, bid me come to you over the water*. I know, you see, that if it is you, you have only to command, and it will happen. And he said, *Come*. He got down from the boat at his command, he began to tremble at his own weakness. And yet when he grew afraid he cried out to him: *Lord, deliver me*, he said. Then the Lord took him by the hand and said, *Little faith, why did you doubt?* (Mt 14:28.30.31). It was he that invited him, he that delivered him when he tottered and staggered. This fulfilled what was said in the psalm, *If I said, My foot has slipped, your mercy, Lord, would come to my help* (Ps 94:18).

Two sorts of benefits: temporal and eternal

7. So then, there are two sorts of benefits, temporal ones and eternal ones. Temporal ones are such things as health, wealth, honor, friends, house, children, wife and the other things of this life through which we are traveling as foreigners. So let us place ourselves in the wayside hotel¹¹ of this life, like travelers who are going to pass on, not like owners who are going to stay.

Eternal benefits, on the other hand, are first and foremost eternal life itself, the imperishability and immortality of flesh and soul, the company of angels, the heavenly city, unfailing titles of nobility, a Father and a fatherland, the one beyond death, the other beyond enemies. We should be longing for these benefits with infinite desire, pray for them with tireless perseverance, not with long speeches but with the evidence of our sighs. Desire is praying always, even if the tongue is silent. If you desire always, you are praying always. When does prayer nod off to sleep? When desire grows cold.

So let us beg for these everlasting benefits with insatiable eagerness, let us seek those good things with a singleminded determination, let us ask for those good things without a scruple of anxiety. Those good things, after all, benefit those who have them, and cannot possibly do them harm. But these temporal things are sometimes of benefit, and sometimes harmful. Many people have profited from poverty and been harmed by riches; many have profited from the obscurity of private life, and been harmed by the honors of high public office. And again, money has been good for some people, and so has high position: good for those who use them well, but for those who use them badly they have harmed them more than ever, if they have not been deprived of them.

And therefore, dear brothers and sisters, let us ask for these temporal benefits too, but in moderation, safe in the knowledge that if we receive them, the one who gives them knows what is suitable for us. You've asked, have you, and haven't been given what you asked for? Trust the Father, who would give it to you if it suited you. Look, you can work it out from a comparison with yourself. Your small son, ignorant of the ways of the world, stands in the same relation to you as you, ignorant of the divine world, stand in to the Lord. So there's your little boy, crying at you all day long to give him a pruning knife, to play with as a sword. You refuse to give it to him, you don't give it, you ignore his tears in order not to lament his death. Let him cry, let him torment himself in a tantrum for you to lift him up on a horse; you don't do it because he can't control it; it will throw him and kill him. You are denying him a part, because you are keeping the whole for him. But so that he may grow up and possess the whole safely, you don't give him a dangerous little part.¹²

Whatever we are like, that's what the times are like

8. So that's why I'm saying, dear brothers and sisters, pray as much as you can. Evils abound, and God has willed that evils should abound. If only evil people didn't abound, then evils wouldn't abound.¹³ The times are evil, the times are troubled, that's what people say. Let us live good lives, and the times are

good. We ourselves are the times. Whatever we are like, that's what the times are like.

But what are we to do? We can't convert the vast majority to a good life, can we? Let the few people who are listening live good lives; let the few who are living good lives bear with the many living bad ones. They are grains of wheat, they are on the threshing floor; they can have chaff with them on the threshing floor, they won't have it with them in the barn. Let them put up with what they don't want, in order to come to what they do.

Why should we be vexed, and find fault with God? Evils abound in the world to stop us loving the world. Great are the people, real saints are the faithful, who have made light of the beautiful world; we here can't even make light of the ugly one. The world is evil, yes it's evil, and yet it is loved as if it were good. And what precisely is this evil world? It isn't the sky and earth and the waters and all that is in them, fishes, birds, trees. All these things are good. The evil world is the one made by evil people.

But because, as I have said, as long as we live we cannot be without evil people, let us moan and groan to the Lord our God, and put up with evils in order to attain to things that are truly good. Don't let's find fault with the Father of the family; after all, he cares for us dearly. He is supporting us, not we him. He knows how to manage what he has made. Do what he has told you, and hope for what he has promised.

NOTES

1. A sermon probably preached about 410; there is no particular indication of where it was preached.

2. Literally, "crowned them." But nowadays winners or outstanding performers are given medals, not crowns, and these are generically known as "decorations."

3. See Lk 11:9-10.

4. In the text, simply "when he was teaching prayer," or "teaching the prayer." I prefer to take it in the latter sense; and "the prayer," unless otherwise qualified, is always the Lord's Prayer.

5. He is referring to the words "But this kind is only cast out by fasting and prayer," which were part of the gospel text he was preaching on (Mt 17:21), and which he will quote fully at the beginning of section 3. They are found in the Latin versions of Matthew, but they have been imported there from Mk 9:29, and do not occur in the best Greek texts of Matthew, or in modern translations such as the Revised Standard Version.

6. "Tie you down." The Latin word is *ligo*, which is also the medical word for bandaging, or tying a limb to a splint. But as it goes with the next two words, "burn, cut," I take it to have meant tying the patient down securely before operating without any anesthetic.

7. Reading with one manuscript *quid esset* instead of the *qui esset* ("what they were and who they were," which is pure padding) preferred by the editors.

8. See Rom 8:3. Reading *qui sumus caro, peccati carnem portans homo*, instead of *qui sumus caro peccati, carnem portans homo peccati* preferred by some editors. This would translate "being sinful flesh; humanity carrying sinful flesh."

9. This conceit of envisaging the incarnation as a commercial transaction finds its way into the liturgy of Christmas time, in the first antiphon for first evening prayer of the octave day of Christmas, 1 January. Whether the liturgy took it from Augustine or Augustine from the liturgy, it is impossible to say; most probably the former. See also Sermon 121, 5.

10. The contrast is between *vilitas*, cheapness, and *caritas*, which basically means dearness, and from there, because what is dear to you is loved by you, it comes to mean love or charity.

11. The exact modern equivalent of Augustine's *stabulum* would be the motel. But I could hardly put this in the text, as it inescapably connotes travel by motor car which is worlds away from the laborious business of traveling in Augustine's time. A fascinating account of the details of travel in the ancient world, and of Augustine's own reluctant experience of it, is given in *Les Voyages de Saint Augustin* by O. Perler and J.-L. Maier (Paris, 1969).

12. For the same illustrations of the theme see Sermons 21, 8; 77B, 3; 82, 2.

13. This explains how God can have willed that evils should abound, both as a just punishment for evil people and as a means of correcting them. Augustine does *not* say God has willed that evil people should abound.

SERMON 81

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

Date: 410 or 411¹

The threat of scandals

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

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

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

from your law, to make him meek in the face of evil days, until a pit is dug for the sinner (Ps 94:12-13). How various the words of scripture seem, and yet they flow and run together into one truth, so that whatever you may be able to drink in⁶ from that inexhaustible spring, you too may assent to, agreeing with the truth as its friend, filled with peace, warm with love, armed against scandals.

How to be meek

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

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

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

To conclude, see how meek he was, how well instructed in the law of God, I mean in God's eternal law. You see, the law given to the Jews on stone tablets¹² didn't yet exist in the days of Job, but the eternal law was still lodged in the

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

What do the meek do

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

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

Throw it away from you means don't consent

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

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

Now perhaps he tries what Satan tried on the Lord: *It is written about you that he has commanded his angels about you, lest you hurt your foot upon a stone* (Mt 4:6; Ps 91:11-12). Perhaps this friend of yours too, knowing that you are a Christian, wants to use the law¹⁵ to persuade you to do what he thinks you ought to.

"Do what he says."

"What?"

"This thing the man wants."

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

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

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

The law says, Do not lie

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

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

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

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

"How much more kindly he's dealing with me than I will be dealing with myself if I lie! He can kill my flesh, I can kill my soul." When Mr. Big gets angry, he kills the body; *the mouth that lies kills the soul.* He kills the body; it was going to die anyway, even if it wasn't killed. But the soul which is not killed by iniquity is received by the Truth¹⁶ into eternity. So keep what you can keep; let that perish which is going to perish sometime anyhow.

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

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

Acknowledge Christ, and ascend by the man to God

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

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

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

Troubles and pressures are not scandals but training exercises

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

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

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

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

The world has grown old

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

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

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

The fall of Rome in Christian times

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NOTES

1. Preached at Hippo sometime in 410 or 411.

2. Mt 18:79, or possibly a longer section of the gospel, and some verses of Ps 37, if not the whole psalm.

3. That is to say, no scandal, that is, stumbling-block, can scandalize them or make them stumble. I keep the word "scandal," though its meaning has shifted considerably in current English, because alternatives, like stumbling-block, are so colorless and weak in comparison.

4. See Rom 2:13; Jas 1:22.25.

5. See Gal 5:6.

6. Reading *haurire* instead of *audire*, to hear. There is no support for this at all from the manuscripts. It is simply my hunch that the stenographer misheard *haurire* (which suits the metaphor much better) as *audire*. Just as a "t" between two vowels easily gets reduced in some dialects to a "d" (as in American English), so in other dialects (as in some forms of British English) either consonant in the same position can be reduced to an "r," and "butter" or "better," for example, pronounced "burrer" and "berrer." So *haurire*, with the "h" silent, can be interpreted, rather than heard, as *audire*.

7. "Pressure" is really far too weak a word for *pressura*, which here means affliction. But the

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

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

9. See Acts 16:24-25.

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

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

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

12. See Dt 5:22.

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

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

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

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

17. See Jn 1:12.

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

19. See Heb 10:23.

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

21. See 1 Cor 3:12-15.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

27. See 2 Pt 3:7.12.

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

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

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

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

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

SERMON 82

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

Date: 408¹

A speck is the beginning of a beam

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

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

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

carry on, you are hating him; your indulgence results in his death. How much better it would be if you were angry, and gave him what for, than if by not being angry you allowed him to perish!

So hatred is to be shunned more than anything, the beam to be tossed out of the eye. It's surely quite a different thing when you get angry with somebody and go too far in what you say, which you later put right by apologizing, from when you nurse a grudge in your heart, ready to settle old scores when you get the chance. Lastly, there's a world of difference between these words of scripture, *My eye is disturbed for anger* (Ps 6:7) and—what does it say about that other thing? *Whoever hates his brother is a murderer* (1 Jn 3:15). There's a world of difference between an eye that's been disturbed and one that's been put out. A speck disturbs the eye, a beam pokes it out altogether.³

If you hate somebody else, you damage your own spirit

3. So the first thing we have to persuade ourselves of is that, in order to be able to carry out and do well what we have been urged to do in today's gospel, we must above everything else not hate anyone. Then, you see, with no beam in your own eye, you can see clearly whatever there may be in your brother's eye; and you are in a fever of impatience until you can extract from your brother's eye what you see to be harming your brother's eye. The light in you doesn't allow you to be unconcerned about your brother's lights.⁴ After all, if you hate him and want to reprove him, how can you put his lights straight, when you have lost your own lights? This is said quite plainly in the same part of scripture where it is written, *Whoever hates his brother is a murderer. Whoever hates his brother, it also says, is in darkness still* (1 Jn 2:9). Hatred is a kind of darkness.

It is impossible, though, to hate someone else without first doing damage to yourself. You try to ruin him outwardly, you devastate yourself inwardly. But insofar as our spirit is superior to our body, to that extent we should take precautions against its suffering damage. Now if you hate somebody else, you damage your own spirit. And what are you going to do to the guy you hate? What are you going to do? You can deprive him of his money, but not of his faith, can you? You can damage his reputation, but not his conscience, can you? Whatever you injure, you injure outwardly; notice what injury you do to yourself. Internally, you see, you are your own enemy, if you hate someone else. But because you don't feel the bad damage you are doing to yourself, you rage against the other guy, and put your life in all the greater danger precisely to the extent that you don't realize how badly you are treating yourself; because in fact by raging like that you have lost your senses. You there have acted savagely against your enemy; by your savage action he has been stripped to the bone, you have proved yourself wicked. There's all the difference in the world between being stripped to the bone and being wicked. He has lost his money, you your innocence. Ask yourself which of you has suffered the greater loss. He has lost a perishable object; you have become a perishable object.

Reprove people out of love

4. That's why we ought to reprove people out of love, not avid to harm them, but eager to correct them. If we are people like that, we can do extremely well what we have been urged to do in today's gospel: *If your brother has sinned against you, reprove him between yourself and him alone* (Mt 18:15). Why reprove him? Because you are sorry for yourself, because he's sinned against you? God forbid. If you do it out of self-love, you do less than nothing. If you do it out of love for him, you are doing something very good indeed. In any case, observe in our Lord's very words for love of whom you ought to do it, of yourself or him: *If he listens to you, he says, you have gained your brother* (Mt 18:15). So do it for his sake, to gain him.

If you gain him by doing it, it means he would have been lost if you hadn't done it. So why is it that so many people make light of these sins, and say, "What's so awful about what I have done? I've only sinned against an ordinary person." Don't make light of them; you've sinned against another person; do you want to make sure that by sinning against another person you have perished, you are lost? If the one you have sinned against rebukes you between himself and you alone, and you listen to him, he has gained you. What can his gaining you mean, but that if he hadn't gained you, you would have perished? After all if you hadn't perished, hadn't been lost, how could he have gained you? So let none of you make light of it, when you sin against a brother or sister. After all, the apostle says somewhere, *But sinning in this way against the brethren and striking their weak consciences, you are sinning against Christ* (1 Cor 8:12), precisely because we have all become members of Christ, parts of his body. How can you avoid sinning against Christ, when you sin against a member of Christ?

You are offering your gifts, and you are not a gift to God yourself

5. So let none of you say, "Because I haven't sinned against God, but against a brother, I've only sinned against a human being; it's a trivial sin, or no sin at all." Well, perhaps what you mean is, "It's a trivial sin, because it is soon put right." You've sinned against a brother; make it up with him, and you are cured. You've done something poisonous in a moment, but the next moment you've found a remedy. Which of us, my brothers and sisters, could possibly hope for the kingdom of heaven, when it says in the gospel, *Whoever says to his brother, You fool, will be liable to the gehenna of fire?* How absolutely terrifying! But observe the remedy there on the spot: *If you have been offering your gift at the altar, and have then remembered that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar.* God won't be angry because you delay placing your gift on the altar; God wants you much more than your gift. I mean, if still bearing a bitter grudge against your brother, you arrive with a gift at your God's place, he will answer you, "You're lost, what have you brought me? You are offering your gift, and you are not a gift to God yourself." Christ wants one he has redeemed with his blood much more than he wants what you have found

in your storehouse. So, *leave your gift there in front of the altar, and go first to be reconciled with your brother; and in this way come and offer your gift* (Mt 5:22-24). There he was, liable to gehenna, and see how soon he has been released from his liability.⁵ Not yet reconciled, you were liable to gehenna; once reconciled, you are offering your gift at the altar without a qualm.

Those who have done an injury: ask pardon

6. But of course people find it easy to give offense, and difficult to restore harmony. Ask pardon, he says, of the person you have offended, the person you have harmed. He replies, "I won't humble myself." At least listen to your God, if you insist on ignoring your brother: *Whoever humbles himself shall be exalted* (Mt 18:4).⁶ You are unwilling to humble yourself, you that have fallen flat on your face anyway? There's a world of difference between someone humbling himself, and someone flat on his face. You're already flat on your face, and you refuse to humble yourself? You would have every right to say, "I refuse to lower myself," if you had refused to come hurtling down in the first place.

Those who have suffered an injury: reprove

7. So that's what anyone who has done an injury ought to do. But what about those who have suffered an injury, what ought they to do? What we have heard in today's gospel: *If your brother has sinned against you, reprove him between yourself and him alone*. If you neglect to do so, you are worse than he is. He has done wrong, and by doing wrong has inflicted a grave wound on himself; are you going to ignore your brother's wound? You see that he's on the point of being lost, or is already lost, and are you not going to bother? You're worse by keeping silent than he was by noisily abusing you.

So when someone sins against us, let us care about it deeply, not for ourselves, because it is splendid to forget injuries done us. Yes, but forget your injury, not your brother's wound. So, *reprove him between yourself and him alone*, to make sure of correcting him and to spare him the shame. Perhaps, you see, for very shame he may start defending his sin, and so you may end by making him worse, while wishing to put him right.⁷ So, *reprove him between yourself and him alone*. *If he listens to you, you have gained your brother*, because he would have been lost, if you hadn't done it.

But if he doesn't listen to you, that is, if he defends his sin as though it were an act of justice, bring along with you two or three; because every matter stands on the word of two or three witnesses. If he does not even listen to them, refer it to the Church; if he does not even listen to the Church, let him be to you as an ethnic and a tax collector (Mt 18:15-17). Don't count him as one of your brothers. That doesn't mean, however, that you need no longer bother about his salvation. For while we don't count the ethnics, that is to say the Gentiles and heathens among our brothers and sisters, we are still always seeking their salvation. So, we have heard the Lord giving us this admonition, and phrasing

the command very carefully, so as to add immediately, *Amen I tell you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven* (Mt 18:18). You start regarding your brother as a tax-collector; you are binding him on earth; but make sure that you bind him justly. Justice, you see, bursts unjust bonds apart. When, however, you have corrected your brother and made it up with him, you have loosed him on earth. When you loose him on earth, he will also be loosed in heaven.⁸ You are doing a great service, not to yourself but to him, because he has done great harm, not to you but to himself.

Agreement of the gospel with Solomon and the two testaments

8. All this being so, what's the meaning of what Solomon says, which we heard first today in another reading: *One who winks deceitfully with the eyes piles up sadness for men, but one who censures openly makes peace* (Prv 10:10)? So if *one who censures openly makes peace*, why and how, *rebuke him between yourself and him alone*? I'm afraid it looks as if divine injunctions are contradicting each other. But let us be sure about this, that in fact perfect harmony prevails here; don't let's share the ideas of some deluded people,⁹ who hold the erroneous opinion that the two covenants, represented by the books of the Old and New Testaments, contradict each other. Don't let us assume, in other words, that there is a contradiction between this thing in Solomon's book and that thing in the gospel.

Suppose, you see, some ignorant critic of the divine scriptures were to say, "Look where the two testaments contradict each other: the Lord says, *Rebuke him between yourself and him alone*; Solomon says, *One who censures openly makes peace*. So is the Lord ignorant of what he has himself commanded?"¹⁰ Solomon means the bold face of the sinner to be put in its place; Christ is sparing the blushes of someone who is ashamed of himself. I mean, there it says, *One who censures openly makes peace*, and here, *Rebuke him between yourself and him alone*, not openly, but secretly and privately."

Do you want to know, whoever you are, entertaining such thoughts, that the two testaments are not at odds with each other, because that is found in Solomon's book and this in the gospel? Listen to the apostle, the apostle who is of course a minister of the New Testament.¹¹ So listen to the apostle Paul giving Timothy instructions and saying, *Censure those who sin in front of everyone, so that the rest too may learn to fear* (1 Tm 5:20). Now it's not the book of Solomon but the letter of Paul the apostle which seems to conflict with the gospel.

Without prejudice, let's put Solomon aside for a moment; let's listen to Christ the Lord and his servant Paul. What do you say, Lord? *If your brother has sinned against you, reprove him between yourself and him alone*. What do you say, apostle? *Censure those who sin in front of everyone, so that the rest too may learn to fear*. What are we to do? Listen to this dispute like judges? Surely not. Rather, as subject ourselves to the judge, let us knock, that we may obtain the

opening of the door to us; let us flee for refuge under the wings of the Lord our God. I mean, he cannot have spoken against his apostle, because he himself spoke in him, as Paul declares himself: *Do you wish to get a taste of Christ who speaks in me* (2 Cor 13:3). Christ in the gospel, Christ in the apostle. So Christ said both things, one by his own lips, one by the lips of his herald. Because when the herald says anything from the bench, it isn't written in the record, "The herald said," but the one who told the herald what to say is recorded as having spoken.¹²

Follow the scriptures

9. So, brothers and sisters, let us listen to these two instructions in order to understand them, and set ourselves in a calm frame of mind between them both. Let us make peace with our own hearts, and we shall find that holy scripture is never and nowhere at war with itself. It is all absolutely true; each point is true. But we have to distinguish; sometimes this is to be done, and sometimes that. Sometimes your brother should be reproved between yourself and him alone, sometimes your brother is to be reproved in front of everybody, that the rest too may learn to fear. If we sometimes do the one and sometimes the other, we shall be maintaining the harmony of the scriptures, and in acting in compliance with them, we shall not be going astray. But someone's going to say to me: "When am I to do this, and when that? How am I to avoid rebuking him between myself and him alone, when I ought to rebuke him in front of everyone, or rebuking him in front of everyone when I ought to be rebuking him privately?"

Public or private reprove

10. Your graces will see soon enough which we ought to do when, but if only we aren't sluggishly reluctant to do it. Notice carefully: *If your brother, he says, has sinned against you, reprove him between yourself and him alone.* Why? Because he has sinned against you. What's the meaning, precisely, of "against you"? It means you know he has sinned, because it was something private, not known to other people, when he sinned against you. Look for a chance to do it privately, when you correct him for sinning. After all, if you are the only one who knows that he has sinned against you, and you want to censure him for it in front of everybody, you won't be reproving him, but betraying him.

Look how that just man, Joseph, showed such goodness in sparing the shameful wrong of which he suspected his wife, before he knew how she had conceived. He saw she was pregnant, and he knew he had not known her intimately himself. So there was a suspicion, amounting to a certainty, of adultery. And yet because he was the only one who had noticed it, the only one who knew it, what does the gospel say about him? *But Joseph, being a just man, and unwilling to disgrace her publicly.* A husband's sense of injury did not look for revenge; he wanted to help the sinner, not punish her. *Being unwilling, it says, to disgrace her publicly, wished to divorce her privately.* While he was

thinking about this, *behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream* (Mt 1:19-20), and pointed out the truth of the matter, that she had not dishonored her husband's bed, because she had conceived the Lord of them both by the Holy Spirit.

So, your brother has sinned against you. If you are the only one who knows it, then in fact he has only sinned against you. I mean if he affronted you in the hearing of several other people, then he also sinned against them, making them witnesses of his wickedness. I'm only saying, my dearest brothers and sisters, what you too can easily recognize for yourselves. When someone, in my presence, insults my brother, God forbid I should reckon that insult has nothing to do with me. Of course, he insulted me too; indeed he did me the greater injury, imagining I would be pleased with what he did. Those sins, then, are to be rebuked in front of everybody which are committed in front of everybody. Those which are committed less publicly are to be rebuked less publicly. Distinguish between the occasions, and scripture is at peace with itself.

Private reprove

11. Let's act like that, because that's how we should act, not only when someone sins against us, but also when anybody's sin is unknown to someone else. We should rebuke privately, censure privately, and not betray people by wishing to censure them publicly. What we are wanting to do is to rebuke and correct; what if some enemy of theirs wants to hear about something he can punish? A bishop, for example, knows someone or other is a murderer, and nobody else knows he is. I want to rebuke him publicly, while you are looking for a chance to bring an indictment. Well of course, I will neither give him away, nor ignore his sin. I will rebuke him privately, set God's judgment before his eyes, terrify his bloodstained conscience, try to persuade him to repent.¹³ That is the kind of Christian charity with which we should all be equipped.

That's why people sometimes find fault with us bishops, because we seem not to reprove sinners. They either suppose that we know what in fact we don't, or they suppose that we say nothing about what we do know. But perhaps I too know what you know; and yet I don't reprove it in your presence, because what I want to do is to cure, not accuse. There are people who commit adultery in their own homes; they sin privately.¹⁴ Sometimes they are reported to me by their wives out of extreme jealousy, sometimes out of a real concern for their husbands' salvation. I don't give them away publicly, but censure them in private. Let the evil terminate where the evil happens. I don't however neglect that wound; I try above all to show a man set in the habit of that sort of sin, and carrying a wounded conscience around with him, that the wound is in itself deadly.

Sometimes people who commit this sin treat it lightly out of heaven knows what kind of perversity. They hunt about for heaven knows what null and worthless proofs in their support, and they say, "God doesn't mind the sins of the flesh." Well, what about what we have heard today, *Fornicators and adul-*

terers God will judge (Heb 13:4)? So there you are, pay attention, any of you afflicted with this sort of disease. Listen to what God is saying, not to what your own prejudice is saying in favor of your sins, or your friend, perhaps, chained with the same shackles of wickedness as yourself—though in fact he is more your enemy and his own. So listen to what the apostle says: *Let marriage be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed be undefiled. But fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*

The rebuke is public, but the correction is private

12. So come now, brother, let yourself be corrected. You're afraid your enemy may bring an indictment against you, and aren't you afraid God may judge you? Where's your faith? Be afraid while there is time for being afraid. Sure, the day of judgment's a long way off. But the last day of each and every one of us cannot be a long way off, because life is short. And because it is always uncertain just how short, you don't know when your last day is going to be. Correct yourself today, ready for tomorrow. Let private rebuke avail you right now. I am speaking publicly, and I'm censuring privately. I'm knocking at the ears of all of you, but I meet the consciences of some of you only. If I said, "You there, adulterer, mend your ways," I might in the first place be asserting something I didn't know;¹⁵ I might perhaps be giving too much credit to something I had heard quite casually. So I don't say, "You there, adulterer, mend your ways," but, "Whoever you are, adulterer, in this congregation, mend your ways." The rebuke is public, but the correction is private. I know that the one who fears God is mending his ways.

You are God's temple

13. What he mustn't do is say to himself, "God doesn't mind sins of the flesh." *Do you not know, says the apostle, that you are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you? Whoever violates God's temple, God will destroy him* (1 Cor 3:16-17). Don't deceive yourselves, any of you, But someone will say, perhaps, "God's temple is my mind, not my body," adding the proof text, *All flesh is grass, and all the splendor of the flesh as the flower of grass* (Is 40:6). Miserable interpretation, punishable thought! Flesh is called grass because it dies, but take care that what dies for a time doesn't rise stained by crime. Do you want to have a completely clear judgment on the point? *Do you not know, says the same apostle, that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which you have from God?* Now you can't make light of bodily sins; here you have it that even *your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which you have from God.*¹⁶ You were making light of bodily sins, were you, you make light of sinning against a temple? Your very body is the temple of God's Spirit in you. Now see what you are doing to God's temple.

If you chose to commit adultery in church, within these four walls, could anything be more infamous than you? But now you yourself are God's temple.

A temple you come in, a temple you go out, a temple you stay at home, a temple you get up. Mind what you do, mind you don't offend the inhabitant of the temple, or he may abandon you and you will fall into ruin. *Do you not know*, he says, *that your bodies* (and here the apostle was talking about fornication, in case they should make light of bodily sins) *is*¹⁷ the temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own? For you have been bought for a great price.¹⁸ If you make light of your body, just reflect on your price.

Let yourself be corrected now

14. I myself know, and so does anyone who stops to reflect a little, that nobody who fears God will fail to correct himself at his words, unless he assumes that he has longer to live. This is the thing that kills many people, when they say, "Tomorrow, tomorrow," and suddenly the door is shut. He remained outside, croaking like a crow, because he didn't know how to moan like a dove. "Tomorrow, tomorrow";¹⁹ it's the caw of the crow. Moan like a dove and beat your breast; but when you give yourself blows on the breast, take care you emerge from the beating corrected. Otherwise what you may appear to be doing is not beating your conscience, but ramming down a bad conscience into concrete with your fists, making it harder and more solid than ever, not correcting it.

Moan and groan, but not with meaningless moans and groans. Someone will perhaps say to you, "God promised me pardon when I have corrected myself; I'm safe, I read the divine scripture, *On the day the wicked man turns away from his wickedness and does justice, I will forget all his wickedness* (Ez 18:21-22). I'm safe; when I correct myself, God grants me a pardon for my bad deeds." And what am I going to say? Am I going to protest against God? Am I going to say to God, "Don't grant him pardon"? Am I going to say this wasn't written, God didn't make this promise? If I say any of this, what I say is all untrue. What you say is right, what you say is true. God did promise pardon for your correcting yourself; I can't deny it. But tell me this, please—look, I agree, I know, I grant you, God did promise you pardon. I mean, did anyone promise you tomorrow? That place you are reading to me from, about how you are going to receive pardon if you correct yourself: read to me from it how long you are going to live. "I don't read that," you say. So you don't know how long you are going to live.

Let yourself be corrected now, and so always ready. Don't be afraid of the last day, like a thief who digs through the wall while you're asleep, but wake up and correct yourself today. Why put it off till tomorrow? "Life will be long." This long life of yours, let it be a good one. No one puts off a good long dinner, and are you willing to have a bad long life? Surely if it's long, it will be all the better for being good; if it's short, you do well to extend it into eternity as a good one. It's really very odd, I must say, how people neglect their lives, so that the only things they are quite agreeable to having bad are their lives. You are buying

a country cottage, you look for a good one; you want to marry a wife, you'd rather have a good one; you want children to be born to you, you hope they'll be good ones; you hire a pair of boots,²⁰ and you don't want bad ones; and you love a bad life! What has annoyed you about your life so much, that it's the only thing you like being bad, with the result that among all your good things, you alone are bad?

The ministry of rebuking

15. So, my brothers and sisters, if I wanted to rebuke any of you, taking you aside to do so, no doubt you would listen to me. But I'm now rebuking many of you publicly. Everyone applauds me; I hope someone is listening. I don't like someone applauding me with his words, and ignoring me in his heart. You see, when you applaud and don't correct yourself, you are a witness against yourself. If you are bad, and yet like what I say, then don't like yourself; because if you don't like yourself when you're bad, you will like yourself when you have put yourself right, as I told you a couple of days ago, if I'm not mistaken.²¹

In all my sermons I am presenting you with a mirror. They aren't my sermons, anyway; I only speak at the Lord's command, it's only dread of him that stops me keeping quiet. I mean to say, who wouldn't much rather keep quiet, and not have to give an account of you? But it's quite a time since I accepted this burden, and now I neither can nor should shrug it off my shoulders. You heard, my brothers and sisters, when the Letter to the Hebrews was being read, *Obey your leaders and submit to them; because they keep watch over your souls, as having to render account for you; that they may do this with joy and not with sadness; for that would not be for your profit* (Heb 13:17).

When do we do this with joy? When we see people making progress in the words of God. When does the workman labor with joy in the fields? When he looks at the tree and sees the fruit; when he looks at the crop, and looks forward to plenty of grain on the threshing floor. He hasn't labored in vain, he hasn't bent his back in vain, he hasn't worn down his fingers to the bone in vain, he hasn't endured cold and heat in vain. That's what he means when he says *that they may do this with joy and not with sadness; for that would not be for your profit*. He didn't say, "it would not be for their profit." No; but he said *it would not be for your profit*. You see, when those leaders are saddened by your bad deeds, this is for their profit; their very sadness does them good, but it is not for your profit. But I don't want anything to be for my profit, which is not also for your profit. So, brothers and sisters, let us work at doing good together in the field of the Lord, that together we may enjoy the reward.

NOTES

1. The only evidence for this sermon and the next one being preached at Milev is in the heading of one tenth century manuscript. But there is no reason to doubt it. Milev was a town of western Numidia, about 40 miles inland from the coast, roughly in the center of the northern sector of modern Algeria. Augustine's friend Severus was the bishop there. Its date is fairly definitely fixed by a comparison of its contents with those of Letter 95, written in August 408 to Paulinus of Nola. The comparison suggests that the sermon came after the letter; so it could have been preached either late in 408 or early in 409 (*Les Voyages de Saint Augustin* by O. Perler, Paris, 1969, page 273).

2. See Mt 7:3,5.

3. It would seem by the sequence of the last two contrasts that he interprets the text from 1 John as meaning that to hate your brother is, in effect, to murder yourself, spiritually.

4. In the sense in which we talk about people acting according to their lights. That's what "eyes" here represent for Augustine. But in Latin one's eyes could be called one's lights, and in another sermon he alludes to the custom of swearing "by my lights" (Sermon 16A, 3—"eyes" in the English translation, but *lumina* in the Latin).

5. Gehenna is the New Testament word for hell as the place of eternal punishment. It is actually, and rightly, a metaphor, because literally it is the little valley south of the city walls of Jerusalem where the city rubbish was burnt, and where once unfaithful Israelites before the exile had sacrificed children through fire to Moloch.

6. See Mt 23:12; Lk 14:11; 18:14; 1 Pt 5:6.

7. If you reprove him publicly instead of privately.

8. The conventional apologetic interpretation of this verse (which says the same to the disciples as was said to Peter in Mt 16:19) applies the statement only to the apostles and by implication to their successors the bishops. But Augustine, taking it as part of the whole section, understands it much more correctly as applying to all the faithful. Thus all believers share in this grant of authority (linked with correction and forgiveness) by Jesus Christ.

9. The Manichees.

10. The Lord speaking through Solomon, since the scriptures are divine, that is, divinely inspired.

11. See 2 Cor 3:6.

12. We have met the judge and his herald before. One supposes that the herald was the ancient equivalent of the microphone or loudspeaker.

Augustine's insistence on ironing out all apparent contradictions or incoherences between scriptural texts (what is called harmonizing) is not shared by modern biblical scholars or theologians. To take note of the real differences of approach and points of view between the biblical authors can and should contribute to a deepening of theological insights into the divine revelation. But this will only happen if modern theologians appreciate the validity of Augustine's concern. Some kind of accord, dramatic perhaps rather than simply logical or dialectical, has to be achieved between such contrasted points of view, if the fundamental concepts of divine revelation and the inspiration of the scriptures are to be maintained. Some modern critics succumb rather too easily (for very different reasons) to the Manichean temptation Augustine is here attacking.

13. Is he here just talking about what comes to the bishop's knowledge in the confessional? No doubt that is included; but he goes on to give the instance of knowing about men's adulteries through their wives reporting them to him, and applies the same rule. I think he would apply it (after all, he is advising his *lay* congregation how to act) if he alone knew a murderer because he alone had witnessed the deed. He is, in fact, extending the seal of the confessional far beyond the confessional, in a manner calculated to infuriate any public authorities and law enforcement agencies.

14. Presumably with their female slaves. See Sermon 9, 3-4, 11-13.

15. He seems to forget any "in the second place." One guesses that at this point he pointed to the most blameless old gentleman in the congregation, or perhaps at the most saintly member of the clergy present—or even at himself.

16. The sentence is very possibly a marginal comment that has crept into the text of some manuscripts. Most leave it out.

17. Yes, he here imposes a grammatical mistake on the text of Paul, and says "your bodies is." The Greek has the whole sentence consistently in the singular, the Latin, which he quoted accurately a moment or two earlier, has it consistently in the plural. It was possibly a subconscious recollection of the Greek that led him here to this mistake, after he had interrupted his quotation of the text.

18. See 1 Cor 6:19-20.

19. *Cras, cras* in Latin. He is thinking of the raven which Noah first sent out from the ark and which didn't return (means didn't repent), and of the dove which brought back the olive branch, symbol of reconciliation and peace (Gn 8:6-11). I assume, perhaps wrongly, that a raven is just a poetic version of a crow.

20. What a very odd thing to do! The word usually means "to hire out," but if you did that, you wouldn't be so worried about the boots being bad ones.

21. No scholar has suggested any extant sermon to which this may be a reference.

SERMON 83

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 18:21-22: *HOW OFTEN SHALL MY BROTHER SIN AGAINST ME, ETC.*

Date: 408 or 409¹

Parable of the wicked servant

1. Yesterday the holy gospel warned us not to be indifferent to the sins of our brethren: *But if your brother, it says, has sinned against you, reprove him between yourself and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he takes no notice, bring along with you two or three, so that every matter may stand on the words of two or three witnesses. But if he takes no notice of them either, tell the Church; while if he takes no notice of the Church, let him be to you as an ethnic² and a tax collector* (Mt 18:15-17). Today the passage that follows this, which we heard when it was read just now, deals with the same point.

When the Lord Jesus said this, Peter got up³ and questioned the Master about how often he should forgive a brother who sinned against him; he wanted to know whether seven times would be enough. The Lord answered him, *Not merely seven times, but even seventy-seven times.* Then he told a truly terrifying parable: that the kingdom of heaven is like a man, a householder⁴ who settled accounts with his servants; among them he found one owing him ten thousand million.⁵ And when he ordered everything he had, and his whole family, and the man himself to be sold, and the debt paid, he fell at the knees of his master, asked him for time to pay, and won cancellation of the debt. His master, you see, was sorry for him, as we heard, and forgave him the whole debt.

He himself, though, free of the debt but slave of iniquity, on going out from the presence of his master, found a debtor of his own, who owed him, not ten thousand million such as his own debt had been, but a hundred dollars. He began to take him by the throat and shake him, and say, *Pay what you owe.* He started asking his fellow servant for the same consideration as he had asked from the master, but he didn't find his fellow servant the same sort of man as he had found their master. He not only refused to forgive him the debt, he didn't even give him time to pay; he had him dragged off to be tortured till he should pay. The other servants didn't like this, and informed their master what had happened;

and the master had that servant brought before him, and said to him, *Wicked servant, when you owed me that vast amount, I was sorry for you, I forgave you it all; so should not you too have been sorry for your fellow servant, just as I was sorry for you* (Mt 18:32-33)? And he ordered the whole amount he had forgiven him to be extorted from him.

We are all God's debtors

2. So he put forward this parable for our instruction, and by warning us he wanted to save us from destruction. *So also, he said, will your heavenly Father do to you, if you do not each one of you forgive your brother from your hearts* (Mt 18:35). There you are, brothers and sisters, the matter's plain, the warning is timely and useful; and it is a very salutary obedience we are obliged to, in order to carry out what we have been commanded. We are all, I mean to say, God's debtors, and we all have brothers and sisters in debt to us. Who, I ask you, could there be who is not in debt to God, except the one in whom no sin can be found?⁶ And on the other hand who could there be who doesn't have a brother in his debt, but someone whom nobody has sinned against? Do you really imagine anyone could be found in the whole human race who is not under obligation to a brother for sinning against him?

So then, everyone is a debtor, and yet also has someone else in debt to him. That's why the just God has set up a rule for you in dealing with your debtor, which he too will follow in dealing with his. You see, there are two works of mercy which set us free, which the Lord himself set before us briefly in the gospel: *Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given you* (Lk 6:37-38). *Forgive, and you will be forgiven* refers to granting pardon; *give, and it will be given you* refers to doing a good turn. What he says about pardoning: you want your sinning to be pardoned, and you have someone you can pardon yourself. Again, as regards doing a good turn: a beggar asks you for one, and you are God's beggar. I mean, we are all God's beggars when we pray. We stand in front of the great householder's gate, in fact we go so far as to prostrate ourselves, we whine and implore, wanting to receive something; and that something is God himself. What does the beggar ask you for? Bread. And you, what do you ask God for, if not Christ, who says, *I am the living bread who came down from heaven* (Jn 6:51)? Do you want to be pardoned? Pardon. *Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Do you want to receive something? Give, and it will be given you.*

How often ought I to pardon?

3. But now listen to something that may bother you in this very straightforward instruction. When pardon is asked in the business of forgiving, and is owed by the forgiver, you may have the same problem as bothered Peter. *How often, he said, ought I to pardon? Is seven times enough?* It's not enough, says the Lord. *I do not say to you, seven times, but seventy-seven times* (Mt 18:21-22).

Now start counting how often your brother has sinned against you. If you can get as far as his seventy-eighth fault, and so get beyond seventy-seven times, then get cracking on your revenge. Is it really true what he says, is that how things really are, that if he sins seventy-seven times you must pardon him; but if he sins seventy-eight times, you are now allowed not to pardon him?

I have the nerve, the effrontery to say that even if he sins seventy-eight times, you must pardon him. Yes, pardon him if he sins, as I said, seventy-eight times. And if he sins a hundred times, pardon him. And why should I go on saying so many and so many times? In a word, as often as he sins, pardon him. So have I had the nerve to overstep the limit of my Lord? He fixed the limit for pardoning at the number seventy-seven; do I, then, presume to jump over this limit?

It's not true, I haven't had the nerve to do more than he did. I have listened to my Lord himself speaking through his apostle, where no measure or number is prescribed. He says, you see, *Forgiving one another, if anybody has a complaint against someone, as God in Christ forgave you* (Col 3:13). You've heard what the form, the pattern is. If Christ forgave you your sins seventy-seven times, if he pardoned you that far, and refused to go beyond it, then set that limit yourself, and refuse to pardon beyond it. But if Christ found thousands of sins of sinners, and still forgave them all, then don't you withdraw your compassion, but instead demand an explanation of that number.

For you see it was not without reason that the Lord said *seventy-seven times*, although there is absolutely none which you ought not to pardon. There you have that servant, who being in debt himself found he had a debtor, and who owed ten thousand million. You see, I take it that the ten thousand million, not to overdo it, are ten thousand sins. I mean, I don't want to say that one million includes all sins. Now how much did that other servant owe him? He owed him a hundred dollars. Isn't that already more than *seventy-seven times*? And yet the Lord was angry because he didn't forgive him that amount. You see, it's not only that a hundred are more than *seventy-seven*; but a hundred dollars are, aren't they, a thousand dimes. But what's that to ten thousand million?

We must pardon all wrongs

4. And so it is that if we desire to receive pardon, we must be ready to pardon all wrongs committed against us. After all, if we take a look at our own sins, and try counting what we commit by deed, with our eyes, with our ears, in our thoughts, by innumerable impulses, I don't know whether we wouldn't go to bed with a cool million to our account. That's why we ask every day, batter God's ears every day with prayer, prostrate ourselves every day and say, *Forgive us our debts, just as we too forgive our debtors* (Mt 6:12). Which debts of yours? All of them, or only a part? You will answer, I am sure, "All of them." So just the same, then, with you and your debtor. You lay down this rule, you state this condition, you rehearse this stipulation and these terms when you pray, so that you say, *Forgive us, just as we too forgive our debtors*.

Symbolism of 77

5. So what's the meaning of *seventy-seven times*? Listen, brothers and sisters, it's a great mysterious riddle, a marvelous kind of sacramental sign.⁷ When the Lord was baptized, the holy evangelist Luke there recounts his ancestry, the order, the series, the pedigree by which it eventually came to the birth of Christ himself. Matthew began with Abraham and got to Joseph, coming down the generations. But Luke began counting by going up them. Why did the former come down, the latter go up? Because Matthew was drawing our attention to the birth of Christ, and how he came down to us; that's why it was when Christ was born that he started coming down the generations to count them.

Luke, on the other hand, began counting them when Christ was baptized; that was the beginning of his ascension, or going up and back to God.⁸ So Luke began his count by going up and back, and he completed his count in seventy-seven generations. Who did he count from? Notice who from. He began counting from Christ, and went as far as Adam himself, who was the first to sin, and begot us under the obligations of sin. He went right back to Adam, and there are seventy-seven generations to count; and from Adam down to Christ seventy-seven. So if no generation has been left out, no sin is passed over where pardon should be withheld. Thus the reason he listed seventy-seven generations of his ancestry, the same number as the Lord mentioned in connection with forgiving sins, is that he started the count from baptism, in which all sins are undone.

Symbolism of the ten commandments

6. And on this point, brothers and sisters, here is yet another and greater sacramental meaning for you. In the number seventy-seven is contained the mystery of the forgiveness of sins. That's the number of generations we find from Christ back to Adam. Next interrogate this number a little more thoroughly for its secrets, search out its coverts; knock more insistently, so that it may be opened to you.

Justice rests upon the law of God; that's true, isn't it? The law is presented to us in the ten commandments. That's why that servant owed ten thousand million.⁹ That's the well-known decalogue, written by the finger of God, transmitted to the people through Moses the servant of God.¹⁰ So that man owed ten thousand million, signifying all sins, because of the number of the law. And the other one owed a hundred dollars; equally a multiple of ten. You see, on the one hand a hundred times a hundred makes ten thousand; and on the other ten times ten makes a hundred. That one owed ten thousand million, this one ten times ten dollars. There's no departure, you see, from the number signifying law; it's there in the case of each, in the sins of each. Each of them is a debtor, each of them implores pardon and obtains it.¹¹ But that bad servant, that ungrateful, mean servant refused to do as he had been done by, refused to concede what he had had quite undeservedly conceded to him.

The number 77 symbolizes all sins

7. So, brothers and sisters, pay close attention to this: each person starts from baptism, comes out of it totally free, the debt of ten thousand million forgiven. And when he comes out, he is bound to find a fellow servant who owes him something. So he must keep an eye on sin itself, because the number eleven means the transgression of the law. The law, you see, is tenfold, sin is elevenfold. Law is represented by ten, sin by eleven. Why sin by eleven? Because it is by transgressing, or overstepping ten that you come to eleven, Now the law has fixed the due measure of conduct; but overstepping that is sin. As soon as you overstep ten, you come to eleven.¹²

That shows how great a mystery was represented when orders were given for the construction of the tabernacle. Many numbers are mentioned in the account, all profoundly significant as sacramental signs. Among other things, the order was given for curtains of haircloth to be made, not ten of them, but eleven,¹³ because haircloth represents the confession of sins.¹⁴

Why look any further? Do you want to see how all sins are contained in that number seventy-seven? It's usual to reckon a complete whole or total in terms of seven, because time revolves in seven days, and once you've reached the seventh you go back to the beginning, so that it may roll on in the same form. The ages too pass through their revolutions according to the same pattern; there's no departure from the number seven.¹⁵ So he included all sins when he said *seventy-seven times*; because just multiply that eleven by seven, and you get seventy-seven. So he intended all sins to be forgiven, because he pointed to them by the number seventy-seven. Nobody should retain sins against himself by not pardoning them, or his own will be held against him when he prays. God says, "Forgive, and you will be forgiven. But I have forgiven you first; at least forgive yourself afterward. Because if you don't forgive, I will summon you back, and whatever I have forgiven you, I will pile on you again."

Truth, you see, doesn't lie; no, Christ neither deceives nor is deceived, Christ who concluded, *So also will your Father in heaven do to you*. You find him a Father, imitate him as Father. I mean, if you are not prepared to imitate him, you are preparing yourself to be disinherited. Therefore, *Your heavenly Father*, he says, *will do the same to you, if you do not forgive, each one of you, your brothers from your hearts* (Mt 18:35). Don't say "I excuse you" with your tongue, and think differently in your heart. After all, God has shown you the punishment and warned you of the retribution due. God well knows where you really speak. Man hears your voice, God looks into your conscience. If you say "I forgive you," then forgive. It is better to complain loudly with your mouth and forgive in your heart, than to be mild of mouth and cruel of heart.

Forgiveness from the heart

8. So now ill-behaved children, not wanting to be beaten, plead with us and direct us along these lines when we want to teach them a lesson: "I've been naughty, let me off." Look, I've let him off, and he's naughty again. Let him

off. I have let him off; he's naughty a third time. Let him off; I've let him off a third time. Now the fourth time he can be beaten. And he says to you, "I haven't vexed you seventy-seven times, have I?"

If the strictness of good discipline is to be lulled to sleep by this rule, then with discipline held in check naughtiness will rampage unpunished. So what's to be done? Let us reprove with words, and if necessary with a cane; but let us forgive the wrong and rid our hearts of all thought of blame. You see, that's why the Lord added *from your hearts*, so that even if love requires the teaching of a lesson, gentleness should not depart from the heart.

What after all could be more considerate than the doctor bringing his scalpel? The patient due to be cut open cries—and is cut open, cries at the prospect of cauterization—and is cauterized.¹⁶ That's not cruelty. God forbid we should charge the doctor with ferocity. He's ferocious against the wound, in order to cure the person, because if the wound is just fondled, the person's finished.

So, my brothers and sisters, let this be my exhortation, that we should altogether love our brethren who have sinned, that we should not drive love toward them out of our hearts, and that when necessary we should discipline them. Or else if discipline is relaxed, slackness may increase, and we may find ourselves accused before God, because the lesson has been chanted to us, *Those who sin, censure in front of everyone, that the rest may learn to fear* (1 Tm 5:20).¹⁷ Certainly, if you correctly distinguish between different occasions, you will also correctly solve the problem. If the sin was committed in private, reprove it in private. If the sin was public and open, reprove it publicly, so that the sinner may mend his ways, and the rest may learn to fear.

NOTES

1. This sermon was preached the day after Sermon 82, that is to say, at Milev late in 408 or early in 409.

2. "Ethnic" is the Greek word which appeared, simply transliterated, in Augustine's Latin text. In Sermon 82,⁷ he explains it as meaning "Gentiles (the proper Latin equivalent) and heathens." Here he sees no need to explain it. I am encouraged in my use of it by its having become a fashionable word recently in newspapers and radio newscasts.

3. I emend the text to read *Cum enim dixisset hoc Dominus Jesus, Petrus subegit et interrogavit . . .*, instead of . . . *dixisset hoc Dominus Jesus Petro, subjecit et interrogavit*: "When . . . Jesus said this to Peter, he took him up and questioned . . ." I take the latter (the reading of all the manuscripts, I presume) to have been the stenographer mishearing what Augustine said. *Petrus* and *Petro* would have sounded almost exactly the same, and likewise *subegit* and *subjecit*. My reasons for my emendation are, first, that Jesus had not just been speaking to Peter before, and Augustine was well aware of this. Secondly, this new section of the chapter does not begin with Peter "taking up" what Jesus had said, but with his "coming up" and questioning Jesus. Augustine's Latin text could have read *Subigens* instead of the Vulgate *Accedens*.

4. Actually, a king. Augustine is mixing this parable up with several others in which a householder figures as the dominant God-representing character dealing with servants, for example the workers in the vineyard, or the wicked tenants, Mt 20:1-16; 21:33-41.

5. I treat a talent here as equivalent to \$1,000,000. Only the very rich dealt in talents. I have to

admit that I exaggerate over what my Lewis & Short *Latin Dictionary* says; but even though I have a 1966 reprint at my disposal, I doubt if it has changed on this point since the first edition of 1879. It makes a talent the equivalent of £243, 15s (\$1,182.05 in American gold). Will 110 years of inflation have pushed that up to \$1,000,000? Very nearly, I imagine.

6. That is, Jesus Christ. See Jn 8:46.

7. Augustine is quite right; the number 77 was not just casually or insignificantly chosen here. His own choice, however, of the 77 generations of Luke's genealogy to solve the riddle and penetrate the mystery and obtain "the grace of the sacrament," while ingenious, and possibly also having some validity (at least for interpreting the genealogy), overlooks the most obvious and likely clue to the mystery: Gn 4:24, where Lamech says seventy-sevenfold vengeance will be exacted for Lamech, where only sevenfold vengeance had been exacted for Cain. Peter was willing for the law of the gospel to reverse the old vendetta law of Cain; Jesus said it must reverse the whole concept of vengeance in its most extreme form, as typified for the human race by Lamech. The allusion in Mt 18:22 to Gn 4:24 is clearly deliberate on the part of the author; and no doubt behind him on the part of Jesus himself.

8. Christ's baptism was the beginning of his ministry, which was only completed with his ascension. More specifically, it was the initial "sacrament" of his redeeming, forgiving work, prefiguring his death, resurrection and ascension, which would actually accomplish that work.

9. The reason scarcely leaps to the eye. What apparently he means is that the servant represents the human race, which has broken each of the ten commandments a thousand million times—a thousand talents per commandment.

10. See Ex 31:18; Dt 9:10.

11. The parable doesn't say that the second servant obtains pardon. Augustine deduces it from the fact that his creditor has had the tables turned on him for his meanness.

12. For "ten" in this passage he often uses the adjective *denarius*, for which there is no English equivalent, and for "eleven" the adjective *undenarius*. But *denarius* was also the name of the most common Roman coin, which eventually became the English penny; *denarius*, because it was worth (or had once been worth) 10 *asses*. And the second servant owed 100 *denarii*, which I translated dollars.

13. See Ex 26:7.

14. Penitents, like mourners, put on haircloth or sackcloth. It was made of goat's hair, and was reputedly extremely coarse and uncomfortable.

15. It was taken for granted that the world is destined to last seven aeons or ages (*saecula* in Latin). They were variously reckoned, and Augustine himself was not consistent. But it was commonly accepted that we are now, since the first coming of Christ, living in the sixth aeon, and that the seventh will either be "the reign of the saints for a thousand years" (Rv 20:4), or will be the eternal kingdom inaugurated by Christ's return in glory.

16. No anesthetic in those days. Cauterization of surgical incisions, or the stumps of amputated limbs, was presumably a method of sterilizing them.

17. This text was quoted in the previous sermon, delivered on the day before. He ends this sermon, rather curiously, on a point discussed at length in the previous one, and not hitherto referred to at all in this one.

SERMON 84

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 19:17: *IF YOU WISH TO COME TO LIFE, KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS*

Date: 411¹

How much we should love eternal life

1. The Lord said to one young man, *If you wish to come to life, keep the commandments* (Mt 19:17). He didn't say, "If you wish to come to eternal life," but *If you wish to come to life*, indicating, though, that life which would be eternal life. So let us begin by reminding ourselves of our love of this present life. After all, this life is loved, whatever it's like; and whatever it's like, wretched, miserable, people are frightened of its coming to an end, and dread the prospect. This should help us to see, to consider seriously, how much we should love eternal life, when this miserable life, that's got to end anyhow sometime, is loved so dearly.

Just think, brothers and sisters, how much you should love the life in which you never come to the end of life. So you love this life, do you, in which you struggle, and run around, and bustle about and gasp for breath; and you can scarcely count the things that have to be done in this wretched life: sowing, plowing, planting, sailing, grinding, cooking, weaving. And after all this, your life has got to end anyhow. Look at all the things you put up with in this wretched life you love so; and do you imagine you are going to live for ever and never die? Temples, great blocks of stone and marble, reinforced with steel and lead—yet they fall into ruin;² and does mere man think he's never going to die? So learn, brothers and sisters, to seek eternal life, where you will not have to endure these things, but will reign with God forever.

For *he that wishes life*, as the prophet says, *longs to see good days* (Ps 34:12).³ After all, in evil days it is death rather than life that is longed for. Don't we all hear and see people, who as long as they are beset by troubles and distress on every side, by conflicts and illnesses, and as long as they actually see they are in such difficulties, just keep on repeating, "God, send me death, wind up my days quickly"? And sometimes they fall ill; immediately there's a hurrying and a scurrying and doctors are fetched, they are promised pounds and presents. Death in person says to you, "Here I am; you were begging the Lord for me a

short while ago. Why do want to escape me now? I've found you out as a mere pretender, as in fact a lover of a miserable life."

The only real life is the blessed one

2. About the days we are spending now the apostle has this to say: *Redeeming the time, because the days are evil* (Eph 5:16). So aren't the days evil, then, which we spend in this wasting away of the flesh, in or rather under this colossal burden of the perishable body,⁴ among such great trials, such difficulties, where pleasure deceives, where there's no certainty of joy, where fear torments, greed is grasping, sorrow makes a desert of life? That's how evil the days are. And nobody wants to finish with these evil days, and people pray to God a lot about this, that they may live a long time. But is living a long time anything else than being tormented for a long time? Is living a long time anything else than adding evil days to evil days? And when children grow it seems as if their days are increasing; and they don't realize that in fact they are diminishing, and that that is a false reckoning. You see, as they grow, their days are decreasing rather than increasing. Grant someone just born, for example, eighty years. Every moment he lives diminishes that total. And we absurd human beings congratulate ourselves over our umpteenth birthdays, both our own and our children's. Oh, what a far-sighted man you are! If the wine in your jar goes down, you're sorry; you lose days off your life, and you're delighted?

So the days are evil, and all the worse for being loved. That's how this world cons us, so that no one wants to finish a calamitous life. This, you see, is true of blessed life, when we rise again and reign with Christ. The wicked too, of course, are going to rise again, but only to go into the fire.⁵ So the only real life is the blessed one. And life cannot be blessed unless it is eternal, where the days are good; and not many days either, but just one; it's out of what we are accustomed to in this life that they are called days. That day knows no rising of the sun, knows no setting. That day is not followed by a tomorrow, because it is not preceded by a yesterday.⁶ This day, or these days if you like, and this life and true life we possess now as a promise. So it is the reward of some work or other. If we love the reward, then, let us not fall down on the work; and then we shall reign with Christ for ever.

NOTES

1. Sermon preached at Carthage in 411. This is the judgment of a distinguished scholar, Most of the evidence for it must be external to this short sermon. But see the next note.

2. Imperial laws enacted about 380 had closed the pagan temples for worship, forbidden their upkeep, and diverted their revenues to other purposes. So some of them would be beginning to have a very tumbledown appearance in 411.

3. He rather cavalierly misconstrues this text, which is really one question. Wishing for life and longing to see good days are parallel phrases: Who is the person that wishes for life, and longs to see good days?

4. See Wis 9:15, one of Augustine's favorite texts.

5. See Mt 25:41.

6. Augustine is in this way making the very important point that eternity does not consist of endless, successive time, but of a timeless, successionless, "now." This idea is especially linked with the liturgy of Easter, its repeated refrain "This is the day which the Lord has made," and certain phrases in the *Exsultet*, the hymn of praise in honor of the paschal candle.

SERMON 85

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 19:17-25: ***IF YOU WISH TO COME TO LIFE, KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS, ETC.***

Date: 425-428¹

If you wish to come to life, keep the commandments

1. The reading of the gospel which has just been ringing in our ears, brothers and sisters, calls more for hearers and doers than for an expounder. What could be brighter than this light: *If you wish to come to life, keep the commandments.* So what can I say? If you wish to come to life, keep the commandments. Who doesn't want life? And yet who wants to keep the commandments? If you don't want to keep the commandments, why look for life? If you are slack about the work, why be in such a hurry for the salary?

That rich young man said he had kept the commandments; he then heard a more demanding requirement: *If you wish to be perfect, you are lacking one thing* (Mk 10:21);² go, sell everything you have and give to the poor; and you won't lose it, but you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me; after all, what good is it to you, if you do that and don't follow me? But he went away sad and mournful, as you heard, because he was very rich.

What he heard, we have heard too. The gospel is the mouth of Christ. He is seated in heaven, but he hasn't stopped speaking on earth. Don't let's be deaf, because he's the one who's shouting at us; don't let's be dead, because he's the one who's thundering at us.

If you don't want to do the bigger things, do the smaller ones. The burden of the bigger things is too much for you; well at least pick up the smaller ones. Why are you so reluctant about both of them? Why do you resist them both? The tougher ones are, *Sell everything you have, and give to the poor, and follow me.* The easier ones, *You shall not commit murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not seek false witness;*³ *you shall not steal; honor father and mother; you shall love your neighbor like yourself* (Mt 19:17.21). Do all that.

What's the good of my shouting at you to sell your possessions, when I can't even twist your arm to stop you plundering other people's? You heard: *You shall not steal;* what you do is plunder. In the presence of so great a judge I now hold you to be not just a thief but a bandit. Spare yourself, have mercy on yourself.

This life is still giving you time; don't spurn reproof. You were a thief yesterday; don't be one today. Perhaps you have been one today too; don't be one tomorrow. Be done with evil some time or other, and for the sake of the reward carry out the good. You want to have good things, and you don't want to be good; your life is in contradiction to your wishes. If it's a great good to have a good country house, what a great evil it must be to have a bad soul!⁴

Riches and poverty

2. The rich man departed saddened, and the Lord said, *How difficult it is for anyone who has riches to enter the kingdom of heaven!* (Mk 10:23).⁵ And just how difficult it would be he showed by offering a comparison which makes it so difficult as to be altogether impossible. I mean, everything impossible is difficult, but not everything difficult is impossible. How difficult is it? Look at the comparison: *Amen I tell you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter into the kingdom of heaven.* For a camel to enter through the eye of a needle; if he had said a flea, it would be impossible.

In any case, when they heard this the disciples were saddened, and said, *If that is so, who ever can be saved?* (Mt 19:23-25). Who among the rich? You that are poor, listen to Christ. I'm speaking to the people of God.⁶ Most of you are poor, you at least must try to understand. Anyway, listen. Any of you inclined to boast about your poverty, beware of pride, or you may be beaten to the post by the rich who are humble; beware of irreverence, or the rich who are religious may beat you to it; beware of drunkenness, or the rich who are sober will beat you to it. Don't boast about your poverty, if they ought not to boast about their riches.

Who can take God away from you?

3. The rich should listen too, if there are any here, that is, they should listen to the apostle: *Command the rich of this world*, because there are the rich of the other world. The poor are the rich of the other world. The apostles are the rich of the other world, who could say, *As having nothing, and possessing everything* (2 Cor 6:10). To show you which kind of rich people he was talking about, he added, *of this world*. So let the rich of this world listen to the apostle: *Command the rich of this world*, he says, *not to have proud thoughts*. The primary worm in the apple of riches is pride. It is an evil grub that gnaws the whole away, and reduces it all to ashes. So, *command them not to have proud thoughts, nor set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches*; or perhaps you may go to sleep rich and wake up poor. *Nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches* (they are the apostle's words), *but*, he says, *on the living God*. A thief can take your gold away; who can take God away from you? What have the rich got, if they haven't got God? What have the poor not got, if they do have God? So, he says, *not to set their hopes on riches, but on the living God, who provides us abundantly with everything for our enjoyment* (1 Tm 6:17), and with this everything, himself as well.

What to do with riches

4. So if they ought not to set their hopes on riches, not to put their trust in them, but in the living God, what are they to do with their riches? Listen to what: *Let them be rich in good works* (1 Tm 6:18). What does that mean? Explain, please, apostle. You see, many people don't want to understand what they don't want to do. So explain, please, apostle; don't let obscure words provide them with an excuse for bad works. Tell us what you have really said, *Let them be rich in good works*. Let them hear and understand; don't let them get away with excuses, but let them rather start accusing themselves, and saying what we have heard a moment ago in the psalm: *Since I myself acknowledge my sin* (Ps 51:1). You tell us what it means, *Let them be rich in good works*.

Let them give readily. And what does *Let them give readily* mean? Is even that not understood? *Let them give readily, let them share* (1 Tm 6:18). You've got something, someone else hasn't; share, so that other things may be shared with you. Share here, and you will share there. Share bread here, and you will receive bread there. What bread here? The sort you gather with sweat and toil, as a result of the curse on the first man.⁷ What bread there? The one which said, *I am the living bread, who have come down from heaven* (Jn 6:51). You're rich here, but you're poor there. You've got gold, but you don't yet possess Christ present with you. Pay out what you've got, in order to receive what you haven't got. *Let them be rich in good works, let them give readily, let them share.*

Let them share

5. So, are they to lose their possessions? *Let them share*, he said, not "Let them give everything away." Let them keep what's enough for them, let them keep more than enough. Let us give away a certain part of that. How big a part? A tithe, or tenth part. The scribes and Pharisees used to give tithes. We should be ashamed of ourselves, brothers and sisters. Those people for whom Christ had not yet shed his blood used to give tithes. The scribes and Pharisees used to give a tenth of their possessions,⁸ in case you should imagine, perhaps, that you are doing something terrific when you break your bread to the poor; and it's scarcely one part in a thousand of your wealth.

I'm not blaming you, though; at least do that. I'm so thirsty, so hungry, I can even rejoice at these crumbs. Still, I won't pass over in silence what the one who died for us said while he was alive. *Unless your justice*, he said, *is more abundant than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 5:20). He doesn't coddle us; he's the doctor, he gets straight to the quick. *Unless your justice is more abundant than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.* The scribes and Pharisees used to give a tenth. So what then? Question yourselves. See what you do, how much you do it from, what you give, what you keep for yourselves, what you spend in charity, what you reserve for luxury. So: *Let them give readily, let them share, let them lay down for themselves a good foundation for the future, that they may take hold of the true life* (1 Tm 6:18.19).

Beware of avarice

6. I've been wagging a finger at the rich. Poor people, you listen too. You should pay out too; you shouldn't go plundering either. You should give of your means too, you too curb your greed. Listen, you poor, to the same apostle: *But great emolument* (emolument means making a profit)⁹—*But great emolument*, he says, *is piety with sufficiency* (1 Tm 6:6). You have the world in common with the rich; you don't have a house in common with the rich, but you do have the sky, you do have the light in common with them. Just look for a sufficiency, look for what is enough, not for more than that. Anything more is a weighing down, not a lifting up of the spirit; a burden, not a guerdon.¹⁰

There is great emolument in piety with sufficiency. First of all, "piety." Piety means reverence for God. *Piety with sufficiency. For we brought nothing into this world.* Or did you bring something here? But not even you, you rich people, brought anything with you. You found it all here, just the same as the poor you were born quite naked. Common to each is the feebleness of body, common to each the equaling, evidence of misery. *For we brought nothing into this world* (he's speaking to the poor); *but neither can we take anything out of it. Having food and clothing, with these let us be content. For those who wish to become rich. . . .* "Who wish to become," not "Who are." As for those who are, let them be. As far as concerns them, they have heard that *they should be rich in good works, give readily, share.*

They've heard their bit. Now you who aren't yet rich, hear yours. *Those who wish to become rich fall into temptation and snares, and desires many and harmful.* Doesn't that frighten you? Listen to what follows. *Which plunge people into destruction and ruin.* Doesn't that frighten you? *For the root of all evils is avarice* (1 Tm 6:7-10). Avarice means wanting to be rich, not already being rich. That's avarice. Aren't you afraid of being plunged into destruction and ruin? Aren't you frightened by avarice, the root of all evils? You weed out thistles by the root from your field, and aren't you prepared to weed out evil greed from your heart by the roots? You clean up your field, so that your belly may derive fruits from it; and aren't you prepared to clean up your heart, so that your God can live in it? *For the root of all evils is avarice, in pursuit of which some people have wandered far from the faith, and entangled themselves in many pains* (1 Tm 6:10).

God made both the rich and the poor

7. You have heard what you should do, you've heard what you should be afraid of, you've heard what the kingdom of heaven can be bought with, you've heard what the kingdom of heaven can be blocked with. All of you be of one mind and heart together in the word of God. God made both the rich and the poor. Scripture speaks: *The rich man and the poor have met each other, but the Lord made them both* (Prv 22:2). The rich man and the poor have met each other. On what road, if not in this life? The rich man was born, the poor man was born. You have met each other, walking together along the road. Don't you squeeze

him, and don't you cheat him.¹¹ This one is in dire need, that one has plenty. *But the Lord made them both.* By the one who has plenty he helps the one in dire need; by the one who has nothing he tests the one who has plenty. We've heard it, we've said it. Let's hold on to it,¹² let's be careful, let us pray, let us finally arrive.

NOTES

1. Sermon preached in Hippo, between 19-24 June, any year between 425 and 430. The argument about the date of this and some related sermons is extremely complicated. Dom C. Lambot appears to fix it more precisely on 24 June, the birthday of John the Baptist. As for the year, 430 seems to me to be highly unlikely, as the Vandals were besieging Hippo then, and we would expect some allusion to that situation if the sermon were preached then. So we may reasonably narrow the limits to 425-429.

2. This last phrase comes from Mk 10:21. It is only Matthew, however, which says the man was a young man. Luke calls him a ruler, or chief. There are further echoes of Mark's account as Augustine recalls the story.

3. An interesting variation of the right text. In other sermons on the subject of false witness, he usually mentions people bringing pressure to bear on someone else to give false evidence. That's what he is thinking of here, suborning witnesses.

4. Hardly a reflection to put to a congregation in a city under siege, or even to people aware of invading barbarians approaching from the west. I think this rules out not only 430 but also 429 as the year in which this sermon was preached; so we can narrow the limits even further to 425-428.

5. Again, the wording is much closer to Mk 10:23 than to Mt 19:23.

6. I think he is suggesting that all the people of God ought, in a sense, to be poor, including the rich members. But he is also clearly addressing here those who are materially poor.

7. See Gn 3:17-19.

8. See Lk 18:12.

9. This is Augustine explaining the word *quaestus*, which was presumably an unusual or archaic word. That's why I translate it by "emolument"—which I would not dream of suggesting as a translation of 1 Tm 6:6.

10. *Onerant, non honorant* is his play on words, which we have met before in an earlier sermon.

11. Which of them does what to the other, the hearer or reader must decide. Does the rich squeeze the poor and the poor cheat the rich, or vice versa? My guess is that he thinks of the poor squeezing the rich by importunate begging, or perhaps by resorting to theft and robbery, and of the rich cheating the poor by all kinds of commercial racket.

12. Following one manuscript's *teneamus*. The rest have *timeamus*, "let us fear."

SERMON 86

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 19:21: *GO, SELL EVERYTHING YOU HAVE, AND GIVE TO THE POOR, ETC.*

Date: 429-430¹

Live with Christ in your hearts

1. The gospel that was read just now prompts me to speak to your graces about the nature of this treasure in heaven. For you see, it's not the case, as grasping unbelievers suppose, that our God wanted us to lose our fortunes. If you understand correctly what we have been told to do, and trust it loyally, and accept it seriously, then he wasn't telling us to lose our capital, but showing us the best place to invest it. None of us, after all, can help thinking about our treasure, or following its fortunes on a kind of mental journey in our hearts. So if our fortunes are buried in the ground, our thoughts will drag our hearts downward. But if they are in a heavenly savings deposit, our hearts will be lifted upward.

So, if Christians want to practice what they know perfectly well they have openly professed—it's true, not everyone listening to me here knows what this is,² and oh, if only those who do know didn't know it to no purpose!—so if any of you really want to lift up your hearts, then it's up there, up there that you must deposit what you love. Placed on earth in the flesh yourselves, live with Christ in your hearts; and just as the Church has been preceded into heaven by its head, so let Christians be preceded by their hearts. Just as his members are going to go where Christ their head has gone on before, so all of us when we rise from the dead are going to go where our hearts will now have gone on before. So *let us go hence* (Jn 14:31), with that part of ourselves with which we are able to do so; the whole of us will follow where part of us has gone on ahead. Our earthly home is falling into ruin, our heavenly home is eternal.³ Let us transfer our assets where we are intending to settle.

Give it to the poor

2. We have just heard some rich man or other seeking advice from the good master about how to obtain eternal life. It was a great thing he was in love with,

and a cheap thing of no value he was unwilling to let go of. And thus, because it was with a contrary heart that he heard what the one he had already called good master had to say, he forfeited his dearest possession through his greater love for his cheapest. Yet unless he had been genuinely interested in eternal life, he wouldn't have sought advice about acquiring eternal life.

So what is it, brothers and sisters, that made him reject the words of the one he had himself called good master, words of sound, reliable teaching that was offered him? He was a good master before he gave his teaching; was he a bad one after giving it? Before he gave his advice, he was called good. The man didn't hear what he wanted to, but he heard what he needed to. He had come, all eagerness and enthusiasm, but he went away sorrowful. What if he had been told "Destroy everything you own," when he went away sorrowful on being told "Take good care of everything you own"?

Go, he said, sell everything you have, and give to the poor. Perhaps you are afraid you will lose it all? Notice what follows: *And you shall have treasure in heaven* (Mt 19:21). No doubt you would have put some pet slave in charge of your treasures; well, your God will take charge of your gold. He gave it on earth, he keeps it safe for you in heaven. Perhaps this man wouldn't have hesitated to hand over all he had to Christ; and the reason he was saddened was that he was told "Give it to the poor," as though he said to himself, "If you had said, 'Give it to me, I will keep it safe for you in heaven,' I wouldn't have hesitated to give it to my Lord, the good master; but now what you have said is, 'Give it to the poor.' "

You did it to me

3. Nobody should be afraid of spending money on the poor. Nobody should imagine that the one who receives it is the one whose outstretched hand he sees. The one who receives it is the one who ordered you to give it. And this isn't just my own idea, I'm not saying it as a piece of merely human guesswork; listen to him, as he both gives you a warning and writes you out a guarantee. *I was hungry*, he says, *and you gave me to eat*. And when, after he has mentioned several other forms of kindness, they answer, *When did we see you hungry?* he in turn replies, *When you did it to one of the least of mine, you did it to me* (Mt 25:35-40).

It's a poor man begging, but a rich man receiving; you give the one something to consume; the other receives something to pay back. And he isn't just going to give back what he receives; he is determined to borrow at a usurious rate of interest, he promises more than you have given. So now's your chance to give your avarice free play, to think of yourself as a money-lender. Of course, if you really were one, you would be severely reprimanded by the Church, you would be put clearly in the wrong by the word of God, you would be detested by all your brothers and sisters as a cruel money-lender, eager to squeeze out profit from the tears of others. Well, be a money-lender, no one is stopping you. What you want to do is to give to a poor person, who will cry and lament when the

time comes for paying back; give to someone who is thoroughly credit-worthy, who even begs you to take the interest he promises.

It was I who received it; it is I who will pay you back

4. Give to God, and serve a summons on God.⁴ Or rather, give to God and you will be summoned, to be paid back. On earth, of course, you were looking for your debtor; and he was looking too, but for somewhere to hide from you. You had heard the judge, and you had said, "Have that debtor of mine summonsed." He heard this too, and skipped, and didn't even wait to bid you farewell, though you perhaps had helped him to fare well by giving him a loan when he was broke.

So, you've got someone to lay out your money on. Give to Christ; he freely serves you with a summons, to be paid back, you being quite astonished all the while that he ever got something from you. You see, to those placed at his right hand, he will say of his own accord, *Come, you blessed of my Father. Where to? Come, receive the kingdom which was prepared for you from the origin of the world.* What for? *I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was naked and you clothed me; a stranger, and you took me in; sick and in prison, and you visited me.* And they say, *Lord, when did we see you?* (Mt 25:34-37).

What's happening here? The debtor serves the summons, the creditors make excuses. The honest debtor doesn't want them done out of their due. Are you hesitant to receive it? I got something from you, and you aren't aware of it? And he tells them how he got it: *When you did it to one of the least of mine, you did it to me* (Mt 25:40). I didn't get it in person, I got it through my people. What was given to them reached me; don't worry, you haven't lost it. You noticed they weren't very credit-worthy on earth; you've got someone who is credit-worthy in heaven. It was I who received it, he says, it is I who will pay you back.

When he gives bread, he will be giving himself

5. And what did I receive? What do I pay back? *I was hungry, he says, and you gave me to eat*, and so on. I received earth, I will give heaven; I received temporal things, I will return eternal things; I received bread, I will give life. Or rather, let's even say this: I received bread, I will give bread; I received a drink, I will give a drink; I received hospitality, I will give a home; I was visited in sickness, I will give health; I was visited in prison, I will give freedom. The bread which you gave to my poor has been eaten up; the bread which I will give both fills, and never fails.⁵ May he give us bread, being himself the bread which came down from heaven.⁶ When he gives bread, he will be giving himself.

What, after all, were you intending to do, when you were lending money at usurious rates of interest? To give cash and receive cash; but to give less and receive more. I, says God, will reschedule everything you have given to your advantage. I mean, if you gave a pound of silver and got back a pound of gold,

how you would dance and caper for joy! Take a look at yourself, and ask your own avarice: I gave a pound of silver, and I'm getting back a pound of gold. What's the comparison between silver and gold? So, much more to the point, what's the comparison between earth and heaven? Both gold and silver you would be bound to leave behind here; you yourself, though, are not going to stay here for ever. I will give you something else, I will give you something more, give you something better, and give you something eternal.

In this way, brothers and sisters, let us damp down our ordinary avarice, to allow another and holier kind to flare up. It's surely obvious that the sort which forbids you to do good is giving you thoroughly bad instructions; you want to be the slaves of a bad mistress, and not acknowledge the good Master. And sometimes two such mistresses possess the heart, and they tug the bad slave, fit only to serve such mistresses, in opposite directions.

Two opposing mistresses

6. Sometimes two opposing mistresses take possession of a person: avarice and extravagance. Avarice says, "Save"; extravagance says, "Spend." Under two such mistresses, giving contradictory orders, making contradictory demands, what are you going to do? They each have their own little speeches. And when you start showing unwillingness to comply with them, and entering into the inheritance of your proper freedom, they start coaxing, because they can no longer command. And we should be more on our guard against their coaxings than against their commands.

What does avarice say? "Save up for yourself, save up for your children. If ever you are in need, no one is going to give you anything. Don't just live for the moment; take thought for yourself in the future."

Extravagance takes the opposite line: "Live while you are alive; treat yourself well.⁷ You are going to die, and you don't know when; nor do you know whether the one you plan to leave your estate to is going to gain possession of it. You are severely rationing your gullet; but perhaps when you are dead, he will neglect to set a cup over you; or if he does, perhaps he himself will get drunk on it, and not a drop will trickle down to you.⁸ So treat yourself well, when you can, while you can."

Avarice was saying one thing: "Save up for yourself, take thought for your future"; extravagance another: "Spend, treat yourself well."

The words don't change; it's persons who change

7. Grow weary, O free people called to freedom,⁹ grow weary of enslavement to such mistresses as these. Recognize and acknowledge your redeemer, your liberator.¹⁰ Be his slaves; he gives you easier commands, not contradictory commands. In fact, I'm bold enough to say something more. Avarice and extravagance were giving contradictory commands, so that you couldn't fall in with both; one was saying, "Save up for yourself, take thought for your future,"

while the other was saying, "Spend, treat yourself well." Let your Master step forth, your Redeemer, who will say the same things, and won't say contradictory things.¹¹ If you are unwilling, his household has no need of reluctant servants.

Observe your redeemer, observe your price. He came to redeem you, he shed his blood. He must have held you very dear, since he bought you so dearly. You acknowledge the one who bought you; observe what he bought you back from. I pass over in silence the other vices that were proudly lording it over you; after all, you were slaves to innuinerable evil mistresses. I just mention these two that were giving you contradictory orders, avarice and extravagance, pulling you in opposite directions.

Tear yourselves away from them, come to your God. If you were the slave of iniquity, become the slave of justice.¹² The very same words you used to hear from them, giving you contradictory orders, you will hear from your Lord, and he is not giving contradictory orders. He doesn't cancel their words, he cancels their authority. What was avarice saying to any of you? "Save up for yourself, take thought for the future." The words don't change, it's persons who change.¹³ Now, if you would be so good, compare your advisers. That one's avarice, this one is justice.

Avarice's advice: Save up for yourself

8. Examine these contradictory pieces of advice.¹⁴ "Save up for yourself," says avarice. Suppose you want to go along with that. Ask her where you are to put your savings. She is going to show you some strong room, some walled chamber, or iron chest. Put in all the security devices you like; perhaps they will be nullified by an inside job; and when you have taken all this thought for your money, you will fear for your life. Perhaps while you are saving up so much, the person who wants to snatch it is planning also to kill you. Finally, while you may secure your treasure and your wardrobe with whatever defenses you like, try defending them against rust and moth.¹⁵ What are you going to do? There is no enemy taking them away from you outside, but there is one eating away at them inside.

Avarice's advice: Take thought for the future

9. So avarice hasn't given you very good advice. There it was telling you to save, and it didn't find any place to provide you with where you could safely save. Let it say the next thing too: "Take thought for the future." For how much future? For a few uncertain days. It says, "Take thought for the future" to a person who may not even live till tomorrow. But all right, let him live as long as avarice imagines—not as long as it can show, as long as it can teach, as long as it can guarantee; but suppose he has lived as long as it likes to imagine, has grown old, has come to the end of his life: still this old, bent man, leaning on his stick, is looking for profit, and listening to avarice saying, "Take thought for the future." For what future? It's addressing someone already at his last gasp.

"For your children's sake," it says. Oh, if only we didn't at least have any grasping old men among those who don't have any children! But even to them, even to such people, even to those who cannot excuse this wickedness under the guise of family feeling, avarice never stops saying, "Take thought for the future."

But perhaps these will soon be ashamed of themselves. Let's look at those who have got children, and see if they are quite sure their children will gain possession of what they leave them. While they are still alive, they should take a look at other people's children, some of whom lose what they inherited through the fraudulent machinations of strangers, while others run through what has come into their possession by their own profligate behavior. You mean, close-fisted slaves of avarice.

But my children, he says, will get possession of it all. That's not so certain. I don't say it's untrue. But the arrangements you have made are uncertain. But in any case, suppose they are quite certain: what do you want to leave them? What you have acquired for yourself. Well certainly, what you have acquired wasn't left to you, and you have it. If you have been able to amass what wasn't left to you, it follows that they too will be able to amass what you haven't left to them.

The Lord's advice: you shall have treasure in heaven

10. So much for the advice given by avarice. But now let the Lord say the same thing, let justice now speak. They will be the same words, not the same meaning. "Save up for yourself," says the Lord, "take thought for the future." Ask him too, "Where shall I put my savings?" *You shall have treasure in heaven* (Mt 19:21; Mk 10:21; Lk 18:22), where no thief can reach, nor moth can ravage.¹⁶ For how long a future will you save up? *Come, blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom which was prepared for you from the origin of the world.* How many days this kingdom lasts is shown by the end of the whole judgment. When he had said about those on the left, *In this way those shall go into eternal burning*, he said about those on the right, *But these into eternal life* (Mt 25:34, 46).

That's really taking thought for the future; a future which has no further future beyond it. Those days without end, they are called days, and it's called a day. Someone said, you see, *That I may dwell in the house of the Lord for length of days* (Ps 23:6), when he was talking about those days. And it's called a day in the text, *I, today, have begotten you* (Ps 2:7). And those days are one day, because there's no longer any time; that day isn't preceded by yesterday or concluded by tomorrow. So let us take thought for that future. The words are no different from the ones avarice spoke to you; and yet avarice is routed.

Question your faith

11. It remains for you to say, "And what am I to do about my children?" Listen to your Lord's advice on this point too. If your Lord were to say to you,

"I who created them have better plans for them than you have, who begot them," you probably wouldn't have anything to say. But you are going to look at that rich man who went away sorrowful, and was found fault with in the gospel.¹⁷ And perhaps you will say, "The reason that rich man was wrong not to sell everything and give to the poor was that he didn't have any children. But I have got children; I have people I must save up for." Even in this weakness of yours, your Lord stands by you.

I make bold to say, by his mercy, I make bold to say something, not presuming on my own authority but on his mercy: save up for your children too; but listen to me. If, as human affairs go, someone loses one of his children¹⁸—no, pay attention, brothers, pay attention, because there is no excuse for avarice at all, neither here nor in the age to come. Look, it's human realities I'm talking about; I'm not wishing it on you, after all, I'm looking at examples. Some Christian has been lost, you've lost a Christian son. So in fact you haven't lost him, you've sent him on ahead.¹⁹ Nor has he gone away, he's gone ahead. Question your faith about it. Without doubt you too are going to go to him, where he has gone on before you.

I'm putting the thing in a nutshell, and I don't think anyone will have an answer. Does this son of yours live? Ask your faith about it. So if he lives, why should his share be seized by his brothers? But you will say, "He isn't going to come back, is he, and take possession of it?" In that case let it be sent to him, where he has gone on ahead; he can't come to his property, let his property go to him. Consider who he is with. If your son was a soldier in the imperial guard, and became a friend of the emperor's, and wrote to you saying, "Sell my share there, and send me the proceeds," would you be able to make any objection? Now your son is with the emperor of all emperors, and with the king of all kings, and with the Lord of all lords; send his share on to him. I'm not suggesting that he needs it himself; his Lord, in whose company your son is, needs it on earth. He wants to receive here what he gives back in heaven. Do what more than a few money-grubbing misers are in the habit of doing; make a contract of transfer.²⁰ Give to strangers and foreigners here what you will be paid back in your own country.

Pay back what you owe

12. In any case, I'm not now talking about you; I'm talking about your son. You are reluctant to give what is yours, you are also showing reluctance to pay back what belongs to someone else; you will certainly be convicted of not saving up for your children. Why look, you are not giving to your children, because you will be taking away from your children. Well, you will certainly be taking away from this one, who has died. Why is he unworthy to get anything from you, just because he is living with someone worthier than you? Of course, if the one he is living with didn't want to receive anything, he would be rich in generosity toward your house; but in fact he is rich in generosity toward his own divine house.²¹

So then, far be it from me to tell you, "Give away what you have"; what I

am telling you is, "Pay back what you owe." "But his brothers," you say, "will get it." O evil doctrine, teaching your sons to desire their brothers' deaths! If they will be the richer for their dead brothers' share, just consider how they will eye each other in your house. So what are you going to do? Are you dividing up the patrimony, and teaching a lesson in parricide?²²

Save up for your Lord the place of one son

13. But I don't want to talk about a son you've lost, or I may seem to be threatening you with human misfortune. Let's look at it in a better and altogether happier light. I'm not now saying you will have one son less; reckon yourself to have one son more. Make a place for Christ among your sons, let your Lord join your family, let your creator join your little brood, let your brother join the number of your sons. Although there is such a vast difference between you, he is even prepared to be your brother. And although he is the only Son of the Father, he wanted to have fellow heirs. Look how generously he behaves; why are you behaving so meanly? You've got two sons, count him as the third; you've got three, let him be number four; you've five, let him be the sixth; you've ten, let him be the eleventh. I won't go on; save up for your Lord the place of one son. You see, what you give to your Lord will be to the advantage of both yourself and your children; but what you save up, avariciously, for your children will be to both your and their disadvantage. You will just give one share, which you have assigned to one son. Consider yourself to have begotten one son more.

Avarice has no possible objection to make

14. What's so enormous about that, my brothers? I'm making a suggestion, I'm not putting a noose round your necks, am I? As the apostle says, *I am saying this for your benefit, not to toss a halter over you* (1 Cor 7:35). I think, brothers, that it is a small and simple calculation to reckon that a father of sons has one son more, and to buy with it the kind of estates you can possess for ever, you and your children. Avarice has no possible objection to make. You shouted at these words. Speak against her, don't let her defeat you, don't let her have more influence in your thoughts than your redeemer. Don't let her have more influence over your hearts than the one who exhorts us to lift up our hearts. So let's leave this subject at that.

Extravagance's advice

15. What does extravagance say? What are her words? "Treat yourself well." And here we have the Lord too saying "Treat yourself well." Justice says to you exactly the same as extravagance was saying. But in this case too notice how it's said. If you want to treat yourself, or your soul, well, turn your attention to that rich man who on the advice of both avarice and extravagance wanted to

treat himself and his soul well. His lands flourished, and he didn't have enough space to store his crops in, and he said, *What am I to do? I have nowhere to store things. I have found out what to do; I will pull down the old barns and build new ones, and I will fill them, and I will say to my soul, You have many goods, enjoy yourself.* Listen to some advice against extravagance: *Fool, your soul will this very night be taken away from you; those things you have prepared, whose will they be?* (Lk 12:16-18. 20).²³ And where is this soul going to go, which will be taken from him? This night it will be taken away, and it doesn't know where it's going.

Another rich man

16. Look at another rich man, extravagant and proud. He used to feast sumptuously every day, and he always wore purple and fine linen; and a poor man, full of sores, lay at his gate, longing in vain for scraps from the rich man's table; the dogs fed on his sores, and he wasn't fed by the rich man. They both died; one of them was buried; what was said about the other? *He was taken away by angels to Abraham's bosom.* The rich man sees the poor man, or rather it's now the poor man seeing the rich man; he longs for a drop of water dripped on his tongue from the finger of the one who longed for a scrap from his table. Roles have been reversed for sure. The rich man, dead, says all this in vain; don't let us, who are alive, hear it in vain. You see, he wanted to be called back to the world above, and he wasn't allowed to;²⁴ he then wanted one of the dead to be sent to his brothers, and this wasn't granted to him either. But what was he told? *They have Moses there and the prophets.* He answered, *They won't listen unless someone goes from the dead.* Abraham said to him, *If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not even believe if someone goes from the dead* (Lk 16:22-31).

Put the advice into practice

17. So about giving alms, and buying rest for your soul for the future, that we should treat ourselves and our souls well, advice perversely given by extravagance, Moses also said it, and so did the prophets. Let us listen while we are still alive. Because anyone who ignored these things when he heard them longs to hear them in that place in vain. Or are we expecting in our turn someone to rise from the dead and tell us to treat our souls well? This too has already happened. Your father hasn't risen from the dead, but your Lord has. Listen to him, accept his good advice. Don't spare your treasures, spend as much as you can. This used to be the voice of extravagance; it has become the voice of the Lord. Spend as much as you can, treat your soul well, or it may be taken away from you this night.

In the name of Christ, as I see it, you have had a sermon about giving alms. This sound of your voices raised in applause is only acceptable to the Lord when he sees your hands active in the cause.

NOTES

1. This sermon was preached probably toward the end of Augustine's life, 429 or 430 and was probably in Hippo or perhaps some other seaport, during winter. One eminent scholar, Christine Mohrmann, suggests the date; another, Othmar Perler, suggests the season, and by implication the kind of place, because during the winter dockers and seamen laid off work added greatly to the number of the indigent poor. If it was preached in a seaport, it is more likely to have been Hippo than any other port.

2. That is, the catechumens and others who had to leave the church before the "Mass of the faithful" began (before the prayers of the faithful and the offertory) didn't know about the dialogue at the beginning of the prefase, *Sursum corda* (Lift up your hearts): *Habemus ad Dominum* (We have lifted them up to the Lord), which he is alluding to here.

3. This bald statement that our earthly home is *ruinosa* is probably one clue to the lateness of this sermon in Augustine's life, being very possibly an allusion to the devastation being wrought in North Africa by the Vandals, who crossed the straits of Gibraltar in 429.

4. For payment of the debt.

5. An attempt to echo the Latin play on words, *et reficit et non deficit*.

6. See Jn 6:41.

7. See Sir 14:11.

8. It sounds like a reference to a pagan burial rite of pouring a libation of wine on the grave of the deceased. But it was probably common among Christians too. At the beginning of his ministry Augustine waged a campaign against the custom of honoring the martyrs on their anniversaries by getting very drunk at their tombs. And now at the end of his life he is, no doubt wisely, acknowledging that he hasn't been completely successful.

9. See Jn 8:36, Gal 5:1.

10. Liberator, Latin *manumissor*, that is the master who grants a slave his freedom. The word "redeemer" too had much more powerful resonances in a slave-owning society, where people could sink into slavery by getting into debt, unless a benefactor were willing to "buy them back."

11. The Master will step forth to redeem you, to buy you in the slave market from avarice and extravagance. But only if you are willing. He doesn't need your services, as Augustine goes on to say. The paradox of the good Master saying the same things as avarice and extravagance, and yet not contradicting himself, will only gradually be resolved. Augustine often keeps his audience on tenterhooks, no doubt fuming with impatience, as a device for keeping their attention.

12. See Rom 6:17, 18.

13. And so, I suppose the implication is, they change the application of the words, by following the advice of justice, and not of avarice.

14. Up till now this has meant the contradictory advice of avarice on the one hand and extravagance on the other. But that can hardly be what he is thinking of here; rather it is the opposing advice of avarice and justice. But they both, as far as words go, give the *same* advice.

15. See Mt 6:19. Fine "changes of raiment" were an important part of capital wealth in the ancient world. The treasure liable to rust, at least among the people our Lord was talking to (and Augustine is simply following the gospel), probably consisted largely of brass and bronze, perhaps with a little silver thrown in. Gold and jewels, I believe, don't rust.

16. See Lk 12:33; also Mt 6:20.

17. Mt 19:16-14.

18. Here, no doubt, murmurs of protest and cries of "Shame!" from the congregation.

19. A play on words here: *non amisisti*, you have not lost, contrasted with *praemisisti*, you have sent on ahead.

20. *Fac trajectitium*. See Sermon 38:9 for what is involved. Apparently there was legal provision in Roman law allowing very high interest on a *contractus trajectitius*, owing to the high risks of a sea voyage. So I would pay you, a foreigner, a certain sum here that you are in need of, while you guarantee that your agents will pay me a considerably larger sum when I arrive in your native city at the other end of the sea voyage. That seems to be the kind of arrangement Augustine has in mind.

21. The Latin is almost incomprehensible, from "he would be rich . . .": *jam domui tuae, sed domui divinae dives*. I have made what sense I could of it. Christ, the one your deceased son is living with, could be generous to your house, and let you off what you owe your son as his share of the inheritance; but he prefers to be generous to his own house (the poor), and so demands that you hand over your son's share—via the poor. See Sermon 9:20.

22. While parricide literally means killing one's father, it was extended to cover all family slayings, including what would properly be called fratricide, as here.

23. To appreciate the whole passage, and the advice "Treat yourself well" (literally, treat your soul well), one should bear in mind that the word used throughout is *anima*, which as well as meaning "soul" also means "self" and "life." There is no particular body/soul concept involved here.

24. I think this is just Augustine's own embroidery on the parable. It almost certainly was not in his text of Luke.

SERMON 87

PREACHED ON A SUNDAY AT THE TIME OF THE VINTAGE ON WHAT IS WRITTEN IN
THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 20:1-16: *THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE A MAN, A
HOUSEHOLDER, WHO SENT WORKMEN INTO HIS VINEYARD*

Date: After 424¹

We cultivate God, and God cultivates us

1. You have heard a parable in the gospel, about people who are working in a vineyard, which fits in nicely with the present season. After all, it's vintage time now in the obvious sense. But there is also a vintage in the spiritual sense, in which God rejoices in the produce of his vineyard. You see, we cultivate God, in the sense of worshiping him, and God cultivates us.² But we don't worship or cultivate God in such a way as to make him better, to improve him by cultivating him. I mean, we cultivate or tend him by bowing to him, not by plowing him.

He, however, cultivates us as a farmer does his fields.³ So his tending or cultivating us means he makes improvements in us, because a farmer improves his fields by tending them; and the produce he expects from us is that we should tend or worship him. His cultivation of us consists in his never ceasing to root out bad weeds from our hearts with his word, to open up our hearts, as it were, with the plow of his doctrine, to plant the seeds of his commandments, to await the produce of devotion. You see, when we so submit to this cultivation of our hearts and minds that we honor and worship him properly, we do not appear ungrateful to our cultivator, but produce fruits he can rejoice in. And these fruits of ours don't make him richer, they make us more blessed.

God worships human beings

2. So there you are; listen; as I said, God "worships" us in the sense of tending our worth. That we worship God, of course, doesn't need proving to you. It's on everybody's lips, after all, that human beings worship God. That God, though, worships human beings, it's enough to frighten hearers out of their wits, because people are not in the habit of saying that God worships human beings—in that special sense—but that human beings worship God.

So I've got to prove to you that God too does "worship" human beings, or you will consider, perhaps, that I have used the word very carelessly, and begin arguing against me in your thoughts, and finding fault with me because you don't in fact grasp what I have been saying. So it's agreed that this is what has to be demonstrated to you: that God also "worships" us; but in the sense I have already mentioned, that he tends our worth as his field, to make improvements in us. The Lord says in the gospel: *I am the vine, you are the branches; my Father is the farm worker* (Jn 15:5,1). What does a farm worker do? I'm asking you, those of you who are farm workers and farmers. What does a farm worker do? I presume he works his farm, that is, tends its worth, that is, "worships" it, in a sense. So if God the Father is a farmer or farm worker, it means he has a farm, and he works or "worships" his farm, and expects a crop from it.

A vineyard was planted

3. Anyhow, he certainly planted a vineyard, as the Lord Jesus Christ says himself, and hired it out to farm workers, who would pay him its produce at the appropriate times. And he sent them his servants, to request payment of the rent for the vineyard. But they heaped abuse on them, and even killed some of them, and didn't bother to pay the rent. He sent others; they suffered the same fate. And that householder said, that "worshiper" or tender of his farm's worth, that planter and renter of his vineyard: *I will send my only son; perhaps they will at least respect him. And he even sent*, it says, *his own son. But they said to one another, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours. And they killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those evil tenants?* The reply comes, *He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and hire out his vineyard to other farmers, who will pay him its produce in due season* (Mt 21:33-41).

A vineyard was planted, when the law was sown in the hearts of the Jews. Prophets were sent to seek its fruits, their living good lives. Abuse was heaped by them on the prophets, they were even killed. Christ too was sent, the householder's only Son; they killed him too, the heir—and that's why they forfeited the inheritance. He turned their evil design against them. They killed, to gain possession; and because they killed, they forfeited possession.

The laborers in the vineyard

4. Just now you heard a parable from the holy gospel: *The kingdom of heaven is like a householder, who went out to hire laborers for his vineyard* (Mt 20:1). He went out early, and hired those he found, and agreed with them on a daily wage of 10 dollars. He went out again at 9:00 a.m. and found others, and brought them to work in the vineyard. He did the same also at noon, and he did it at 3:00 p.m. He went out too even at 5 o'clock almost at the end of the day, and found some people standing around idle. And he said to them, "Why are you lounging around here? Why aren't you working in the vineyard"? They answered, "Be-

cause no one has hired us." "Come," he said, "you too, and I will give you what is fair." A wage of 10 dollars was agreed on.

When would these men, who were only going to work for one hour, ever have dared to promise themselves 10 dollars? And yet they were pleased to think they were going to get anything. They too were hired for one hour. At the end of the day he ordered them all to be paid their wages, from the last comers to the first. He began paying from those who had come at 5 o'clock, and ordered them to be given 10 dollars. When those who had come at 7 o'clock in the morning saw these fellows getting 10 dollars each, which they themselves had agreed upon, they hoped they would get rather more; it came to their turn—and they received 10 dollars. They grumbled against the householder, and said, "Look, here are we, who have borne the heat and the bustle of the day, and you have put us on the same level as these fellows who have only worked one hour in the vineyard."

And the householder gave one of them the fairest possible reply, and said, "Mate, I haven't done you any wrong; that is to say, I haven't cheated you. I've paid you what I agreed to. I haven't cheated you, because I've paid what I stipulated. As for this man, my wish is, not to pay him, but to give him a present. Am I not allowed to do what I like with my own? Or are your eyes envious because I am generous? If I had pinched someone else's money to give to anybody, I would be rightly blamed for it as a cheat and as unjust; if I hadn't paid anybody what I owed them, I would be rightly blamed, as a cheat and as refusing others their rights. But when I pay what I owe, and also make a present to anyone I like, the one I owed money to cannot blame me, and the one I made a present to has all the more reason to rejoice."

No answer was possible; they had all been treated as equals, and the last had become first and the first last:⁴ by putting them on the same level, not by turning them back to front. What's the meaning of "The last have become first and the first last"? That both the first and the last have received exactly the same.

The first to receive wages

5. So why is it that he began paying out with the last? Aren't all, as we read, going to receive together at the same time? You see, we read in another place in the gospel that he is going to say to those he places on his right hand, *Come, blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the beginning of the world* (Mt 25:34). So if all are going to receive together, how are we to understand it here that those who worked from 5 o'clock were the first to receive their wages, while those who worked from 7 o'clock in the morning were the last? If I can explain in such a way as to make you understand, then God be thanked. He, after all, is the one you ought to thank, because he is the one paying out to you through me; I mean, I'm not paying out to you from my own assets.

If you were to ask about two of these men, for example, which was the first to receive his wages, the one who got them after one hour, the other after his

twelfth hour of working, everyone answers that the one who had worked one hour received before the one who had worked twelve. So then, although they all received their wages at the same time, yet because some received them after one hour, others after twelve, the ones who received them after working a short time are said to have received them first.

The first just men, like Abel, like Noah, were called, so to say, at the beginning of the day, and they are going to receive the happiness of the resurrection along with us. Other just men, Moses and Aaron, and others of their time, were called, you could say about noon, and they are going to receive the happiness of the resurrection along with us. After them the holy prophets, called as it were in the afternoon, are going to receive the same happiness along with us. At the end of the world, all Christians, called at the equivalent of 5 o'clock, are going to receive the happiness of this resurrection along with these. We are all going to receive it together. But notice after how long a time those first people are going to receive it. So if those first people receive it after a long time, and we after a short time, although we all receive it together, still we seem to have received it first because our reward hasn't been so long in coming.

The wages are eternal life

6. So we shall all be equal in the reward we get, the last like the first and the first like the last; because those ten dollars are eternal life, and in eternal life we shall all be equal. For while we shall sparkle in different ways according to our various deserts, some more, some less, as far as eternal life is concerned, it will be the same for all. After all, it can scarcely be longer for one, shorter for another, being equally everlasting for each; what will have no end will have an end neither for you nor for me.

There will be a different kind of sparkle there for the chaste fidelity of married couples, and for the untouched virginity of the single; the fruit of good works will be one thing there, the crown of a martyr's sufferings another. This will be glorious in one way, that in another. Yet as regards living for ever, this person won't live more than that one, nor that one than this one. After all, they will live without end, every one of them alike, while they each live in their own proper kind of glory; and those ten dollars are eternal life. So the one who received them after a long time should not grumble against the one who received them after a short time. To one it's a payment due, to the other it's a free gift but to both of them one and the same thing is given.

All receive the same wage of eternal life

7. There is something similar to be seen within the span of this life, and quite apart from that explanation of this parable, according to which those called early in the morning are Abel and the just men and women of his time, those called at nine o'clock are Abraham and the just of his time, those at noon are Moses and Aaron and the just of their time, those at three in the afternoon the prophets

and the just of their time, those at five o'clock, as though in the last days of the world, are all Christians; quite apart from such an explanation of this parable we can observe how it fits this span of our life here and now. Those who begin to be Christians almost as soon as they emerge from the womb are called, you could say, first thing in the morning; children, at nine o'clock; young people at noon; at three o'clock the middle aged; at five o'clock broken down old crocks; and yet they are all going to receive the same ten dollars of eternal life.

Come when you are called

8. But be sure you don't make the mistake, my dear brothers and sisters, of supposing that you can put off coming to the vineyard, for the simple reason that you can be certain of getting your ten dollars, at whatever time you come. Indeed you can be certain that the ten dollars are promised you; but you are not told to put off coming. I mean, did those who were hired for the vineyard, when the householder went out to hire those he found hanging around at nine o'clock and hired them, did they say to him, for example, "Wait a bit; we'll only come along at midday"? Or those he found at three o'clock, "We're not coming till five, he's going to give exactly the same to everybody; why should we tire ourselves out for nothing?"

What he's going to give, what he's going to do, that's his business, his decision; as for you though, come when you are called. Yes, the same reward is promised to everyone, but a great question mark hangs over the time for working. I mean, if those for example who are called at midday, at the stage of life when they are in the full vigor and heat of their youthful years, just like the heat of midday, if those young people said, on being called, "Wait, because we've heard in the gospel that we are all going to receive exactly the same pay. We'll come along when we've grown old, at five o'clock; as we are all to receive just as much as everyone else, why should we work more?" they could be given the answer, "So you don't want to work, though you don't even know whether you will live to old age? You've been called at noon; come. Yes it's true, the householder did promise you ten dollars even if you come at five; but whether you will even live till one o'clock, nobody promised you. I'm not saying till five o'clock, I'm saying till one. So why put off the one who is calling you, certain as you are of the reward, but quite uncertain about the day? Take care your putting things off doesn't deprive you of what he promises to give you."

If that sort of thing can properly be said with regard to infants, like one called first thing in the morning, or with regard to children, like the nine o'clock squad, or with regard to young people, like those in the full heat of noon, how much more properly can it be said with reference to the old crocks, "Look, it's already five o'clock; and are you still loafing around, reluctant to come in?"⁵

Coming out to hire laborers

9. Or perhaps the householder hasn't come out to call you in? If he hasn't come out, what am I talking about all this time? The point is, I am a slave of

that household, I have been sent to hire laborers. So why are you lounging about? You've already practically finished the number of your years, hurry up to get the ten dollars. This, after all, is the meaning of the householder going out; it means his getting to be known. Because anyone in the house is tucked away inside, he's not seen by people outside. So Christ, when he's not understood and not acknowledged, he's inside in the office; but when he's acknowledged, he has come out to hire labor.

You see, he has come forth from hidden obscurity to being a celebrity.⁶ Christ is known now, Christ is preached everywhere, the glory of Christ is cried aloud by everything whatsoever under heaven. He was once someone laughable, after a fashion, to be mocked and criticized among the Jews, he appeared to be a nobody, he was despised. You see, he was hiding his grandeur, exposing his weakness. What was exposed is what was despised about him, and what was hidden was not known. For if they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory.⁷

He was despised while he hung on the tree, but is he still to be despised, where he is seated in heaven? Those who crucified him wagged their heads as they stood in front of his cross, and as though gloating over the fruits of their ferocious animosity they said derisively, *If he is the Son of God, let him come down from the cross. He saved others, cannot he save himself? Let him come down from the cross, and then we will believe in him* (Mt 27:39-42). He wouldn't come down, because he was lying low.⁸ It would, after all, have been perfectly easy for him to come down from the cross, seeing that he was able to rise from the tomb. It was to educate us that he was giving a demonstration of patience, deferring the exercise of his power—and consequently wasn't recognized. He hadn't then come out, you see, to hire laborers; he hadn't come out, he hadn't become known. On the third day he rose again, he showed himself to the disciples, he ascended into heaven, and sent the Holy Spirit on the fiftieth day after the resurrection, the tenth after the ascension. The Holy Spirit, being sent, filled all those who were together in one hall, a hundred and twenty people. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak with the tongues of all nations,⁹ a summons was issued, he went out to hire. The power of Truth, you see,¹⁰ was beginning to become known to all. I mean at that time one person, on receiving the Holy Spirit, even one person started speaking with the tongues of all nations. Now, however, in the Church it's the Church's unity, like one person, speaking with the tongues of all nations. Is there any language which the Christian religion has not reached? Any countries it hasn't spread out to? Now *there is none who can hide himself from its heat* (Ps 19:6); and still he dilly-dalies, the old fellow standing around at five o'clock!

Despair on wrongheaded hope

10. So it's clear then, my dear brothers and sisters, it's absolutely clear, hold on to it, be assured, that our God Jesus Christ, whenever people are converted to faith in him from their old ways, whether they were merely vain or downright

wicked, that all those past things are forgiven them, and they start again, all debts cancelled, with an absolutely clean slate.¹¹ Everything without exception is forgiven. Nobody should be anxious that there is something not forgiven them. On the other hand nobody should be perversely sure of themselves.

These are two things, you see, that kill souls, either despair or wrongheaded hope. Listen to a few points about these two evils. For just as good hope, the right sort of hope, sets free, so wrongheaded hope sets a trap. But first let's see how despair sets its trap. There are people who, as soon as they begin to think about the evil things they have done, assume that they can't be pardoned; and on the assumption that they can't be pardoned, they give their souls over to destruction from that moment. They perish from despair, as they say to themselves, "There's no hope for us now; clearly, the dreadful things we've committed can't possibly be forgiven or pardoned; so why not satisfy our lusts? Let us at least fill the cup of pleasure in this present time, because we shall get no reward in the future. Let us do whatever we please, even if it's not allowed, so that at least we may have some temporal enjoyment, seeing that we don't qualify to obtain the eternal variety."

By saying that sort of thing they perish from despair, whether before they come to believe at all, or whether they are already Christians and have fallen by evil living into various sins and vicious forms of behavior. The Lord of the vineyard comes forth to them, and while in their despair they turn their backs on him as he calls, he hammers away at them and cries out through the prophet Ezekiel, *On whatever day anyone turns from his evil ways, I will forget all his iniquities* (Ez 18:21-22). When they hear and believe these words, they recover from their despair and emerge from that deep and dizzy whirlpool in which they had been submerged.

Wrongheaded hope

11. But now they have got to be careful they don't tumble into another whirlpool, and find that having been unable to die from despair, they now die from wrongheaded hope. They change to a very different way of thinking, but one that is equally pernicious; and again they start saying to themselves, "If, on whatever day I turn from my evil ways, God in his mercy, as he truly promised through the prophet, will forgive all my iniquities, why should I be converted today, and not tomorrow? Why today and not tomorrow? Let today pass like tomorrow, let it be spent on the vilest pleasures, in a dissolute whirl, let me wallow today in deadly delights. I will be converted tomorrow, and that's the end of it." "The end of what," you will be asked. "Of my iniquities." "Fine; congratulations, because tomorrow will see the end of your iniquities. But what if before tomorrow comes we shall see the end of you? So you are quite right to be relieved because God has promised to let you off for your iniquities once you are converted; but nobody has promised you tomorrow. Or if perhaps an astrologer has made you such a promise, that's something very different from God." Astrologers have misled many people, because often enough they have even promised themselves a profit, and incurred a loss.

So again, for the sake of these wrongheaded hopers, forth comes the householder. Just as he came forth to those who had wrongly despaired, and were perishing from despair, and called them back to hope, so he also comes forth to these people who wish to perish from the wrong sort of hope, and he says to them through another book, *Do not delay to be converted to the Lord* (Sir 5:7). Just as he had said to those others, *On whatever day the wicked man turns from his evil ways, I will forget all his iniquities* (Ez 18:21-22), and relieved them of the despair through which they had already given over their souls to destruction, despairing of any kind of pardon, so he also comes forth to these who are bent on perishing by hoping and putting off conversion. And he speaks to them and rebukes them, *Do not delay to be converted to the Lord, nor put it off from day to day. For suddenly his wrath will come, and in the time of vengeance he will destroy you* (Sir 5:7).

So don't put things off, don't shut in your own face a door that stands open. Look, the granter of pardon is opening a door for you; why do you hold back? You would presumably be delighted if ever you were knocking at it and he opened it; now you haven't knocked, and he opens it, and do you stay outside? So don't put things off. About the works of mercy it says somewhere in scripture: *Do not say, Go away and come back, tomorrow I will give you something; since you can, do good immediately* (Prv 3:28); because you do not know what may happen the following day. You've heard this commandment not to put off a kindness to someone else, and are you going to be cruel to yourself by putting things off? You mustn't put off giving a loaf of bread, and you happily put off receiving a pardon. If you don't put another person off in showing kindness, be kind to your own soul too by pleasing God.¹² Give alms to your own soul also. I don't mean that you should give it yourself, only don't push away the hand that is offering it.

The call of the lowly

12. However, people sometimes do themselves untold harm by being afraid of offending others. Good friends have great power for good, and bad friends great power for the worse. That's why the Lord, to help us make light of the friendship of powerful people for our very salvation, didn't want to choose senators first, but fishermen. What wonderfully skillful mercy.¹³ You see, he knew that if he chose a senator, the senator would say, "I was chosen for my rank." If he chose a rich man first, the rich man would say, "I was chosen for my wealth." If he chose the emperor first, the emperor would say, "I was chosen for my authority." If he chose an orator first, the orator would say, "I was chosen for my eloquence." If he chose a philosopher, the philosopher would say, "I was chosen for my wisdom."

"For the time being" he says, "these proud persons must be put off; they are very swollen-headed!" There's all the difference in the world between being great and being swollen. Each indicates size, but each doesn't indicate health. "So we must put off," he says, "these proud people, they need healing by some

solid sense. Give me first," he says, "this fisherman. Come here, you, poor man, follow me. You have nothing, you know nothing, follow me. Common, uneducated poor man, follow me. There's nothing in you for people to be frightened of, there's a lot of space in you that can be filled."¹⁴

To such an abundant fountain an entirely empty vessel has to be brought. The fisherman left his nets, the sinner received grace, and became a divine preacher.¹⁵ Here's what the Lord did, in the words of the apostle: *God chose the weak things of the world to confound the strong; and the low-born things of the world God chose, and the things that are not like those that are, that the things that are might be brought to nothing* (1 Cor 1:27-28). To conclude, the words of these fishermen are still read, the necks of orators are brought low. Out then with the empty windbags, out with the smoke which fades away as it rises. It's as clear as day that for our very salvation's sake these things should be taken very lightly.

It's time for restoring health

13. If there was someone seriously ill in town, and there was also a very clever doctor there, who happened to be an enemy of the sick man's influential friends; so if there was someone in town sick with a dangerous disease, and in the same town a very clever doctor, an enemy, as I said, of the sick man's powerful friends, who said to their friend, "Don't bring him in, he doesn't know a thing," saying it in a spirit of envy, not of objective judgment; wouldn't he, for the sake of his recovery, brush aside the malicious tales of his influential friends, and however much they might be offended, call in, in order to live a few days longer, that doctor with his wide reputation for skill, to rid him of that disease?

The human race is sick, not with a physical disease, but with sins. It's laid low over the whole wide world, from the east to the furthest west, one gigantic invalid. To heal this gigantic invalid there came down the all-powerful doctor. He humbled himself to the level of mortal flesh, as though to the level of the sick person's bed. He makes salutary prescriptions, he's ignored; those who listen are set free.

He's ignored when powerful friends say, "He doesn't know a thing." If he didn't know a thing, he wouldn't be filling the nations with his power. If he didn't know a thing, he wouldn't have existed before he existed amongst us. If he didn't know a thing, he wouldn't have sent the prophets ahead of him. Aren't the things that were foretold now being fulfilled? Isn't this doctor proving the effectiveness of his techniques by fulfilling the promises?¹⁶ Are not pernicious errors being overthrown throughout the whole world and greed and ambition being tamed by the threshing of the world?

Don't let anyone start saying, "The world used to be better before than it is now; from the moment this doctor began practicing his skills, we've seen many horrible things here." Don't be surprised. Before anyone was treated and cured, the doctor's surgery and operating theater were clean of blood; well you, then,

as you see the blood now, shake yourself free of the empty pursuit of pleasure, come to the doctor; it's time for restoring health, not for the indulgences of wealth.

Let's be cured

14. Let's be cured then, brothers and sisters. If we acknowledge the doctor, don't let us turn on him savagely like raving lunatics. Don't let us turn away from him like people sunk in lethargy. Many have perished of apoplectic rage, many of sleep. Raving lunatics are people who are crazy because they never sleep, lethargic people are those who sink under too much sleep.

Well that's what human beings are like. Some want to turn savagely on this doctor; and because he is now seated in heaven, they persecute his members, the faithful on earth. He cures such people too. Many of them have been converted, from being enemies have become friends, have become preachers instead of persecutors. Such too were those Jews, who raged against him while he was still here, and whom he cured of their mad frenzy, praying for them as he hung on the cross. He said, you remember, *Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing* (Lk 23:34). Many of them though, once their fury cooled, their mad frenzy as it were calmed down, came to know God, came to know Christ. When the Holy Spirit was sent after the ascension, they were converted to the one whom they had crucified, and as believers in the sacrament they drank his blood, which they had shed in their frenzied rage.¹⁷

The frenzy and the lethargics

15. We have plenty of examples. Saul persecuted his members, though he himself was seated in heaven. He was a bitter persecutor in his frenzy, his mind deeply disturbed, in a very morbid condition. But he cried out to him from heaven, just that one question, *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* (Acts 9:4), struck him down raving mad, raised him up completely sane; slew the persecutor, gave life to the preacher.

Many lethargics too are cured. Like them are people who neither rage against Christ nor bear Christians any ill will; all they do is put it off, put it off, fading away with sleepy words, too slothful to turn their eyes to the light; and people who try to rouse them are a nuisance. "Leave me alone," says the languid lethargic, "please, please, leave me alone." "Why?" "I want to sleep." "But you'll die of it." And in love with sleep, he replies, "I want to die." And charity calls down from above, "I don't want you to."

This charitable sentiment is often shown by a son to his aged father who's going to die anyway in a few days, having already come of course to the end of his life. If he sees his father lethargic, and learns from the doctor that his father is suffering from lethargic fever, when the doctor says to him, "Wake up your father, don't let him sleep if you want him to live," the boy comes up to the old man, shakes him, pokes him, pinches him, pesters him out of filial duty. He

won't let him die forthwith, even though he's soon going to die of old age; and if he lives, the son is delighted that he can live a few more days with a father he is going to succeed on his decease.

How much more urgently, then, should charity oblige us to pester our friends, with whom we hope to live not just for a few days in this world, but for ever with God? So let them love us, let them do what they hear about through us, and let them cultivate in worship the one whom we too worship, that they may receive what we too hope for.¹⁰ Turning to the Lord, etc.

NOTES

1. A sermon preached in the autumn, probably in Hippo, and probably in the last years of Augustine's life, after 424.

2. In the whole first section of the sermon there is a play on the double meaning of the verb *colo*, which basically means to tend or cultivate, and derivatively means to worship. When Augustine says in this sentence *Colimus Deum*, he is not saying anything as peculiar as "We cultivate God"; it is a straightforward statement, "We worship God," but with that play on the meaning of the word which cannot be kept up in English.

3. This sentence, *Ille autem colit nos tanquam agricola agrum*, would have sounded rather differently to his audience's ears from what it does to ours. *Ille colit nos* would have been immediately heard as "He worships us," but then this is explained away, *tanquam agri—cola agrum*, "as a field-worshiper/tender his field."

4. See Mt 20:16.

5. One wonders what hoary old sinners his caustic glance rested on as he said this! Such a remark, though, leads me to infer, first that he knew many of his congregation personally, and hence is likely to have been preaching in Hippo; and secondly that he was an old man himself, and hence the sermon is likely to have been preached not earlier than 424, when he was 70.

6. *Ex occulito processit ad notitiam*; a much more theologically pregnant phrase in the Latin. He has at the back of his mind the incarnation, the Son coming forth from the Father into the world from the hidden obscurity of the divine sphere into the knowable form of being human, though his immediate reference is to Christ's leap to worldwide fame, as it were, after Pentecost.

But for Augustine the word *processit* would primarily signify the eternal generation of the Son from the Father, which takes place *in occulito*, but which is made known to us, comes to *notitia*, by the incarnation, by the Son's being sent into the world to become man (see *The Trinity*, IV, 20, 29). Furthermore, the word *notitia* plays an important role in Augustine's working out of his theology of the trinitarian image in the human mind. His first sketch of that image is of a mental trinity of *mens*, *notitia*, and *amor* (mind, knowledge and love), where *notitia* corresponds to the divine Word or Son (*The Trinity*, IX, 4, 4, onward).

But this primary coming forth from obscurity to celebrity is itself published, made known, by the proclaiming of the risen Christ to the world by the apostles, and by the Church after them. And that is what he now proceeds to elaborate.

7. See 1 Cor 2:8.

8. That is, he was concealing the grandeur of his divine Sonship.

9. See Acts 1:15; 2:1-4.

10. I am assuming that by "Truth" Augustine here means Christ, something he frequently does rather more explicitly.

11. The sentence is just as badly constructed in the Latin. He forgot he had already made "our

God Jesus Christ" the subject of it, and went on in the passive voice.

12. See Sir 30:23 (Vulgate).

13. Reading *magna ars misericordiae* with some manuscripts, instead of the *magna artificis misericordia* (What wonderful mercy of the craftsman) preferred by the editors of the CCL edition.

14. For similar treatment of this theme see Sermon 43, 6.

15. A more memorable jingle in the Latin: *Dimisit retia piscator, accepit gratiam peccator, et factus est divinus orator.*

16. What he had in mind, as much as Christ fulfilling the prophecies in his life, death, and resurrection, was his fulfilling them by spreading his Church throughout the world—a frequent topic in the sermons.

17. See Acts 2:37.

18. The "we/us" here could well be the preacher's way of saying "I/me"; but while indeed I think Augustine is thinking primarily of himself and his pastoral responsibility toward the lethargics, I also think he intends to include the devout among the congregation in that responsibility.

He refers back in his last sentence to the play on the word *colo* with which he began the sermon (note 2); which is why I translate rather artificially, "let them cultivate in worship."

SERMON 88

ON THE WORDS FROM THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 20:30.34, WHERE IT TELLS OF
THE TWO BLIND MEN, SITTING BY THE ROAD AND CRYING OUT, *LORD, HAVE
MERCY ON US, SON OF DAVID*

Date: 400¹

Building up faith in the things that were not seen

1. Your graces know as well as I do that our Lord and savior Jesus Christ is the doctor responsible for our eternal health or salvation; and that the reason why he took upon himself the sickness of our nature was to prevent that sickness of ours being eternal. I mean, he assumed a mortal body in order by means of it to slay death. *For he was crucified by reason of our infirmity*, as the apostle says, *but he lives by the power of God* (2 Cor 13:4). And there are the words of the same apostle, *And that he dies no more, and death will have no further dominion over him* (Rom 6:9).

So this is all well known to faith. At the same time it also follows that we should realize that all the miracles of healing he performed have the value of reminding us to collect from him something that is not going to pass away, or ever have an end. He gave back to the blind their eyes, which death, of course, was going sooner or later to close for good. He brought Lazarus back to life, though in due course he would die again. And whatever else he did to restore bodies to health, he didn't do it to make them everlasting, even though at the end he is going to give the body too everlasting health and salvation. But what wasn't seen wasn't as a rule believed; and therefore by these temporal benefits that were seen he was building up faith in the things that were not seen.

God prefers those who don't see and yet believe

2. And so nobody should say, dear brothers and sisters, that our Lord Jesus Christ doesn't do such things now, and therefore earlier times in the Church are to be preferred to the present. Somewhere or other the same Lord, after all, prefers those who don't see and yet believe to those who only believe because they see. The fact is that in those times the disciples were so shaky in their infirmity, that even though they had actually seen he had risen, they didn't think

they could believe unless they touched him. They weren't satisfied with what they could see with their eyes, unless they could stretch out their hands as well to his body, and touch the scars of his recent wounds; so that the disciple who doubted, as soon as he had touched and recognized the scars, cried out *My Lord and my God* (Jn 20:24-29).

He had healed all the wounds of other people, and yet he showed him his own scars. Couldn't the Lord have risen without any scars? But he knew all about the wounds in the minds of his disciples, and it was to cure these that he preserved the scars in his own body. And how did the Lord answer him when he confessed and said, *My Lord and my God?* Because you have seen me, he said, you have believed. Blessed are those who do not see, and yet believe. Who was he referring to, brothers and sisters, if not us? Not only us, of course, but also those who come after us. It wouldn't be long, after all, before he withdrew from mortal eyes in order to consolidate faith in people's minds, and whoever believed after that believed without seeing, and their faith had great merit. To acquire this faith all they stretched out was a true and loyal heart, not a groping hand as well.

Blind hearts open their eyes to the word of the Lord

3. So the Lord did all these things, in order to invite people to faith. This faith is now glowing white-hot in the Church, which is spread throughout the whole world. And now he is achieving greater healings, for the sake of which he was then prepared to perform those lesser ones. Just as the spirit, you see, is better than the body, so too the health of the spirit is worth more than the health of the body. Nowadays, while indeed blind flesh does not open its eyes at a miracle of the Lord's, blind hearts do open their eyes to the word of the Lord. Nowadays no mortal corpse rises again; souls do rise again, which were lying dead in living corpses. Nowadays the ears of deaf bodies are not opened; but how many people have the ears of their hearts stopped up, which nonetheless open up to the penetrating word of God, so that those believe who used not to believe, and those begin to live good lives who used to lead bad ones, and those who used to be disobedient start obeying? And we say, "So-and-so has become a believer," and we are astonished when we hear this about people whom we used to know once as being uncommonly stubborn.

So why are you astonished at his being a believer, innocent, a servant of God, if not because you observe that he sees, and you knew him to be blind; you observe him to be alive, and you knew him as dead; you observe that he hears, and you used to know him as deaf? I mean, you must realize that there is another way of being dead, and it was about people dead in that way that the Lord said to someone who was hesitating to follow him because he wanted to bury his father, *Let the dead bury their dead* (Mt 8:22). Obviously, the dead who do the burying are not dead in the body, because if they were, they wouldn't be able to bury dead bodies. For all that, he calls them dead; where but within in the soul? Just as often enough in a house that is in good repair and functioning

smoothly the master of this house is to be seen lying dead, so too in bodies that are in good repair many people have dead souls inside. And this is how the apostle tries to rouse them: *Awake, you that sleep, and rise from the dead, and Christ shall enlighten you* (Eph 5:14). He's the one who enlightens the blind, just as he's the one who wakes the dead. It's his voice, after all, that is crying out to the dead through the apostle, *Awake, you that sleep!* The blind will be enlightened with light when they rise from the dead. As for the deaf, how many of them the Lord had his eyes on when he said, *Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear* (Mt 11:15). Was there anyone, after all, standing there in front of him without any ears on their heads? So what other ears could he be requiring but those of the inner self?

Walk by faith in order to arrive at vision

4. Again, what sort of eyes was he looking for when he was speaking to people who could see, obviously enough, but who could only see with the eyes in their heads? You see, when Philip said to him, *Lord, show us the Father, and that's enough for us*, he understood well enough that being shown the Father could satisfy him; but if the one who is equal to the Father wasn't enough for him, how would the Father be enough? And why wasn't he enough for him? Because he wasn't seen. Why wasn't he seen? Because the eye he could be seen with was not yet whole. As for the Lord's body which could be seen with these eyes, it wasn't only the ones who revered him that saw him, but also the Jews who crucified him. So if he wanted to be seen in another way, it means he was requiring other eyes. And that's why he gave this reply to the one who said, *Show us the Father and that's enough for us: Have I been with you all this time, and you do not know me? Philip, whoever sees me also sees the Father.* And to heal the eyes of faith in the meantime, he is first admonished in terms of faith, so that he may be enabled to attain to sight. And in case Philip should assume that God is to be thought of in the same way as he saw the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh, he immediately added, *Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me?* (Jn 14:8-10).

He had said just before, *Whoever sees me also sees the Father.* But Philip did not yet have a whole and healthy eye with which to see the Father, and thus not one either with which to see the Son himself who is coequal with the Father. And so the Lord undertook to heal and strengthen the still enfeebled focus of his mind, that was unfit to gaze on so bright a light, with the medicines and lotions of faith, and he said, *Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me?* So anyone who cannot yet see what the Lord is going to demonstrate should not ask first to see what he is to believe, but should first believe, so that the eye may be healed with which he is to see.

You see, to the slavish eyes of slaves he was only exhibiting the form of a slave; because if he who did not consider it robbery to be equal to God could already be seen as equal to God by those whom he wished to heal, there would have been no need for him to empty himself and take the form of a slave.² But

because there was no capacity there for seeing God, while there was a capacity for seeing man, he being God became man, in order that what was seen might heal that capacity with which he was not yet seen.³ After all, he says himself in another place, *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God* (Mt 5:8).

Philip, of course, could have answered, "But look, Lord, I can see you. Do you mean the Father is the same sort of thing as I see now, since you said, *Whoever sees me also sees the Father?*" Before Philip, though, could answer like that, perhaps before he could even think of it, the Lord immediately added, after saying "*Whoever sees me sees the Father too,*" *Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?* The point is, with that eye he could not yet see either the Father or the Son who is equal to the Father; but to heal, the eye for seeing it had to be given an ointment for believing. That's why, before you see what you are still unable to see, you must believe what you still do not see.⁴ Walk by faith, in order to arrive at vision; vision, or the sight of God, will not give you joy in the kingdom if faith does not give you comfort on the way there. As the apostle says, *As long as we are in the body, we are away abroad from the Lord.* Then he immediately explains why we are still away abroad, even though we have already come to believe: *We walk by faith*, he says, *not by sight* (2 Cor 5:6-7).

Healing of the eyes of our hearts

5. Therefore, brothers and sisters, what calls for all our efforts in this life is the healing of the eyes of our hearts, with which God is to be seen. It is for this that the holy mysteries are celebrated, for this that the word of God is preached, to this that the Church's moral exhortations are directed, those, that is, that are concerned with the correction of our carnal desires, the improvement of our habits, the renunciation of this world, not only in words but in a change of life. Whatever points are made by God's holy scriptures, this is their ultimate point, to help us purge that inner faculty of ours from that thing that prevents us beholding God.

You see, just as the eye is made for seeing this temporal light, which though coming from the heavens is still something physical, and visible not only to human beings but even to the most insignificant little creatures (what it's made for, after all, is to see this light), still, if something is pushed into it, or flies into it, which may irritate it, then it cuts itself off from this light; and though the light is present all around it, it nevertheless turns itself away, and absents itself. It is absent from the light which is present, not only because of being irritated and inflamed, but also because the light it was made for seeing is painful to it. In the same way the eye of the heart, when it is unsettled and hurt, turns itself away from the light of justice, and neither dares nor is able to gaze upon it.

Take care of the inner eye

6. What is it that inflames the eye of the heart? Greed, avarice, injustice, worldly covetousness inflames, closes, blinds the eye of the heart. And yet how

they go looking for a doctor when the eye of the body gets inflamed, how they rush without delay to get it opened and cleaned out, to restore the capacity to see this light! People run around, nobody rests, nobody puts the business off, if so much as a smut gets in the eye.

Now it's certain that the sunlight, which we so want to see with healthy eyes, was made by God. The one who made it is of course much brighter and clearer than this sunlight; and the light which concerns the eye of the mind is not of the same sort anyhow. That light is eternal wisdom.⁵ Now God made you, O man and woman, to his image. Do you think he would give you the wherewithal to see the sunlight which he made, and not give you the wherewithal to see the one who made you, considering that he made you to his own image? Of course he gave this too; he gave you both capacities. But you are greatly attached to these outer eyes, and thoroughly negligent of that inner eye; you carry it around all worn out and damaged. It's painful for you if your designer wishes to show himself to you; it's painful to your eye, before it is cured and healed.

I mean, even in paradise Adam sinned, and hid himself from the face of God. While he still had a sound heart and a clean conscience, he rejoiced in the presence of God. After that eye was damaged by sin, he began to dread the divine light, he fled into the darkness and the thickets of the woods, running away from the truth, clutching at shadows.⁶

Following Christ's example

7. So then, my dear brothers and sisters, seeing that we too were born of that source, and as the apostle says, *In Adam all die* (1 Cor 15:22)—all of us, after all, were once upon a time just two human beings—so if we were unwilling to follow the doctor's orders in order to avoid getting ill, let us at least follow them in order to be delivered from our illness. The doctor gave us orders when we were fit and healthy; the doctor gave us orders so that we wouldn't need the doctor. *It's not the healthy*, he said, *who need the doctor, but the sick* (Mt 9:12). When we were healthy we ignored his orders, and we learned by experience how totally disastrous it was for us to ignore his orders. We have already begun to get ill, we are feverish, we are lying on a bed of sickness—but we mustn't despair. Because we were unable, you see, to go to the doctor, he was quite prepared to come to us. He was ignored by us in good health, he did not ignore us when we were hurt.

He did not stop giving other orders to the sick person, who had refused to observe the first ones that would have saved him from getting sick. It's as though he said, "You have certainly learned by experience that I was telling you the truth when I said, Don't touch this thing. So anyway, get better, come back to life. I am carrying your infirmity;⁷ drink the bitter cup. Those orders of mine which were given to you in good health were easy and pleasant, but it's you yourself that have made them so hard and painful. They were ignored, you have begun to toss about in a fever; you can't get better unless you drink the bitter cup, the cup of the trials and temptations this life is full of, the cup of afflictions, of distress, of suffering. Drink it," he says, "drink it in order to live."

And in case the invalid should answer him, "I can't, I can't bear it, I can't drink it," the healthy doctor drank it first, so that the invalid would not hesitate to drink it. I mean, what kind of bitterness is there in such a concoction that he never drank? If it's malicious slander you're thinking of, he heard it first, when he was driving out demons: *He has a demon;*⁴ and that *It is in Beelzebub that he casts out demons* (Lk 11:15).

He would draw on that experience to comfort his sick patients when he said, *If they have called the householder Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household?* (Mt 10:25). If pain is bitter, he was bound and scourged and crucified. If death is bitter, well he died too. If it's a particular kind of death that horrifies the invalid, there was nothing more shameful in those times than death on a cross. It wasn't for nothing that in commanding his obedience to us the apostle made this little addition: *Becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross* (Phil 2:8).

Honor to the cross

8. But because he was going to honor his faithful at the end of this world, he first honored his cross in this age of the world, in that the rulers of the world who believe in him have forbidden the crucifixion of any criminals, and that his servants, including even kings, now wear on their foreheads with great confidence what his Jewish persecutors procured for the Lord with endless mockery and abuse. Nowadays it's not so apparent precisely what kind of death the Lord was prepared to undergo for us, *having become a curse for us* (Gal 3:13), as the apostle said. And when the Jews in their blindness were mocking him as he hung there, he could of course have easily come down from the cross, seeing that he wouldn't have been on the cross at all if he hadn't been willing to; but it was much more splendid to rise from the tomb than to climb down from the cross.

So the Lord then, in performing these divine deeds and suffering these human ills, is admonishing us by both bodily miracles and bodily sufferings to believe and be healed, in order to be empowered to gaze upon those invisible realities which our material eyes are unaware of. So it was in pursuance of this policy that he cured these blind men about whom the gospel has told us just now. And observe what advice, in performing the cure, he gave to the invalid inside.

Jesus passes by

9. Notice the final result of the deed, and the order of events. Those two blind men sitting by the road cried out as the Lord passed by that he should take pity on them. The crowd, however, that was with the Lord, tried to shut them up and stop them crying out. Don't imagine that even this little detail is without its hidden symbolism. But they overcame the crowd's efforts to shut them up by their persistent clamoring, so that their voices reached the ears of the Lord—as though he hadn't already anticipated their thoughts. So the two blind men clamored to be heard by the Lord, and the crowd couldn't suppress them. The

Lord was passing by, and they were crying out; the Lord stood still, and they were healed. The Lord Jesus, you see, stopped still, and called them and said, *What do you want me to do for you? They said, That our eyes may be opened* (Mt 20:32-33). The Lord did it for their faith, he restored their eyesight.

If we have already understood about the invalid inside us, the deaf person inside, the dead corpse inside, let us look there too for the blind person inside. The eyes of the mind are closed; Jesus passes by, to get us to cry out. What does it mean, Jesus passes by? Jesus performs temporal deeds. What does it mean, Jesus passes by? Jesus performs transitory, passing deeds. Just think, and note how many of his deeds have passed by and gone for good. He was born of the virgin Mary; is he always being born? He was suckled as a baby; is he always sucking the breast? He ran through the usual stages to becoming a young man; is he always growing in the body? Boyhood succeeded infancy, adolescence succeeded boyhood, young manhood succeeded adolescence, each stage passing away and yielding to the next.

The miracles too which he performed have passed and gone; they are read out and believed. The very fact, after all, of their being written down so that they can be read out shows that they were transitory actions when they were performed. Finally, in order for us not to linger over many details, he was crucified; is he always hanging on the cross? He was buried, he rose again, he ascended into heaven; now *he dies no more, and death will have no further dominion over him* (Rom 6:9); and his divinity abides for ever, and now his body's immortality will never fade away. And yet all those things he did in time have passed away; and they were written down to be read out, and they are proclaimed and preached in order to be believed. So in all these ways Jesus has passed by.

The two peoples: Jews and Gentiles

10. What are the two blind men beside the road, if not the two peoples, for whose healing Jesus has come? Let us discover these two peoples in the holy scriptures. It's written in the gospel, *I have other sheep who are not of this fold; and them too I must bring along, that there may be one flock and one shepherd* (Jn 10:16). So who are the two peoples? One is the Jews, the other the Gentiles. *I was only sent*, he says, *to the sheep that were lost of the house of Israel* (Mt 15:24). Who did he say this to? To the disciples, when that Canaanite woman was crying out, and confessed she was a dog, in order to earn the crumbs from the table of her masters. And because she did earn them, he has now shown that there are two peoples he had come to, namely the Jewish people, of whom he said *I was only sent to the sheep that were lost of the house of Israel*; and the Gentile people whose role was played out in advance by this woman, whom he had first turned down by saying, *It is not right to throw the children's bread to the dogs*; and then when she said, *Quite, Lord; after all, even the dogs eat up the scraps which fall from the table of their masters*, he had answered, *O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you wish* (Mt 15:26-28).

Also representing them was that centurion, of whom the selfsame Lord said, *Amen I tell you, I have not found such great faith in Israel*; this was because the

other had said, *I am not worthy that you should come in under my roof; but just speak the word, and my lad will be healed* (Mt 8:10, 8). In this way then before his passion and glorification the Lord was already indicating the two peoples: one which he had come to because of the promises made to the ancestors; the other which in his mercy he did not turn away, in order to fulfill what Abraham had been promised, *In your seed shall all the nations find a blessing* (Gn 22:18).⁹

That's why the apostle in his turn, after the Lord's resurrection and ascension, went off to the Gentiles when he was spurned by the Jews. Yet for all that he did not pass over in silence the Churches of Jewish believers: *I was personally unknown, he says, to the Churches of Judea which are in Christ. They had only heard that the one who once upon a time used to persecute us is now evangelizing the faith he once used to devastate; and in me, he concludes, they glorified God* (Gal 1:22-23).

Thus Christ is also called the cornerstone *who has made both one* (Eph 2:20, 14). A corner joins two walls coming from different directions. What could be more different than circumcised and uncircumcised, meaning one wall from Judea and another wall from the Gentiles? But they are joined together by the cornerstone. For *the stone which the builders rejected, this has become the head of the corner* (Ps 118:22).¹⁰ You don't get corners in buildings except where two walls coming from different directions converge on them, and are joined together with a kind of unity. So symbolically speaking, the two blind men crying out to the Lord were these two walls.

Faith built up

11. Now pay careful attention, dearly beloved. The Lord was passing by, the blind men crying out. What's the meaning of "he was passing by"? He was performing passing, transitory works, as I have already said. It was with reference to these transitory works that our faith was being built up.¹¹ The fact is, we believe in the Son of God, not only because he is the Word of God through whom all things were made;¹² after all, if he had always remained equal to God in the form of God, he would not have emptied himself, taking the form of a servant;¹³ nor would the blind men have perceived him, so as to be able to cry out. But since he was doing transitory things, that is to say, humbling himself, becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross, the two blind men could and did cry out, *Take pity on us, son of David* (Mt 20:30). Because this very fact that the Lord and creator of David was willing to be also the son of David, this was something he did in time, something he did "passing by."

Who cry out to Christ?

12. But what's the meaning of crying out to Christ, brothers and sisters, if not matching the grace of Christ with good works? I say this, my friends, in case we should be making a noise with our voices, and remaining mute in our morals. Who are the ones who cry out to Christ, to have their inner blindness dispelled

as Christ passes by, that is, as he administers temporal sacraments to us, by which we are reminded to lay hold of eternal realities?¹⁴ Who are the ones who cry out to Christ? Those who think nothing of the world are the ones who cry out to Christ. Those who scorn the pleasures of the world are the ones who cry out to Christ. Those who say, with their lives rather than their lips, *The world has been crucified to me and I to the world* (Gal 6:14), they are the ones who cry out to Christ. Those who distribute and give to the poor, so that their justice endures for ever and ever,¹⁵ they are the ones who cry out to Christ.

Those who hear, and don't turn a deaf ear to the words, *Sell your possessions and give to the poor; make yourselves purses that do not grow old, treasure in heaven that does not fade away* (Lk 12:33), like the blind men hearing the sound of Christ's footsteps as he passes by, let them cry out in response to these things—that is to say, let them do them. Let their voices be heard in their deeds. Let them start thinking lightly of the world, distributing their goods to the needy, being indifferent to the things people love; let them make light of wrongs, instead of wanting to get their own back, offer their cheeks to those who strike them, pray for their enemies; let them not try to get back what anyone grabs from them; let them pay back fourfold what they have grabbed from anyone else.¹⁶

Those who are beside the road must cry out

13. When people begin to do that sort of thing, all their friends and relations and in-laws get very upset. Those who love the world start opposing them. "Why are you acting crazy? You're going to extremes; aren't other people Christians? This is plain folly, it's lunacy." That, and more of the same, is the kind of outcry that comes from the crowd, to stop the blind crying out. The crowd rebuked them when they cried out; but their outcry didn't win the day.

They must understand what they've got to do, those who wish to be healed. Even now Jesus is passing by; those who are beside the road must cry out. The others, you see, are people who honor God with their lips, but their heart is far from him.¹⁷ The ones by the road are people who receive the Lord's instructions with crushed and contrite hearts.¹⁸ For when the transitory things the Lord did are read out to us, we are being presented every time with Jesus passing by; because to the end of time there is never any lack of blind people sitting by the road. So it's most important they should cry out, those people sitting by the road.

The crowd that was with the Lord tried to suppress the clamor of those who were seeking to be healed. Brothers and sisters, do you see what I'm trying to say? The fact is, I don't know how to say it; yet even more, I don't know how to keep quiet about it. I will say it, and say it openly. You see, I'm terrified of Jesus passing by, and stopping; and that's why I can't keep quiet. Good Christians, really earnest Christians who want to carry out the commandments of God written in the gospel, are told not to be bad and lukewarm Christians. The crowd with the Lord tells them to stop crying out; tells them, that is, to stop doing good, in case they should persevere with it, and be healed.

Well, they must go on crying out, they mustn't give up, nor be influenced by the bogus authority of crowds; nor should they imitate those who may have become Christians earlier, but who lead bad lives and resent people who engage in good works. They mustn't say, "Let us live in the same way as the great majority lives." Why not rather live as the gospel tells you? Why do you want to live according to the reproaches of the crowd trying to shut you up, instead of according to the footsteps of the Lord passing by?

They will revile you, abuse you, discourage you; you, though, go on crying out until you reach the ears of Jesus. Those, you see, who persevere in doing the sort of things Jesus commanded, and don't take any notice of the crowds trying to shut them up, or consider it important that they seem to follow Christ, that is, that they are called Christians—well, they certainly won't be cut off from Christ, since they love the light Christ is going to bring much more than they fear the din of people trying to shut them up; so Jesus will stop and heal them.

Christ's divinity stands still; his humanity passes by

14. How, then, are our eyes healed? Just as it's by faith that we perceive Christ passing by in his temporal activities, so we have to understand him stopping and standing still, as Christ in his unchanging eternity. The eye is healed, you see, when it understands Christ's divinity. Your graces must try to grasp this; pay attention to the sublime mystery I am trying to explain.

All the acts performed by our Lord Jesus Christ in time serve to plant faith in us. We believe in the Son of God, not only in the Word through which all things were made, but in this Word made flesh to dwell among us, born of the virgin Mary, and the other things faith accepts. These were presented to us so that Christ might pass by and the blind men might hear his footsteps as he passed by and cry out in good works, recording their profession of faith in their lives.

Now, to heal them as they cry out Jesus stands still. Indeed someone already sees Jesus standing still, someone who says, *Even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, at least now we know him so no longer* (2 Cor 5:16). What he saw, I mean, was Christ's divinity, insofar as that is possible in this life. There's Christ's divinity, and there's Christ's humanity. His divinity stands still, his humanity passes by. What is meant by saying his divinity stands still? It doesn't change, it can't be shaken or shattered, it doesn't disappear. He didn't, after all, come to us in such a way as to depart from the Father; he didn't ascend into heaven in such a way as to move through space, by locomotion.¹⁹ Once he had taken flesh to himself, he moved about locally. But God in assuming flesh doesn't change his place, because he isn't in place.

Let us be touched by Christ as he stands still, let our eyes be healed. But whose eyes? The eyes of people who cry out, of course, when he passes by; of people, that is, who do good works through the faith that has been directed to things done in time, for the education of us little ones.

Love of a light which you do not see

15. What more precious could we have, brothers and sisters, than eyes restored to sight? Those who can see this created light that shines from the sky, or is provided by a lamp, rejoice at it. And how unfortunate those poor people are reckoned to be who cannot see it!

As for me, why am I speaking, why am I saying all this, if not to urge you all to cry out when Jesus passes by? I am recommending to your holinesses the love of a light which perhaps you do not see. Believe, while you do not see it; and cry out, so that you may see it.

What a terrible misfortune it is considered to be, for people who cannot see this material light! Someone goes blind; people immediately start saying, "He made God angry, he did something wrong." That's what Tobit's wife said to her husband. He was making a fuss about a kid, afraid it was stolen; he didn't want to hear the bleating of stolen goods in his house. She, in defense of what she had done, heaped abuse on her husband, and when he said, "Take it back if it was stolen," she answered scornfully, *Where are your acts of justice?* (Tb 2:14). How blind she was, defending her theft! And what a true light he could see by, telling her to restore what she had stolen! She, outwardly, enjoyed the light of the sun; he, inwardly, the light of justice, Which of them was in the better kind of light?²⁰

Good works to perform

16. It is to love this light, brothers and sisters, that I am urging your graces. So cry out with good works when the Lord passes by; let the voice of your faith be heard, so that Jesus stopping and standing still, that is, abiding as the unchangeable Wisdom of God and the sublime majesty of the Word of God through which all things were made,²¹ may open your eyes. Our friend Tobit, giving instructions to his son, instructed him precisely in this matter of crying out; that is, he instructed him in the good works he should perform; he told him to give to the poor, he ordered him to distribute alms to the needy, and he taught him this lesson: *Son, almsgiving does not allow you to go into the dark* (Tb 4:10).

A blind man was giving advice about perceiving and possessing light. *Almsgiving*, he said, *does not allow you to go into the dark*. Suppose his son had replied in astonishment, "So what does that mean, Father? That you never gave alms, so that now, as you speak, you are blind? Aren't you now in the dark, while you tell me that almsgiving doesn't allow you to go into the dark?" But he knew which light he was teaching his son about; he knew what he could see in his inner self. The son gave his father his hand, to guide his steps on earth; the father gave his to his son, to guide his steps to his home in heaven.

Cry out in the very thick of the crowds

17. To conclude this sermon, brothers and sisters, with a few words²² on the point that touches us most nearly and troubles us most anxiously; just notice

that there are crowds who rebuke the blind men for crying out. Well, all of you in this crowd here who want to be healed, don't let them frighten you off. Because there are many who are Christians in name and godless in deeds; don't let them frighten you off good works. Cry out among the crowds trying to shut you up, calling you back, scoffing at you, leading bad lives.

For you see, it isn't only with words that bad Christians try to put pressure on good ones, but also by their bad deeds. A good Christian doesn't want to go to the theater.²³ The very fact of his curbing his desire and not going to the theatre means he is crying out after Christ,²⁴ crying out to be healed. Other people scurry along to the theater, pagans perhaps or Jews, though the truth is, there would be so few of them in the theaters if Christians didn't go there too, that they would give up going for shame. So these trot along too, bearing the holy name to their own undoing. So cry out precisely by not going, by suppressing this desire for fleeting pleasure in your heart, and hold on your way to your savior's attention by your loud and persistent cries, so that Jesus may stand still, and cure you. Cry out in the very thick of the crowds, don't despair of getting the Lord's ear.

After all, those blind men didn't cry out on a side where there was no crowd, in order to be heard without any obstacle to overcome of people trying to shut them up. It was in the thick of the crowds that they cried out, and yet the Lord heard them. So you too, in the thick of sinners and profligates, in the thick of those who are hooked on the vanities of this world, cry out right there, asking the Lord to heal you. Don't cry out to the Lord on another side, don't go to the heretics and cry out to the Lord from there.²⁵

Please notice, brothers and sisters, that it was in the thick of the crowd trying to stop them crying out that those who did cry out were healed.

The kingdom of God is possessed equally by all

18. This too, as a matter of fact, is something your holinesses must pay attention to: what it is to persist in crying out. Let me tell you what I and many others with me have experienced in the name of Christ; the Church, after all, never ceases giving birth to such people. When any Christians begin to lead good lives, to be fervent in good works and to make light of the world, while this is all new to them they experience the fault-finding and opposition of cold, indifferent Christians. But if they persevere and overcome them by their doggedness and don't give up on their good works, those same people who were putting obstacles in their way will now start showing them respect.

They rebuke and harass and try to prevent them, you see, just as long as they are sure they can get their way. But as soon as they are defeated by the perseverance and progress of the others in virtue, they turn right around and start saying, "A great woman, a holy man; blessed are they to whom God has granted such graces." Now they start honoring and congratulating them, blessing and praising them—just like that crowd which was with the Lord. They were trying to stop the blind men from crying out; but as soon as they had cried out to such effect that they won a hearing and gained the Lord's merciful attention, the same

crowd now starts saying, *Jesus is calling you* (Mk 10:49). They are now full of encouragement, after their sharp attempts to shut them up.²⁶

The only ones who are not called by the Lord are those who labor under no difficulties in this life. But are there any, in fact, who don't labor under their sins and iniquities? If then all of us are laboring in one way or another, all of us are told *Come to me, all you who labor* (Mt 11:28). But if we are all told this, why do you blame your faults on the one who is extending you this invitation? Come. Don't get the idea his house is too small for you. The kingdom of God is possessed equally by all, totally by each. It isn't diminished by the growing number of occupiers, because it doesn't have to be divided among them. It is whole for each of them, because it is possessed harmoniously and amicably by the many.

In the Church there are both good and bad people

19. However, what we have come to know through the symbolic figures of this reading, dear brothers and sisters, is openly and explicitly stated in other passages of the holy books, namely that there are in the Church both good and bad people, whom we often call grain and chaff. None should desert the threshing floor before the time; they should put up with the chaff during threshing, they should put up with it on the threshing floor. After all, there won't be any to put up with in the barn. The winnower is coming, who will divide the bad from the good. There will also be a material separation, now preceded by a spiritual one. Always be disconnected from bad people in your hearts; for the time being be cautiously connected with them socially in the body.

Don't, however, be slack about correcting your own people (those, that is, who are your responsibility in any way at all) by warning them, instructing them, urging them, frightening them. Do it in any way you can. You will discover, of course, in the scriptures and in the examples of the saints, whether they lived before or after the coming of the Lord, that bad persons do not defile the good in the unity of God's people; but don't let that make you lazy in your efforts to correct the bad.

There are two ways in which the bad don't defile you: if you don't consent to them, and if you oppose them. Not consenting is the same as not taking part in. You take part in their actions, of course, when you give them the support of your will or your approval. So it was to warn us about this that the apostle said, *Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness*. And because it is not enough simply not to consent, if the duty of discipline is then neglected, he continues, *but rather also oppose them* (Eph 5:11). Notice how he includes both: "Take no part; but rather also oppose." What does "take no part" mean? Don't consent, don't applaud, don't approve. What does "but rather also oppose" mean? Rebuke, reprove, restrain.

In correcting hold fast to the love of gentleness

20. Next, in this matter of correcting or restraining other people's sins, the one who reproves someone else has to beware of being overbearing. That warning of the apostle's must be borne in mind: *Therefore anyone who thinks he stands must see he does not fall* (1 Cor 10:12). By all means let the rebuke be heard outwardly, in tones stern enough to frighten; but inwardly hold fast to the love of gentleness. *If anyone is overtaken in some transgression, as the same apostle says, you who are spiritual must instruct such a one in a spirit of meekness, looking to yourself, lest you too should be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ* (Gal 6:1-2). Again, he says somewhere else, *A servant of the Lord's ought not to be quarrelsome; but to be kindly to all, a good teacher, patient, quietly rebuking those whose thinking is at variance, in case perhaps God may help them to repent and come to know the truth, and recover their senses from the lures of the devil, by whom they have been captured and are being held at his pleasure* (2 Tm 24:24-26).

So then, you must neither be on the side of bad people and approve of them, nor be unconcerned about them and fail to take them to task, nor be arrogant toward them and take them to task in an offensive manner.

Don't let people with warped minds seduce you

21. Any, though, who forsake unity²⁷ violate charity, and whoever violate charity, whatever greatness they may have, are themselves nothing. If they speak with the tongues of men and of angels, if they know all mysteries, if they have all faith so as to shift mountains, if they distribute all their goods to the poor, if they hand over their bodies to be burnt, but do not have charity, they are nothing; it does them no good.²⁸ It's no use their having everything, if they don't have the one thing needed to make use of everything.

And so let us embrace charity, determined to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). Don't let's be seduced by those who have a materialistic understanding of things, and who by forming a separate body separate themselves in spiritual sacrilege from the grains of the Church scattered throughout the whole world.²⁹ Good seed, you see, has been sown throughout the world. The good sower, the Son of man, has scattered good seed everywhere, not only in Africa.³⁰ But the enemy has sown weeds on top of it. Yet what did the householder say? *Let them both grow till the harvest.* Grow where? All over the field, of course. What is the field? Just Africa? No. What is it then? Don't let me explain; let the Lord say; we won't permit anybody the luxury of an arbitrary guess. The disciples, you see, said to the Master, *Explain the parable of the weeds for us.* And the Lord explained it: *The good seed, he said, is the sons of the kingdom, while the weeds are the sons of the evil one.* Who sowed them? *But the enemy, he said, who sowed them is the devil.* What's the field? *The field, he said, is this world.* What's the harvest? *The harvest, he says, is the end of the world's age.* Who are the reapers? *The reapers, he said, are the angels* (Mt 13:30.36.38-39).

Is Africa the world? Is the harvest now in this time? Is the reaper Donatus?³¹ You must wait for the harvest throughout the whole world, you must grow to be ripe for the harvest throughout the whole world, throughout the whole world you must put up with the weeds until the harvest. Don't let people with warped minds seduce you, excessively light chaff that they are, whirling away from the threshing floor before the arrival of the winnower, don't let them seduce you. Hold them to this single parable of the weeds. Don't allow them to talk about anything else. "That man handed over the sacred volumes."³² No. "But that man did hand over the sacred volumes." Whoever handed them over, does the faithlessness of the betrayers make void the faith of God? What's the faith of God? What he promised to Abraham when he said, *In your seed shall all the nations be blessed* (Gn 22:18). What's the faith of God? *Let them both grow until the harvest.* Grow where? Throughout the field. What's the meaning of "throughout the field"? Throughout the world.

Weeds and chaff grow until the harvest

22. Here they say, "It's true, both had grown throughout the world; but now the good grain has shrunk back, and been confined to this region of ours and to our small numbers." No, the Lord doesn't let you explain it as you like. He himself expounds this parable, and in doing so shuts your mouth for you, your sacrilegious mouth, your godless mouth, profane mouth, mouth that contradicts you, who are contradicting the testator, who is inviting even you to enjoy the inheritance. How does he shut your mouth? By saying *Let them both grow until the harvest.* If the harvest has already taken place, let us believe that the good grain has shrunk back. Though not even then will it be diminished, but will be stored in the barn. That's what he said, after all: *First collect the weeds, and bind them up in bundles to be burnt; but store the grain in my barn* (Mt 13:30). So if it's growing till the harvest, after the harvest it's stored; shameless, godless fellow, when does it shrink?

I grant you, in comparison with the weeds and the chaff taken together, the grain is less in quantity; still, both grow until the harvest. Yes, when wickedness flourishes, the charity of many grows cold;³³ the weeds grow, the chaff piles up. But because over the whole field there cannot be a dearth of grain, which is to be saved by persevering to the end,³⁴ both go on growing till the harvest. And if, on account of the multitude of the wicked, it was said, *Do you think, when the Son of man comes, he will find faith on the earth?* (Lk 18:8)—and this word "earth" signifies all those who by breaking God's law imitate the one who was told *Earth you are, and into the earth you shall go* (Gn 3:19)—all the same, there is also a multitude of the good, and someone was told *So shall your seed be like the stars of the sky, and like the sand of the sea* (Gn 15:5; 22:17); and on their account the following too was not left unsaid: *Because many shall come from the east and from the west, and shall take their places at table with Abraham and Isaac in the kingdom of God* (Mt 8:11).

So both grow until the harvest; and the weeds or chaff have their texts in the

scriptures, and the good grain have theirs. Those who fail to understand them mix them up, and get mixed up themselves; and they make such a din in their blind zeal, that they refuse to hold their tongues even when the truth is laid openly before them.

Go out from there

23. "Here you are," they say, "this is what the prophet says: *Depart, go out from there, and do not touch anything unclean* (Is 52:11); so how are we to tolerate bad people for the sake of peace, when we are ordered to depart and go out from them, lest we should touch anything unclean?" We understand this departing spiritually, they take it literally and materially. I mean, I too cry out with the prophet, and whatever sort of instruments we clergy may be, God uses us for looking after you; we too cry out and say to you *Depart, go out from there, and do not touch anything unclean*—but with the touch of the heart, not bodily contact. What else does touching anything unclean mean, anyway, but consenting to sins? And what else does going out from there mean, but doing what is involved in rebuking the bad, to the extent that this can be done, taking account of each person's status and position, without damage to peace? It has displeased you that someone sinned: you have taken care not to touch an unclean thing. You have challenged, rebuked, warned, even administered, if the matter called for it, a suitable penalty that does no violence to unity: you have gone out from there.

Look at the actions of the saints, in case you think this is just my interpretation. The way the saints have understood these words, that of course is the way we must understand them. *Go out from there*, says the prophet. First I will claim for this interpretation the support of common usage, and afterward I will show that it is not mine. People frequently stand accused of things; and when they've been accused, they defend themselves. And when the accused person makes a just and reasonable defense, the people who hear it say, "He's gone out from there."³⁵ How has he gone out from there? He stays in the same place, and he has gone out from there. How has he gone out from there? By giving a reasonable account and a very fair defense of his action.

That's what the saints did, whenever they shook the dust off their feet against those who would not receive the peace proclaimed to them.³⁶ That watchman went out from there, who was told, *I have placed you as a watchman for the house of Israel*. You see, he was also told, *If you speak to the wicked man, and he does not turn away from wickedness and from his way, that wicked man will die in his wickedness, and you will deliver your soul* (Ez 3:16.19). If he does this, he goes out from there, not by physical withdrawal, but defended by his behavior; he has done what he had to do, even if the other man did not heed the warning he should have heeded.

That's the meaning of *Go out from there*.

The prophets stay in the people's midst—good or bad

24. Moses made this sort of plea, so did Isaiah, so did Jeremiah, so did Ezekiel. Let us see if they also did the other sort of thing, if they abandoned the people of God and took themselves off to other nations. How often and how vehemently Jeremiah inveighed against the sinners and villains among his people. He stayed among them though, he used to go into the same temple with them, he used to celebrate the same festivals; he lived in that society of impious villains, but by crying out he went out from there. That's what going out from there means, that's what it is not to touch anything unclean: neither to consent with the will nor to spare with the tongue.

What can I say about Jeremiah, about Isaiah, about Daniel, about Ezekiel, about the other prophets, who did not withdraw from a bad people, in order not to desert the good ones mixed up with that people, in which they themselves were able to be such? As for Moses, brothers and sisters, while he was receiving the law on the mountain, the people down below made an idol. The people of God, the people who had been led through the retreating waves of the Red Sea which then overwhelmed their pursuing enemies, after such great signs and miracles in the plagues that brought death to the Egyptians and in the protection that brought themselves to safety, this people still asked for an idol, extorted an idol, made an idol, worshiped an idol, sacrificed to an idol. God informs his servant what the people have done, and says he is going to destroy them from before his face. Moses intercedes, with the intention of returning to this people. And he had his chance to go out from them, in the way this lot understands it, in order not to touch anything unclean, in order not to live with such a crowd. But in fact he didn't do that.

And in case you should suppose that he acted like this more from necessity than from charity, God actually offered him another people: *And I will make you*, he said, *into a great nation* (Ex 32:10), so leaving himself free to eliminate those others. But Moses wouldn't accept this, he sticks to the sinners, he prays for the sinners. And how does he pray? This is a wonderful proof of his love, brothers and sisters. How does he pray? Notice something I've often spoken of, how his love is almost that of a mother. When God threatened that sacrilegious people, Moses' maternal instincts were roused, and on their behalf he stood up to the anger of God. *Lord*, he said, *if you will forgive them this sin, forgive; but if not, blot me out from the book you have written* (Ex 32:32). What sure maternal, and paternal, instincts, how sure his reliance, as he said this, on the justice and mercy of God! He knew that because he is just he wouldn't destroy a just man, and because he is merciful he would pardon sinners.

We must withdraw from evil with our hearts

25. I'm sure it is now clear to your sagacity how all such evidences of the scriptures are to be taken: that when scripture thunders at us that we must withdraw from the wicked, we are only being required to understand that we must withdraw in our hearts, or we may commit a greater evil in segregating the

good, than the one we would flee from in being connected with the bad, which is what the Donatists have done. If they were really good men reproofing bad ones, and not, as in fact they are, bad men defaming good ones, they would tolerate any sort of people for the sake of peace; after all, they received back the Maximianists as being thoroughly sound, after having condemned them earlier as thoroughly abandoned men.³⁷

The prophet certainly and clearly said *Depart and go out from there, and do not touch anything unclean* (Is 52:11). I, to understand what he said, pay attention to what he did. By what he did he explains to me what he said. What he said was, *Depart*. Who did he say it to? To the just, of course. Who did he say they were to depart from? From sinners, of course, and the unjust. What I'm asking is, did he depart from such people himself? I find that he didn't.³⁸ So he must have understood his own words differently. Because of course he himself would be the first to do what he commanded. He departed in his heart, that is, he upbraided and rebuked. By withholding any consent, he avoided touching anything unclean; by upbraiding them, he went out free in the sight of God. God, after all, could not blame him for his own sins, because he did not commit any; nor for other people's, because he didn't approve of them; nor for indifference or neglect, because he did not keep quiet; nor for pride, because he remained steadily in the unity of God's people.

In the same way, then, my dear brothers and sisters, there are those among you, in the circle of your acquaintance, who are still weighed down with love of the world—misers, perjurers, adulterers, addicts of vain spectacles, people who consult astrologers, temple oracles, augurs, soothsayers, drunkards, profligates, whatever kind of bad persons you know among your acquaintance; as far as you can, show your disapproval, and so depart in your hearts; and argue with them, and so go out from there; and do not consent to them, and thus avoid touching anything unclean.

NOTES

1. Sermon preached about the year 400. There is nothing to indicate where it was preached.

2. See Phil 2:6-7.

3. A sentence of quite excessive rhetorical ingenuity, which would have taxed the mental agility of Augustine's Latin hearers, quite as much as it probably taxes that of English readers. It is stylistic features such as this (among other things) that suggest a rather early date for the sermon. The older he grew, the less mannered and artificial his style became.

4. A constant theme of Augustine's, that believing must come before understanding (which he here calls seeing). In this context he frequently quotes Is 7:9, in the Septuagint version, *If you do not believe, you will not understand*.

5. And eternal wisdom is identified by Augustine, together with the whole Christian tradition, with the Word of God which became flesh, that is to say, with Christ. See 1 Cor 1:24.

6. Shadows, of course, contrasted with truth or reality, as in Heb 10:1. In that text, though, "shadow" signifies at least a distant sign or indication of the true reality, whereas here Augustine thinks of shadows as deceitful parodies of the truth, or worthless substitutes for it.

7. See Is 53:4.

8. If he is thinking of Lk 7:33, it is John the Baptist in fact of whom this was said. It is said to Jesus about himself in Jn 8:48. Neither instance is connected with the Beelzebub incident.

9. See also Gn 12:3; 18:18; 26:4; 28:14.

10. Quoted in Mt 21:42, Mk 12:10, Lk 20:17, Acts 4:11, and 1 Pt 2:7. It is also linked with Is 8:14 and 28:16.

11. Faith, for Augustine, is essentially a humbling of the intellect, a necessary though in some ways galling preliminary to the vision of God, because it is by faith that the "inner eye" he has been speaking of is healed. So it follows that for him the immediate object of faith is not God and his eternal timeless mysteries, but the fact—for God the utterly humbling fact—of the incarnation, the humanity of Christ. And this is so, even though in his christology Augustine habitually lays much more stress on the divinity of Christ than on his humanity.

12. See Jn 1:3. He is intending to add "but also because the Word became flesh," but he sidetracks himself. He goes on to say the same thing, rather less plainly, in due course.

13. See Phil 2:7.

14. The temporal sacraments Christ administers include what we mean by sacraments (notably baptism and the eucharist), but also much more; in this context especially they include the narratives of the gospels and other books of scripture which are read to us in church as our spiritual food.

15. See Ps 112:9.

16. See Mt 5:39-44; also Lk 19:8; Ex 21:37; 2 Sam 12:6.

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

18. That is, I think he is suggesting, hearts trampled (the literal meaning of *obtritis*) as roads are trampled by the feet of wayfarers; the image contained in our word "downtrodden"; but "downtrodden hearts" would convey the wrong impression.

19. He is talking about Christ's divinity. What he thought about the ascension of Christ in his risen and glorified humanity, I am not sure.

20. To make his point Augustine is being as unfair to Anna, Tobit's wife, as Tobit admits that he was himself. The kid she brought home had been given her by her employer.

Augustine is also rather incoherent, or at best rather vague, about what he means by the inner light. Earlier on he seemed to equate it with the divinity of Christ, and to mean by having inner sight restored the capacity to see God. Here it has been toned down to "the light of justice."

But this particular incoherence is characteristic, and provides an interesting clue to his thought, which can be followed more explicitly in Book VIII of his work on *The Trinity*. In that work he is seeking to understand the mystery of the Trinity, which is the mystery of the divine being at its most vertiginous and profound. And in Book VIII he makes an attempt to see the mystery directly, in itself—knowing, of course, that it is doomed to fail. But his argument, as far as it concerns us here, is that since God is Truth itself; and since it is in the light of Truth itself that our minds directly perceive certain *immutable truths*—for example *what justice is*—then it ought to be possible to see Truth itself, that is, God as he is in himself. But it isn't; the light is too dazzling, we can't look at it directly. So he turns to trying to perceive the divine light in its image, the human mind.

So that, in Augustine's mind, is the connection, the coherence between seeing the light of justice and seeing the light of God.

21. See Jn 1:3.

22. Don't be deceived and start gathering your belongings together in readiness to leave the church; he is going to carry on for at least another half hour.

23. I suppose the modern equivalent would be "to watch a blue movie," or "a pornographic video." But the Church in Augustine's day rather indiscriminately condemned *all* theatrical performances as gravely sinful even to watch, let alone to act in. And yet it is through the labors of monastic scribes (presumably) that the plays of Aristophanes and Plautus (neither of whom was exactly a prude) survive to this day.

24. Here the echo is rather of the Canaanite woman crying out after Jesus, as described by the disciples, Mt 15:23.

25. He means the Donatists, and he is referring to their assumption that they were the Church

of the saints, so that among them there wouldn't be any bad Christians trotting off to the theaters and so on, and trying to stop good Christians from "crying out."

26. All this is a fair enough observation on average human behavior; but I have the feeling that he forgot the point he was going to make about perseverance; so far all he has shown is "that perseverance always pays." But he hasn't shown that it always has to meet new obstacles, which one naturally supposed at the beginning of section 18 was his intention—for example that the devout must beware of allowing the plaudits of the converted crowd going to their heads, and cooling their fervor.

27. He is referring specifically to the unity of the Catholic Church. But the concept of unity is much more fundamental in his thought than this specific instance of it—a concept deriving its power from the divine unity of the three persons, a unity intended by God's providence to be reflected in the unity of the whole human race, signified by its being derived from one individual, Adam, "the Man." It is this dynamism of the concept that explains Augustine's passionate concern, against the Donatist schismatics, for the unity of the Catholic Church which, as Vatican II so beautifully expressed it in its Constitution on the Church, "is a kind of sacrament, or sign and instrument, of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind" (*Lumen Gentium* 1).

28. See 1 Cor 13:1-3.

29. He has at long last closed with the Donatists and grappled them.

30. The Roman "diocese" equivalent to modern Tunisia and Algeria, not the whole continent.

31. The man who gave the Donatist schism its name, though he didn't actually originate it. He died in 355.

32. The accusation of the first Donatists against their Catholic rivals, that during the great persecution, 303 to 311 and beyond, they had handed over the scriptures to the authorities. So they were called *tradidores*, handers-over, betrayers, traitors.

33. See Mt 24:12.

34. See Mt 24:13.

35. In English, of course, they say "He's got out of that."

36. See Lk 10:11.

37. The Maximianists, in about 392, had started a schism within the Donatist Church that was a kind of miniature replica of the Donatist schism itself within the Catholic Church at the beginning of the fourth century. The deacon Maximian had engineered the deposition of the Donatist bishop of Carthage, Primian, and got himself elected in his stead. The main Donatist body under Primian (who naturally did not accept his deposition) of course excommunicated Maximian and his supporters, but in a Council at Bagai in 397 they agreed to receive them back without treating their ordinations and baptisms as invalid, exactly as the Catholic Church had always been ready to receive back Donatists.

The whole episode was a godsend to Augustine and the Catholic controversialists, as illustrating the impracticality (to put it at its lowest) of Donatist principles.

38. Augustine knew nothing about Proto- and Deutero- (let alone Trito-) Isaiah. He assumed that this passage was a prophecy of the prophet Isaiah who prophesied in the reigns of King Ahaz and King Hezekiah, from about 740 to 700 BC. In fact this prophecy was in all likelihood spoken toward the end of the exile in Babylon, about 550 BC, and the prophet is bidding the Jews depart from Babylon. Augustine found (for example in Is 36 to 39) that the prophet Isaiah never departed from Jerusalem.

SERMON 89

ON THE WORDS IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 21:12-19, WHERE JESUS CAUSED THE TREE TO WITHER; AND ABOUT THOSE IN LUKE 24:28, WHERE HE PRETENDED HE WAS GOING ON FURTHER

Date: 397¹

No one who doesn't have Christ has any fruit

1. The reading of the gospel a moment or two ago has warned us, terrified us indeed, about the danger of having leaves and not having fruit; which means, in a nutshell, all words and no deeds. Truly terrifying!² Who wouldn't be afraid, when they see with their mind's eye in this reading the tree all dried up, and hear the words, as if spoken to themselves, *May fruit never be produced again by you for ever* (Mt 21:19). May the terror correct us, may correction bring forth fruit.

There is no doubt at all, you see, that the Lord Christ had in mind a particular tree being deservedly shriveled up, which would have leaves and not have any fruit. It is the synagogue, the one that was not called but was instead rejected. Because we mustn't forget that a people of God was called from that source, the one which in the prophets truly and sincerely awaited God's salvation in the person of Jesus Christ. It was from there, the synagogue, that the apostles came, from there that whole crowd that went in procession in front of the Lord's donkey and sang, *Hosanna to the son of David; blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord* (Mt 21:9). There was a vast crowd of faithful Jews, a vast crowd of those who believed in Christ before his blood was shed for them. I mean, it cannot have been in vain that the Lord himself had only come to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.³

In others, however, it was after he had been crucified and already been exalted in the heavens that he found the fruit of repentance; and he didn't cause them to wither, but cultivated them in his field, and watered them with the word. So also from the synagogue came the four thousand Jews who believed after the disciples had been filled with the Holy Spirit, and they and their companions started speaking with the tongues of all nations,⁴ and by this diversity of tongues foretold after a fashion the Church that was to be found in the future among all nations. They came to believe at that time, and they were sheep of the house of

Israel that had got lost; but because *the Son of man had come to seek and save what had got lost* (Lk 19:10), he found them too. Because they had been ravaged by wolves, so to speak, they were hiding heaven knows where in the briar patches; and it was because they were skulking in the briar patches that he couldn't reach them to find them without being lacerated by the thorns of his passion; all the same, he did reach them, and find them, and redeem them. They had killed him, or rather not so much him as themselves. They were saved by the one who was killed for them. When the apostles spoke they were pricked to the heart, they who had pierced him with a lance,⁵ their consciences were pricked; being conscience-stricken they sought advice, and when it was given they accepted it;⁶ they repented, they found grace, and as believers they drank the blood which they had shed as raging savages.

Those however who stayed behind in that evil and sterile generation up to the present day and until the end were signified by that tree. Right now you visit them, and you find among them all the utterances of the prophets; but these are just leaves; Christ is hungry, he is looking for fruit; but he doesn't find any fruit among them, for the simple reason that he doesn't find himself among them.

The truth is, no one who doesn't have Christ has any fruit. And you don't have Christ if you don't hold on to unity, if you don't have charity.⁷ Listen to the apostle: *Now the fruit of the Spirit is charity*. He is about to recommend a kind of packet of assorted fruits, so he says, *Now the fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace, long suffering* (Gal 5:22). Don't be astonished at the consequences, where charity is the start.

*The Lord could do many things without the disciples,
the disciples nothing without the Lord*

2. That's why, when the disciples were astonished at the tree being withered up, he turned their attention to faith, with the words, *If you have faith, and don't have any hesitations*—that is, if you trust God in everything, and don't say, "God can do this, he can't do that," but rely completely on the might of the Almighty—*not only will you do this, but even if you say to this mountain, Take yourself off and throw yourself into the sea, it will happen. And whatever you pray for, believing, you shall receive* (Mt 21:21-22).

We read of miracles performed by the disciples, or rather, performed by the Lord through the disciples: *for without me*, he said, *you can do nothing* (Jn 15:5). The Lord could do many things without the disciples, the disciples nothing without the Lord. The one who was able to make the disciples themselves was not of course assisted by them to make them. We read about the miracles of the apostles; nowhere do we read of a tree shriveled up by them, or of a mountain dumped in the sea.

So let us inquire when and how it was done. The Lord's words, after all, cannot have been pointless. If you consider these ordinary, familiar trees and mountains, then it didn't happen.⁸ If you consider the tree he spoke about, and that mountain of the Lord about which the prophet said, *In the last days the*

mountain of the Lord shall be manifest (Is 2:2), if you consider these, and understand these, then it has been done, and done through the disciples. The tree is the Jewish people, but, I repeat, that people as rejected, not as called; that tree we have been reminded of is the Jewish people. The mountain, as we are taught by the prophet's testimony, is the Lord himself. The withered tree is the Jewish nation, deprived of the honor of the Christ; the sea is this world with all its nations.

So now observe the apostles speaking to the tree that is to be withered, and throwing a mountain into the sea. In the Acts of the Apostles they speak to the Jews who contradict them and resist the word of truth, who have leaves, that is, and don't have any fruit, and they tell them, *To you first it was necessary to preach the word of God; but because you have rejected it*—you speak the words of the prophets, and you don't acknowledge the one foretold by the prophets—*behold, we turn to the Gentiles* (Acts 13:46). This too, you see, had been foretold by the prophet: *Behold, I have set you as the light of the nations, that you may be salvation to the ends of the earth* (Is 49:6).

There you have the tree withered up, and Christ transferred to the nations, the mountain to the sea. I mean, how could the tree avoid being withered up, finding itself in the vineyard of which it was said, *I will command my clouds not to pour down showers upon it* (Is 5:6).¹⁰

Act of prophecy

3. That our Lord wished to draw our attention to his having done this thing as an act of prophecy; to his having wished, that is, not only to perform a miracle with this tree, but also to indicate some future reality by the miracle; well, there are many details that suggest this to us, that persuade us of it, that indeed oblige us to admit it, however reluctant we may be.

First, what sin had the tree committed by not having any fruit? Even if it had had no figs at its own proper time, that is, at the season for that sort of fruit, no blame of course would have attached to the tree, because trees, lacking sensitivity, can't be blamed for things. Add to this what we read in another evangelist's account of the episode: *It was not the season for those fruits* (Mk 11:13). I mean, that was the season in which the fig tree puts out its new leaves, which as we know come out before the fruit. The proof of this is that the Lord's passion was approaching, and we know at what time of year he suffered. And even if we failed to notice this, we ought of course to believe the evangelist when he says, *It was not the season for those fruits*.

So if it had only been a matter of presenting us with a miracle, and not of symbolizing something prophetically, it would have been much kinder of the Lord, and more worthy of his mercy, to find some withered tree and make it green again. just as he healed the sick, cleansed lepers, raised the dead. But this time, as though acting against his own rule of kindness, he found a living tree, not bearing fruit out of season, but not denying fruit either to its gardener—and he caused it to wither.

It's as though he were saying to each and every one of us: "I didn't take pleasure in the withering of this tree, but I wanted to suggest to you that I didn't decide to do this without a reason; I wanted to jolt you into attending more carefully to the incident. I didn't curse that tree, I didn't inflict a punishment on a non-sentient tree; I gave you a fright, whoever you are who may take notice, to make you careful not to ignore Christ in his hunger, and to take more pains to be loaded with fruit than to be shady with leaves."

Various meanings in scripture

4. That's one detail by which the Lord suggests he wanted to signify something. What else? He's hungry, and he comes up to a tree looking for fruit. Didn't he know it wasn't yet the season? The tree's cultivator knew it, did the tree's creator not know it? So he's looking for fruit on a tree which it didn't yet have. Is he really looking for it, or is he rather pretending to look for it? I mean, if he was really looking for it, he was making a mistake. But it's unthinkable he was mistaken. Therefore he was pretending. You shrink from the idea of his pretending, you admit he was mistaken. You don't like the idea of his making a mistake, you are brought up against his indulging in pretense. We are left hopping like a cat on hot bricks in the middle. If we're roasting, let us wish for rain, to grow green again, or we may find ourselves saying something unworthy of the Lord, and start withering up.

The evangelist does indeed say, *He came to a tree and did not find any fruit on it* (Mt 21:19). Obviously he wouldn't have said about him that he didn't find any, unless he was really looking for it, or pretending to look for what he knew wasn't there. Well in that case, we have no doubt at all, we cannot possibly say Christ is making a mistake. What? We say he pretended? Or do we really say this? How shall we get out of this? Let's say this much: unless an evangelist said this somewhere else about the Lord, we wouldn't dare say it on our own. Let's say what the evangelist wrote; and when we've said it, let us understand it. But in order to understand, let us first believe. For *unless you believe, you shall not understand* (Is 7:9, LXX), said the prophet.

After the resurrection the Lord was walking along a road with two of his disciples who hadn't yet recognized him, and whom he was accompanying as a third traveler. They reached the place they were going to, and the evangelist says, *But he pretended he was going further* (Lk 24:28). They, however, detained him with proper humanity, saying it was growing late, and asked him to stay there with them. Received as a guest, he breaks bread, and as the bread is blessed and broken, he is recognized. So then, don't let's be afraid any longer of saying he pretended to look, if *he pretended he was going further*.

But another question now crops up. Yesterday I spent a long time insisting that the apostles always told the truth.¹¹ How then can we find the Lord himself pretending? So then, brothers and sisters, I have to tell you, and suggest to you to the best of my ability, which the Lord endows me with for your sakes, and convince you about something you must hold on to as a kind of rule in all the scriptures. Everything that is said or happens is either to be taken in its proper

sense, or it signifies something symbolically, or at all events it has each: both its proper sense and its symbolic meaning. I have proposed three possibilities, and I must give you examples, taken of course from the holy scriptures.¹²

We should take it in the proper sense when we are told that the Lord suffered, that he rose again and ascended into heaven, that we are going to rise again at the end of time, that if we don't spurn him we are going to reign with him for ever. Take all this in its proper sense, don't look for symbols. Just as it is written, that's how it is. So also with actions: the apostle went up to Jerusalem to see Peter.¹³ The apostle did this, it happened, that's what it means. It tells you a story of something done; that's its proper meaning.

A symbolic statement: *The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the head of the corner* (Ps 118:22; Mt 21:42). If we understand "stone" in the proper sense, what stone did the builders reject, and it became the head of the corner? If we take "corner" in the proper sense, of what corner did this stone become the head? If we admit it is said symbolically, and you take it symbolically, the cornerstone is Christ, head of the corner, head of the Church. Why is the corner the Church? Because he called the Jews from this side, the Gentiles from that; and like two walls coming from different directions and coming together in him, he tied them together by the grace of his peace. *For he is our peace, who made of both one* (Eph 2:14).

Symbolic sense

5. You have heard examples of things said in the proper sense, things done in the proper sense, something said in the symbolic sense. There are many, but for the moment what occurs to me from mentioning the cornerstone is when Jacob anointed a stone which he had placed under his head when he went to sleep, and in his sleep he had seen a stupendous dream, stairs¹⁴ rising up from earth to heaven, and angels going up and coming down, with God leaning over the stairs. Jacob realized what he ought to represent symbolically, and how he should demonstrate to us that he was no stranger to the meaning of that vision and revelation, and so he made the stone stand symbolically for Christ. Don't be surprised at his anointing it, because Christ has taken his name from anointing.¹⁵

Now this Jacob had been called in scripture a man without guile. Jacob himself, as you know, was surnamed Israel.¹⁶ That's why in the gospel, when the Lord saw Nathanael, he said, *Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile*. And that Israelite, not yet knowing who was speaking to him, replied, *How do you know me?* And the Lord said to him, *While you were under the fig tree I saw you*, as though to say, "While you were under the shadow of sin, I predestined you." And Nathanael, remembering he had been under the fig tree where the Lord had not been, recognized the divine in him and answered, *You are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel*. Though he was under the fig tree, he didn't become a withered fig tree; he acknowledged Christ. And the Lord said to him, *Because I said, While you were under the fig tree I saw you, is that why you believe? You shall see greater things than that.*

What are these greater things? *Amen I tell you.* Because that man is an Israelite in whom there is no guile, look back to Jacob in whom there is no guile and recollect, when Jesus tells you, the stone at his head, the vision in his sleep, the stairs from earth to heaven, the beings coming down and going up; and then see what the Lord says to the Israelite without guile: *you shall see heaven opened*—listen, guileless Nathanael, to what guileless Jacob saw—and angels going up and coming down—to whom?—to the Son of man (Jn 1:47-51).

That's why he, the Son of man, was anointed at the head,¹⁷ because *the head of the woman is the man, the head of the man is Christ* (1 Cor 11:3). He didn't say, though, "Going up from the Son of man and coming down to the Son of man," as though he were only down below,¹⁸ but *going up and coming down to the Son of man*. Listen to the Son of man crying out up above: *Saul, Saul; listen to the Son of man down below: Why are you persecuting me?* (Acts 9:4).¹⁹

Proper sense and figurative or symbolic sense

6. You have heard a saying to be taken properly: that we shall rise again; a deed to be taken properly: that Paul went up to Jerusalem to see Peter; a saying to be taken figuratively or symbolically: *the stone which the builders rejected*; a deed to be taken figuratively: the anointing of the stone which was at Jacob's head. How I owe you what you are still waiting for, an example that is both things at once; something done in a straightforward proper sense, which also signifies something figurative or symbolic.

We know that Abraham had two sons, one by the servant girl, one by the free woman. It was an actual event in its own right; it isn't only a story that was told, it also really happened. You are waiting to hear what was symbolized by it? *These are the two covenants* (Gal 2:22-24).

So whatever is said figuratively or symbolically is, after a fashion, a pretense or fiction. But because it terminates in a meaning, and the meaning bears the trustworthy stamp of truth, it avoids the charge of falsehood.

Why, there you had the sower going out to sow; and in the sowing, seed fell on the path, fell on rocky places, fell among thorns, fell in good soil.²⁰ Well, who went out to sow, or when did he go out, or among what thorns, on what stones, into what field? I mean, if a man really went out sowing, and cast seed, as we have heard, over these various spots, it wouldn't be fiction. But if you hear it as fiction, you understand it as meaning something; it is fiction, but not also a lie.²¹ Why? Because something pretended or fictitious has a figurative meaning, it doesn't deceive you. It's looking for someone who will understand it, not for someone to mislead.

This is what Christ wanted to draw our attention to when he went looking for figs; he was there drawing our attention to the fact of a figurative, as distinct from a fallacious fiction or pretense—thus to the possibility of praiseworthy, not sinful pretending, not the sort that will lead you, when you examine it, into falsehood, but the sort that will enable you, when you analyze it, to discover truth.

Detain Christ in faith

7. I see what you are going to say: "Explain to me, please, what he meant by pretending to go further. Because if he meant nothing by it, it is deceitful, it's a lie." Yes, in virtue of the explanations I've been giving and these very distinctive rules, I am obliged to say what that pretense of going further signified. He pretended he was going further, and he was detained and prevented from going further.

So then, it's clear that as regards his bodily presence the Lord Christ was assumed to be absent. His being assumed to be absent is as though he were going further. Detain him in faith, detain him for the breaking of bread. What am I talking about? Have you seen?²² If you have seen, then you have found Christ there. This is not the time to speak any more about the sacrament. Those people who put off getting to know about the sacrament,²³ well, Christ is going on further from them. They should detain it, not let it go; let them only invite him in to enjoy their hospitality, and they are invited to heaven.

NOTES

1. This sermon was preached between 22 May and 24 June 397, during a Council of African bishops held in Carthage from May to August.

2. Especially for Augustine, whose whole profession and genius was words; and with him for all preachers and teachers and ministers of the gospel.

3. See Mt 15:24.

4. See Acts 3:4.

5. In fact it was a Roman soldier who did this, Jn 19:34.

6. See Acts 2:37.

7. Here he seems to have switched his attention from the Jews who don't have Christ to the Donatists who don't have Christ, because they haven't held on to unity.

8. Evidently Augustine hadn't heard the story of Gregory the Wonderworker, in the third century, moving a mountain out of the way to facilitate the building of a church (old breviary, 17 November).

9. Here the text adds the words *hoc est, folia habentes*—that is, having leaves. But they add nothing at all to the meaning of the passage, and scarcely fit grammatically into the sentence. I omit them, as having crept into the text from a few lines above.

10. Augustine's memory has wandered unconsciously to the parable of the barren fig tree planted in a vineyard, Lk 13:6-9.

11. He had been preaching, according to Possidius' *Index*, on Gal 2:11, where Paul *withstood Peter to the face*. The sermon is now lost. But the point he was making there (presumably) is made abundantly and painfully clear in correspondence on the subject between Augustine and Jerome. Jerome, to avoid the scandal of apostles quarreling with each other, and even more of Peter the prince of the apostles being plainly in the wrong, maintained that the whole confrontation was a put-up job, a pretense, in order to make Paul's point more effectively. Augustine would have none of this. See Letters 40, 67, 68, 71, 72, 73, 81, 82.

12. In later centuries scholastic theologians would work out fairly systematic theories about "the senses of scripture." They all, or at least the Thomists among them, laid as a foundation the absolute

priority of what they called the literal sense, interpreted as signifying "the sense which the author intended." (So "literal sense" would appear sometimes to be a misnomer, since authors occasionally intend not to be taken literally.) On this could be built a structure of various "spiritual senses."

Augustine can scarcely be said to have a systematic theory. He, like almost all his contemporaries, was greatly influenced by Origen. With rather more sensitivity to language than the scholastics, he talks not of a literal, but of a proper sense. But he thinks what he variously calls figurative, sacramental, or mystical senses are usually much more important (certainly much more interesting), and even that there are passages which don't have a "proper" sense at all—or if they do, it is not always true. In this he follows Origen closely.

This whole style of interpretation is foreign to nearly all contemporary biblical exegesis. One may think their neglect, indeed rejection, of it has been too cavalier and insensitive.

13. See Gal 1:18.

14. I prefer "stairs" to the usual "ladder," both because the Latin *scalae* is a plural word, and more seriously because the visual reality behind the dream for the author was in all probability a Babylonian ziggurat, a temple in the form of a massive step pyramid, which would remind one more of a giant's staircase than of a giant's ladder.

15. See Gn 28:11.18. "Christ," *Christos* in Greek, means "Anointed."

16. See Gn 32:28. That Augustine could suppose Jacob could seriously have been called a man without guile will probably strike readers as odd, given Jacob's track record. But in fact Augustine's Latin text of Gn 25:27, where RSV has Jacob "a quiet man," describes him as without guile. The whole Jacob symbolism is treated at somewhat inordinate length in Sermon 4. See also his treatises *Lying* and *Against Lying*.

17. He is referring to "the stone at the head" of Jacob, which he anointed, and which symbolized Christ the Son of man, and he explains both symbol and thing symbolized, rather curiously, by the text from 1 Cor.

18. Reading *deorsum* instead of *sursum*, up above, which simply doesn't seem to fit the case. It's true he deals with the same point in *Expositions of the Psalms* 44(45),20, where he does talk of Christ being *sursum*. But the angle of vision is rather different there, though the point being made is much the same.

19. Christ the head up above in heaven, Christ the body, the Church, down below on earth. But "Son of man" for Augustine was primarily an earthly title. So if one were not careful, one might think it only applied to Christ during his life on earth.

20. See Mt 13:3-8.

21. The Latin text of the last two sentences is very confused. Without a critical text to go by, I have just made the emendations that seemed to me to produce the best sense. I here give first the text as it is, and then as I emend and translate it:

1) *Si audis fictum, intelligis significative; fictum est. Si enim vere homo seminator exiret et semina, sicut audivimus, per haec diversa jactaret, non erat fictum, sed nec mendacium. Non dum autem fictum, sed non mendacium.*

2) *Si enim vere homo seminator exiret et semina, sicut audivimus, per haec diversa jactaret, non erat fictum. Si audis fictum, intelligis significative; fictum est, sed nec mendacium.*

I transpose the first sentence with the first two thirds of the second, and omit the third as the puzzled gloss of some copyist, which has crept into a rather mixed up text.

22. He was talking about the eucharist, but in veiled language because of the so-called "discipline of the secret," and asking them if they had penetrated the code.

23. Catechumens of a rather tepid or conventional sort, who put off indefinitely their request for baptism. The "it" he goes on to say they should detain is presumably the sacrament and knowledge of it.

SERMON 90

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 22:1-14, WHERE IT TALKS OF THE
WEDDING OF THE KING'S SON. AGAINST THE DONATISTS, ON CHARITY:
PREACHED AT CARTHAGE IN THE RESTORED BASILICA

Date: 411-420¹

1. All the faithful² know about the wedding of the king's son and the banquet it was celebrated with, and the fare of the Lord's table is offered to all of them at will. But it is of some importance how you approach, when access to the table is not forbidden you. In fact the holy scriptures teach us that the Lord provides two banquets, one to which both good and bad people come, the other to which the bad do not approach.

So the Lord's banquet about which we heard just now when the gospel was read clearly had good and bad people on the invitation list. All who excused themselves from attending this banquet are bad; but not all who did come are good. So I am addressing my remarks to all you good people who sit down to this banquet, those of you who take to heart the words *Whoever eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment upon himself* (1 Cor 11:29). All of you who are of that sort, I am reminding not to look for good people outside, and also to put up with bad people inside.³

The good and the bad

2. I'm sure your graces would like to hear who the people are about whom I am reminding you not to look for good people outside and to put up with bad people inside. Well, if all those inside are bad, who am I addressing my reminder to? On the other hand, if all those inside are good, whom am I advising to put up with the bad? So let's first try, with the Lord's help, to resolve this question as best we can.

If you weigh up the meaning of "good" clearly and absolutely, no one is good but the one God. You have the Lord's own plainest statement: *Why ask me about the good? No one is good but the one God* (Mt 19:17). So how did that wedding feast have good and bad guests, if no one is good but the one God?

The first thing you must know is that we are all, according to one way of looking at it, bad. Definitely, we are all of us, according to one way of looking

at it, bad; also, according to one way of looking at it, we aren't all good. I mean, can we compare ourselves with the apostles? And the Lord said to them, *So if you, though you are bad, know how to give good gifts to your children.* If we consider the scriptures, we find there was one bad one among the twelve apostles, about whom the Lord says elsewhere, *And you are clean, but not all of you* (Jn 13:10). And yet addressing them all together he says, *If you, though you are bad.* Peter heard this, John heard it, Andrew heard it, all the other eleven⁴ heard it. What did they hear? *You, though you are bad, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him* (Mt 7:11).

On hearing they were bad, they must have despaired; on hearing that God in heaven was their Father, they could breathe again. *Though you are bad*, he says. So what do bad people deserve but punishment? *How much more*, he says, *will your Father who is in heaven*. What else is due to sons but a reward? With being called bad comes fear of punishment; with being called sons comes the hope of being heirs.

The bad excluded from the banquet

3. So in one respect the same people were bad who in another respect were good. I mean, those who were told, *Though you are bad, you know how to give good gifts to your children*, immediately afterward heard the words added, *How much more will your Father who is in heaven . . .* So he is the Father of bad men, but not of men to be abandoned, because he is the doctor of men to be healed. So in one way they were bad.

And yet those guests of the royal host at the king's wedding, about whom it is said, *They invited the good and the bad* (Mt 22:10), don't belong, I think, to this class⁵ in such a way that they should be reckoned among the bad, whom we heard being cast out in the person of the man found to be without a wedding garment.⁶

In one respect, I've been saying, those who were good were bad; in another respect those who were bad were good. Listen to John on the respect in which they were bad: *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* There you have in what respect they were bad: because they had sin. In what respect were they good? *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and he will cleanse us of all iniquity* (1 Jn 1:8-9).

So if we say, according to this explanation which you have heard me support, as I think, from the holy scriptures, that the same people are both good in one respect and bad in another respect; and if it is in this sense that we wish to take the statement *They invited the good and the bad*, that is people who were both good and bad; if that's how we wish to take it, we are not allowed to do so, because of that man who was found not to have a wedding garment, and who wasn't just thrown out so that he was deprived merely of sharing in that banquet, but so that he was condemned to punishment in eternal darkness.

Leave the few, cast forth the many

4. But someone will say, "What's the significance of one man? What's surprising about it? Does it matter much if one man not having a wedding garment crept in with the mob among the servants of the royal host? Could it just be because of him that it says, *They invited the good and the bad*?" So pay close attention, brothers and sisters, and make an effort to understand. That one man was one whole class, because there were many of him. Now let a careful listener answer me, and say, "I don't want you to fob me off with your guesses; I want it proved to my satisfaction that that one man was many people."

The Lord will be standing by, I will prove it plainly, and I won't need long to be able to prove it. God will help me with his very own words, and will ensure through me that it will be clear to you. Here you are. *The householder*⁷ went in to observe the guests at table. Notice, my dear brothers and sisters, that the only business of the servants was to invite and bring along the good and the bad. Notice that it doesn't say, "The servants looked over the seated guests, and found there a man who didn't have a wedding garment, and said to him . . ." That's not what's written. It was the householder who observed, the householder who made the discovery, the householder who made the distinction, the householder who effected the separation.⁸

That is a point that was not to be overlooked, but it was something else we had undertaken to prove: how that one man was many people. So, *the householder went in to observe the guests at table, and he found a man who did not have on a wedding garment. And he said to him, Friend, how did you get in here not having a wedding garment? But he was speechless.* The one who was questioning him, you see, was not the sort of person for whom he could make up any excuse. That garment, in fact, was being observed on the heart, not on the body; if it had been the sort you put on over the rest, its lack wouldn't have passed unnoticed even by the servants. You can recognize where the wedding garment is to be worn from the text which says, *May your priests be clothed with justice* (Ps 132:9). It is about that garment that the apostle says, *Provided we be found clothed, and not naked* (2 Cor 5:3).

So a man was discovered by the Lord who had escaped the notice of the servants. When questioned he is speechless; he's bound, he's cast forth, he is condemned, one out of many. (O Lord, I said that you are advising me how to advise them all.)⁹ Recall with me the words you have heard, and in a moment you will discover that that one man was many, in a moment you will be judging for yourselves. Certainly, the Lord had questioned one man, had said to one man, *Friend, how did you get in here?* One man had been speechless, and about that one man it had been said, *Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; that is where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* Why all this? *For many are called, but few are chosen* (Mt 22:10-14).

What could anybody oppose to this manifestation of the truth? *Cast him*, he says, *into the outer darkness.* That one man, of course, about whom the Lord says, *For many are called, but few are chosen.* So few are not cast forth outside. Sure, that was just one man who didn't have on a wedding garment. *Cast him*

forth. Why is he to be cast forth? *For many are called, but few are chosen.* Leave the few, cast forth the many. Certainly it was just one man. This quite definitely one man was not only many, but in the mass he quite surpassed the number of the good. After all, the good too are many; but in comparison with the bad, the good are few.

Large crops of wheat are produced; compare with the quantity of the chaff, and the grains are few. The same people, taken in themselves, are many, in comparison with the bad, few. How can I prove that in themselves they are many? *Many shall come from the east and from the west.* Where will they come to? To that banquet to which good and bad enter together? He was speaking of another banquet, and so he added, *and shall sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 8:11). That is the banquet to which the bad are going to have no access. Let the present one we assist at be worthily received, to ensure we come at last to that one.

So the same people are many who are also few; many taken by themselves, few in comparison with the bad. So what did the Lord say? He found one man, and he said, "Let the many be cast forth, let the few remain." For to say *Many are called, but few chosen* amounts to showing openly who in this present banquet are of the sort to be taken on to that other banquet, to which none of the bad will have access.

Receive the wedding garment

5. So what's the position? All of you who approach the Lord's table, which we have here, I don't want you to be among the many who are to be separated, but among the few who are to be preserved. How can you make sure of this? Receive the wedding garment. "Explain the wedding garment to us," you will say. There is no doubt at all that it is a garment which only the good have, those who are to be left at the banquet, preserved for the banquet to which no bad person has access, to be brought through to it by the grace of the Lord. They are the ones who have on the wedding garment.

So let us look, my dear brothers and sisters, among the faithful for those who have something that the bad don't have, and that will be the wedding garment. If we say it's the sacraments, well you can see how they are common to the bad and the good. Is it baptism? It's true that without baptism nobody can come to God, but not everybody who receives baptism comes to God. So we can't take baptism to be the wedding garment, I mean the sacrament itself.¹⁰ As far as that goes, the garment I see on the good I also see on the bad.¹¹

Perhaps it's the altar, or what is received from the altar. But we see that many eat, and they eat and drink judgment upon themselves.¹² So what is it? Fasting? Bad people too fast. Churchgoing? Bad people also go to church. What, finally, about the performance of miracles? Not only do both good and bad people perform miracles, but sometimes good people don't perform them. Take the people of the Old Testament; Pharaoh's magicians performed miracles, the Israelites did not. Among the Israelites only Moses and Aaron performed them. The rest did not, but they saw, they feared, they believed. Were Pharaoh's

magicians, performing their miracles, better than the people of Israel who were not able to do so, and yet the people belonged to God? In the Church, listen to the apostle: *Are all prophets? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues?* (1 Cor 12:29-30).

Love from a pure heart is the wedding garment

6. So what is that wedding garment? This is the wedding garment: *But the goal of the commandment, says the apostle, is love from a pure heart, and from a good conscience and from an unfeigned faith* (1 Tm 1:5). That is the wedding garment. Not any sort of love; even people, after all, who are companions in a bad conscience are often enough seen to love each other. Those who commit armed robberies together, who engage together in witchcraft, who share their devotion to play-actors, who yell encouragement to their favorite charioteers and huntsmen,¹³ they all, very often, love each other. But you don't find in them *love from a pure heart, and from a good conscience and from an unfeigned faith*. It's only such love that is the wedding garment.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have no love, I have become, he says, *booming bronze or clanging cymbals*. The gifts of tongues have come along, and they are asked, "Why have you come in here, not having on a wedding garment?" *If I have prophecy, he says, and know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and have faith so as to shift mountains, but have no love, I am nothing* (1 Cor 13:1-2). There you have some miracles performed by people who as often as not do not have on the wedding garment. If I have all these things he says, and do not have Christ, I am nothing. *I*, he says, *am nothing*.

So is prophecy nothing? So is knowledge of mysteries nothing? No, these things are not nothing. But I, if I have them and don't have love, am nothing. How many good things there are which are of no use at all without the one good thing! If I don't have love, if I spend generously on the poor, if I come forward to confess the name of Christ to the point of shedding my blood, to the point of going to the stake, well these things can be done out of love of glory, and they are vain. So because they can be vainly done out of love of glory, not out of a generous and devoted charity, he mentions them too; so now hear about them too: *If I distribute all my goods for the use of the poor, and if I hand over my body to be burned, but do not have love, it is of no use to me at all* (1 Cor 13:3).

That is the wedding garment. Examine yourselves; if you have it, you can be confident about the Lord's banquet. There are two things in one person: charity and cupidity, love and greed. Let love be born in you if it hasn't been born yet; and if it has, let it be fed and nourished, let it grow. But as for that greed, even if in this life it cannot be totally extinguished, *because if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us* (1 Jn 1:8), but insofar as there is greed in us, to that extent we are not without sin; so let love increase, greed decrease, so that one day that one, that is, love, may be perfected, greed may be wiped out.

Clothe yourselves in the wedding garment; I'm addressing you, you people

who don't yet have it on. Now you are already inside, you have already come in to the banquet, and you are still not wearing a garment in honor of the bridegroom. You are still seeking your own advantage, not that of Jesus Christ.¹⁴ A wedding garment, after all, is accepted in honor of the couple, that is, of the bride and bridegroom. You know who the bridegroom is: Christ. You know who the bride is: the Church. Show respect to them both as they get married. If you show proper respect to these two who are getting married, you yourselves will be sons and daughters. So, make progress in this regard. Love the Lord, and in so doing learn how to love yourselves, so that when by loving the Lord you genuinely love yourselves, you may have no hesitations about loving your neighbors as yourselves. I mean, when I don't find someone loving himself, how can I entrust him with a neighbor to love as himself? "And who can the person be," you say, "who doesn't love himself?" Here he is for you: *Whoever loves iniquity hates his own soul* (Ps 11:5). Does a person really love himself, if he loves his flesh and hates his soul, to his own detriment, and the detriment of his soul and of his flesh too? On the other hand, who is the one who does love his soul? The one who loves God with his whole heart and his whole mind. Now to such a person I will readily entrust a neighbor. Love your neighbors as yourselves.

Everyone is your neighbor

7. "Who is my neighbor?" he says. Everyone is your neighbor. Don't we all have two parents?¹⁵ Animals of every sort are neighbors to each other, dove to dove, panther to panther, adder to adder, sheep to sheep, and is *homo sapiens* not to be neighbor to *homo sapiens*? God spoke, the waters teemed; they teemed with swimming creatures, great whales, fish, winged creatures and suchlike.¹⁶ Did all the birds come from one bird? All the vultures from one vulture, all the doves from one dove? Did all snakes come from one snake, all bream from one bream? All sheep from one sheep? No, of course, the earth produced whole species all together.¹⁷ We come to the human species, and the earth did not produce the human species. For us there was made one father, not even two, a father and a mother. For us, I repeat, there was made one father, not even two, a father and a mother. But from the one father came the one mother; one man from no other, but made by God; and one woman from him.¹⁸

Consider our species, our human race. We have all flowed from one source; and because that one source turned bitter, we from being an olive tree have become a wild olive.¹⁹ Grace too came. One man begot us to sin and to death, and yet as one race, yet as all neighbors to each other, yet as not only like each other but also as related to each other.²⁰ One man came against one man; against one man who scattered came one who gathered.²¹ In the same way, against one man who killed came one man who made alive. *For just as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive* (1 Cor 15:22). But just as everyone who is born of that man dies, so too everyone who believes in Christ is made alive—but only if he has on a wedding garment, if he is invited along to be preserved, not to be separated.

Have faith together with love

8. And so, my dear brothers and sisters, have charity. I've explained the wedding garment to you, I've explained this garment. Faith is to be praised, we all agree, it's certainly to be praised. But the apostle²² makes a distinction about what sort of faith. You see, there were some people who boasted about their faith and didn't have good morals, and the apostle James reproved them, saying, *You, for your part, believe that God is one, and you are right to do so. The demons too believe, and tremble* (Jas 2:19). Call to mind with me why Peter was called blessed, what he was praised for in being blessed; was it because he said, *You are the Christ, you are the Son of God* (Mt 16:16)? The one who called him blessed did not pay attention to the sound of the words, but to the sentiments of his heart. I mean, do you want to know that the blessedness of Peter did not lie in those words? The demons also said exactly the same thing. *We know who you are; you are the Son of God* (Mk 1:24). Peter confessed him to be the Son of God, the demons confessed him to be the Son of God. "Distinguish between them, Lord, distinguish." "Certainly I will distinguish. Peter said it in love, the demons out of fear. To settle the matter, he says *I am with you to the death* (Lk 22:33); they say, *What have we got to do with you?*" (Mt 8:29).

So, any of you that have come to the banquet, don't boast only about faith. Make a distinction in faith itself, and then the wedding garment will be recognized on you. Let the apostle make the distinction, and teach us. *Neither circumcision, he says, nor uncircumcision is of any value, but faith.* Tell us what sort; don't even the demons believe and tremble? "I'll tell you," he says, "I make a distinction, I distinguish right away: *but faith, which works through love*" (Gal 5:6). So what faith, what sort of faith? The sort which works through love. *If I have all knowledge, he says, and all faith, so as to shift mountains, but have no love, I am nothing* (1 Cor 13:2).

Have faith together with love, because you can't have love without faith. This is my warning to you, my exhortation, this is what I am teaching your graces in the name of the Lord: have faith together with love, because you can have faith without love. You see, I'm not urging you to have faith, but love. Because you can't have love without faith; I mean, of course, love of God and neighbor. How can these exist without faith? How can you love God if you don't believe in God? How can the fool love God, who says in his heart: *There is no God* (Ps 14:1)? It can happen that you believe Christ has come, and don't love Christ. But it can't happen that you love Christ, and don't say Christ has come.

Love your friends, love your enemies

9. So have faith with love. That is the wedding garment, Love one another, you that love Christ; love your friends, love your enemies. Don't think of it as being hard for you. So what have you got to lose, where there is so much to gain? Why beg from God, as something enormously important, that your enemy may die? That is not the wedding garment. Notice the bridegroom hanging on the cross for you, and begging the Father for his enemies: *Father, he says,*

forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing (Lk 23:34).

You have seen the bridegroom saying that; now see the friend of the bridegroom, who was invited and wore his wedding garment. Observe the blessed Stephen, and how he rebukes the Jews, with a truly savage fury, it would seem: *You stiff-necked people, and uncircumcised of heart and ears, you are the ones who have resisted the Holy Spirit. Which of the prophets did your fathers not slay?* (Acts 7:51-52). You hear what a savage tongue he had. You too are still quite ready to use yours in the same way on anybody, and if only you spoke like that against the person who had offended, not yourself, but God! He offends God and you don't rebuke him; he offends you—what a racket you raise! Where is that wedding garment?

So you've just heard how savage Stephen was; now hear just how loving he was. He gave huge offense to those he rebuked, so he was stoned by them. And while he was being hounded and pounded from all directions by furious hands and a hail of stones, he first said, *Lord Jesus Christ, receive my spirit*; and then after praying for himself while standing,²³ he knelt down for those who were stoning him, and said, "*Lord, do not hold this crime against them* (Acts 7:55-60); let me die in the flesh, not them in the heart." And on saying this he fell asleep. After these words he had nothing more to say; he spoke them and died; his very last prayer was for his enemies.

Learn how to wear a wedding garment. Kneel down in the same way, yes you too, bang your forehead on the ground, and as you are about to approach the Lord's table, the banquet of the holy scriptures, don't say, "If only my enemy would die; Lord, if I have deserved well of you in any way, kill my enemy." Well, if you do by any chance say that, aren't you afraid he may answer you, "If I wanted to kill your enemy, shouldn't I perhaps kill you first? Or are you patting yourself on the back, because you've come as soon as you were invited? Think what you were like not so long ago. Didn't you blaspheme me? Didn't you deride me? Didn't you wish my name could be wiped off the earth?"²⁴ But you are patting yourself on the back for coming when you were invited. If I had killed you as an enemy, who would there have been then for me to make into a friend? Why are you instructing me in your bad prayer to do what I didn't do to you? Let me rather," God says to you, "instruct you to imitate me. Hanging on the cross I said, *Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing*. I taught my guardsmen²⁵ this lesson. Let me recruit you as well into my fight against the devil. Otherwise, you cannot possibly fight without being defeated, unless you have prayed for your enemies.

"Sure, say this, say this too, that you ought to pursue and prosecute your enemy. But say it with full knowledge; make a distinction in what you say. Look, your enemy is a human being. Tell me, precisely what is it in that person that is at enmity with you? It's not the fact of his being human, is it, that is at enmity with you? No. Well, what then? The fact of his being bad. His being human, which is what I made, doesn't make him your enemy. I made him human, not bad. He became bad by disobedience, by obeying the devil.²⁶ It's what he made himself that makes him your enemy. It's because he's bad that he's your enemy,

not because he's human. I mean, I hear the word 'human' and I hear the word 'bad'; one signifies a nature, the other a defect; I heal the defect and preserve the nature."

So this too is what your God says to you: "And all right then, I avenge you, I kill your enemy; I remove from him his being bad, I preserve his being human. If I make him into a good person, haven't I both killed your enemy and made him your friend? Ask what you ask for in that way, not that human beings should perish, but that their enmities should perish." But if you go on praying for a human being to perish, you are praying as a bad man or woman against a bad man or woman; and when you say, "Kill that bad person," he will answer you, "Which of you two is that?"

Grab your enemy; by being grabbed he will cease to be an enemy

10. So extend your love, and not only as far as your husbands, wives and children. That degree of love is to be found even among cattle and sparrows. You know how these sparrows and swallows love their mates; they share the task of sitting on the eggs, together they feed their chicks, out of a charming and natural goodness, without a thought for any reward. I mean the sparrow husband doesn't say, "I will feed my children, so that when I grow old they may feed me." No such thoughts as that; he loves them freely, feeds them freely for nothing; he shows the affection of a parent, he doesn't expect any reward. You too, I know, I'm sure, love your children in the same way. *For children ought not to save up for their parents, but parents for their children* (2 Cor 12:14). It's on these grounds many of you justify your avarice, because it's for your children that you are amassing fortunes, for them you are hoarding.

But extend your love, let this love grow, because loving children, husbands and wives is not yet that wedding garment. Have faith in God, trust him. First love God. Extend yourselves toward God, and grab whom you can for God. An enemy, perhaps; have him snatched for God. A son, a wife, a slave; have them snatched off to God. A stranger perhaps; have him snatched off to God. Grab, grab your enemy; by being grabbed he will cease to be an enemy.

That's the way we should be making progress; that's the way charity should be nourished, and eventually brought to perfection. That's how the wedding garment should be put on. That's how the image of God to which we were created should be progressively sculpted afresh. You see, by sinning it was defaced, worn down. How did it get worn down, get defaced? By being rubbed on the earth. What's that, rubbed on the earth? It is rubbed by earthly desires. *Although man walks in the image*, you see, *yet he is troubled in vain* (Ps 39:6).²⁷ What one looks for in an image is to be true, not vain. You see, it's by loving truth that that image of God to which we were created is sculpted anew, and his own proper coin is paid back to our Caesar.²⁸

Do you remember that reply of the Lord to the Jews who were trying to catch him out, when he said, *Why are you trying to catch me out, you hypocrites? Show me the coin of the tribute*, that is, the image stamped on it and the

inscription. "Show me what you pay, what you get ready,"²⁹ what is demanded of you. Show it to me." They showed him a *denarius*. And he asked whose image and inscription it had on it. They answered, *Caesar's* (Mt 22:18-19).

Well, this Caesar too is requiring his image. Caesar doesn't want to lose what he has levied, and God doesn't want to lose what he has made. Caesar, my dear brothers and sisters, didn't make the coin, the imperial mint made it. An order was given to the craftsmen, he instructed his ministers. An image was stamped on the coin; on the coin is the image of Caesar. And yet he is demanding what other people have stamped, he is collecting it, he won't be denied.

Well, human beings are Christ's currency. That's where Christ's image is, Christ's name, Christ's style and titles.

NOTES

1. A sermon preached, most probably in the summer of 413. But scholars differ, some dating it as early as 411, others as late as 420.

2. As distinct from mere catechumens and non-Christians, to whom knowledge of the sacraments was not supposed to be divulged.

3. Augustine's assumption that inside the true Church there are both good and bad people is authentic Catholic tradition, and is what distinguished his position from that of the Donatists, who clung rather frantically to belief in a Church only of saints. His assumption, on the other hand, that outside the Church there are no good people, while widely held by Christians at all times, is not, without vast qualifications that in effect cancel it, part of the authentic Catholic tradition. He does occasionally hint at certain qualifications, but not nearly as often or as clearly as one would have wished.

4. Besides Judas, that is.

5. That is, the class of people who are in one respect good and in one respect bad, which is in fact all people. Augustine is here at his most tortuous and puzzling, but I think he will explain himself in this sense as he goes on.

6. This man is equivalent in Augustine's view, I think, to Judas among the Twelve.

7. Augustine is slightly mixing up Matthew's parable with Luke's (Lk 14:21), where the host is not a king but just a man, called in the course of the parable "the householder." I have translated it "the royal host," but I don't feel at liberty to do that in an actual quotation. It could have been Augustine's Latin text that introduced the Lucan term, but it is more likely to have been his memory.

8. This is one of Augustine's constant themes being lightly touched on here, that it is only God who can truly distinguish or discern the good from the bad, only God who can and does effect a separation of them that is absolutely just and absolutely final.

9. No doubt a bit of drama in the pulpit at this point; Augustine, finding he doesn't seem to be advancing his argument, dramatically prays to the Lord, arms raised to heaven, to help him out with inspiration.

10. As distinguished, he means, from the grace of the sacrament.

11. An allusion to the white baptismal garment with which the newly baptized were clothed.

12. See 1 Cor 11:29.

13. New-style gladiators who pitted themselves in the arena against wild beasts.

14. See Phil 2:21.

15. He is referring to our first parents, Adam and Eve, as will become clear a few lines further down.

16. See Gn 1:20-21.

17. See Gn 1:24-25.

18. See Gn 2:7.21-22.

19. See Rom 11:17.

20. From the story of the creation of Adam as the universal ancestor, even in a sense the ancestor of Eve, Augustine draws one of his most telling arguments for the unity of the human race; we are not only one biological species, we are one family. He would have found any neo-Darwinian racial or racist theories theologically monstrous as well as morally intolerable.

Reversing the argument, I find that this strong theological concept of the unity of humankind, family unity and not just specific unity, lends support to a monogenist as against a polygynist view of human origins; that is, that we are indeed all descended from an original human couple, as distinct from an original human population. Whether couple or small population, in either case derived by an evolutionary process from some anthropoid primate. See Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis*, 1950: Denzinger, 33rd ed., 3896.

21. See Lk 11:23.

22. Here, as usual with this expression, he is referring to Paul, in spite of his immediately going on to quote James. But that is a parenthesis. A few lines further on he will come to the distinction made by Paul.

23. The normal posture for prayer in those days, with hands raised to heaven. Kneeling was a more penitent or suppliant posture.

24. Presumably he has in mind newly converted pagans, especially perhaps those who a few years earlier, after the sack of Rome by the Goths in 410, had blamed the catastrophe on Christ and the Christians.

25. Stephen.

26. Here spelt *zabulo* instead of *diabolo*, which possibly tells us something about the African pronunciation of Latin at the time.

27. All he gets out of this quotation from the psalm is the words "image" and "vain." For a more detailed, if equally idiosyncratic, interpretation see Sermons 53A, 4 and 60, 2.

28. That is, to God. See Sermon 43, 4.

29. There were many coinages, or currencies as we would now say, circulating in the Roman Empire; but Roman taxes had to be paid in Roman *denarii*, not in Jewish *shekels*, for example. So taxpayers would often have to go to the money changers to get the right currency. In the opposite direction, the "temple tax" (Mt 17:24) and any payments for sacrifices had to be paid in the Jewish shekel coinage, so to the money changers (banks) again, always with substantial commission, of course.

SERMON 91

ON THE WORDS OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL 22:42-46, WHERE THE LORD ASKED THE JEWS WHOSE SON THEY SAID THE CHRIST WAS

Date: 400¹

Son of David

1. The Jews were asked, as we heard just now when the passage from the gospel was recited, how our Lord Jesus Christ could be the son of David, when David himself called him Lord, and they couldn't answer.² You see, what they knew about the Lord was what they could see. What was seen by them was the son of man; what was hidden from them was the Son of God. That's why they thought they could defeat him, and why they mocked him as he hung on the cross, with the words: *If he is the Son of God, let him come down from the cross, and we will believe in him* (Mt 27:40.42). They saw one thing about him, they did not know the other. *For if they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory* (1 Cor 2:8).

They knew, however, that the Christ was the son of David. I mean, even now they are hoping he will come. It escapes their notice that he has come, and they willfully allow it to escape their notice. After all, even if they didn't recognize him hanging on the cross, they certainly ought to have recognized him reigning over the world. In whose name, I ask you, are all the nations being called and blessed, but in the name of the one whom they assume not to have been the Christ? You see, that son of David,³ of the seed of David, of course, according to the flesh,⁴ is also the son of Abraham. Now if Abraham was told *In your seed shall all the nations be blessed* (Gn 22:18), and they can already see all nations being blessed in our Christ, why are they expecting what has already come, and not fearing what is going to come?

Our Lord Jesus Christ, I mean, called himself a stone, using a prophetic text to declare himself by—the sort of stone, though, that any who stumble over it will be shaken up, while any whom that stone comes upon, it will crush them.⁵ When it is stumbled over, you see, it is lying there, humble. By lying there humbly it shakes the stumblers; by coming on them from on high it crushes the proud. So already the Jews have been shaken by stumbling like that; it remains for them also to be crushed by his glorious coming again—unless of course,

while they are still alive, they acknowledge him in order not to die. God, after all, is patient, and is inviting them every day to believe.

David's Lord

2. But now let's come back to the Jews, unable to answer the question the Lord put to them. When he asked them whose son they said the Christ was, and they answered, "The son of David," he went on to put the next question: *So how does David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, "The Lord said to my lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put all your enemies under your feet"* (Ps 110:1)? *So if David, he says, in the Spirit calls him Lord, how is he his son?* (Mt 22:42-45).

Notice, he didn't say, "He isn't his son," but "How is he his son?" When he says "How," it's a question, not a denial. It's as though he had said this to them: "You are quite right to say that the Christ is the son of David. But David himself calls him Lord; how can the one he calls Lord be his son?" The Jews would have said, if they had been instructed in the Christian faith which we hold, if they hadn't shut their hearts against the gospel, if they had wanted to have the life of the Spirit in them instructed in the Church's faith, they would have answered and said, "*Since in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*, there you have how he is David's Lord. But because *the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us* (Jn 1:1.14), there you have how he is David's son." But being ignorant of this, they stayed dumb, and while naturally keeping their mouths shut, they didn't even open their ears, so that they might be taught to know the true answer, which they were unable to give when they were questioned.

A mystery opened to discerning

3. But it is a great thing to know the mystery of how he is both David's Lord and David's son; how in one person he is both man and God; how in the form of man he is less than the Father, in the form of God equal to the Father;⁶ how again he can say both *the Father is greater than I* (Jn 14:28), and *I and the Father are one* (Jn 10:30); and because it is a great mystery, our behavior has to be put into good shape if we are to be capable of grasping it. It is closed, you see, to the unworthy, opened to the deserving.

It's no use our hammering on the Lord's door with stones or crowbars, with fists or feet. Life knocks, to life the door is opened. It is with the heart one asks, with the heart one seeks, with the heart one knocks, to the heart the door is opened.⁷ But the heart that asks for this in the right way, knocks and seeks in the right way, must be a pious heart, first and foremost loving God freely and for nothing (that, after all, is what piety is), and not setting some reward which one expects from him, in addition to himself.

Nothing, I mean, is better than he is. And if God is of no value to you, what is there of value that you can ask God for? He gives you the earth and you are delighted, you lover of earth, turned into earth yourself.⁸ If you are delighted

when he gives you the earth, how infinitely much more delighted should you be when he gives you himself, the maker of heaven and earth.⁹

So God is to be loved freely and for nothing. This, in fact, is the crime the devil charged holy Job with, ignorant of what went on inside him: *Does Job worship God for nothing?* said he.

The fabrications of the adversary

4. So, if the adversary could make this charge, we ought to be afraid of being charged with this offense ourselves. We have to deal with a very clever trickster; he's always trying to fabricate unfounded charges, how much more ready to bring well-founded ones? However, we can be thankful that the judge is one who cannot be deceived by our accuser. I mean, if we had to face a human judge, the enemy could trump up whatever he liked for such a one's benefit. No one is more cunning than the devil at making things up. Even now, you see, he is busy fabricating all sorts of false charges against the saints. He knows his accusations can carry no weight with God, so he spreads them around among men and women. And what good can that do him, when the apostle says, *Our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience* (2 Cor 1:12)?

Do you imagine, though, that there is no cunning calculation behind the fabrication of these false charges? He knows what damage he can wreak with them, unless faith is on the watch to resist him. I mean, that's why he spreads nasty things around even about good people, to make the weak suppose there aren't any good people, and then start letting themselves go to be dragged and tossed about by their lusts, while they say to themselves, "After all, who keeps any commandment of God anyway? Or are there any people who remain chaste?" While they think the answer is nobody, they themselves turn into nobody.

So that's the sort of thing the devil does. But Job was the sort of man about whom he couldn't fabricate any stories, since his mode of life was too evident and well known. But because he had enormous wealth, he charged him with something which, even if it were true, he could only be in his heart, without the possibility of its showing up in his behavior. He worshiped God, he was always generous in almsgiving; and with what kind of sentiments he used to do this nobody knew, not even the devil himself; but God knew. God bears witness to his servant,¹⁰ the devil casts a slur on God's servant.

He is permitted to tempt Job, Job passes the test with flying colors, the devil is confounded. It is established that Job worships God freely, for nothing, not because he gave him anything, but because he didn't take himself away. He says, you see, *The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away; as it pleased the Lord, so has it been done; may the Lord's name be blessed* (Job 1:21). The fire of temptation was applied, but it found gold, not straw; it removed impurities, it didn't reduce to ashes.

A matter of the heart

5. So the heart has to be purified in order to understand the mystery of God, how Christ can be both man and God. And it is purified by behavior, by mode of life, by chastity, holiness, love, and by the faith which works through love.¹¹ All this I've mentioned is like a tree that has its roots in the heart; deeds, after all, only proceed from the root of the heart. If you plant greed there, thorns proceed from it; if you plant charity, fruits proceed from it. That then is why, immediately after the Lord had put this question to the Jews and they had failed to answer it, he went on to talk about behavior, to show why they were unfit to understand what he had questioned them on.

I mean to say, when they couldn't answer, these miserable proud creatures should of course have said, "We don't know. You are the master; tell us." They remained dumb about the case proposed, and they didn't even open their mouths to make an inquiry. And straightaway the Lord homes in on their pride, and says, *Beware of the scribes, who love to sit in the front seats in the synagogues, and love the first place at banquets* (Mk 12:38-39).¹² It's not that they were given these places, but that they loved them.

Here, you see, he is bringing an accusation against their hearts. Now only an inspector of hearts can be an accuser of hearts. After all, it's quite right that a servant of God who has some rank in the Church should be deferred to and given the first place; if no deference is shown him, it is bad for the one who fails to show it; but deference is no good to the one to whom it is shown. And so it's right that in Christian congregations the leaders of the people should be seated on a higher level, that they should be differentiated by where they sit, and that their office should be made sufficiently clear in this way. But it's not right that their seats should make their heads swell; rather, they should make them think about the burden they will have to render an account for.

But who can tell whether they love this or don't love it? It's a matter of the heart; the only one who can judge it is God. The Lord himself, though, warned his followers against being infected by such a yeast; as he says somewhere else, *Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees*. And when they assumed that the reason he said this was that they had forgotten to bring any bread, he answered them, *Has it escaped you how many thousands were fed on five loaves? Then they understood*, it continues, *that he was speaking of the yeast of their teaching* (Mt 16:6-12). They, you see, loved these temporal things; as for eternal ones, they neither feared eternal evils nor loved eternal goods. Their hearts shut tight, they could not understand what the Lord was questioning them on.

Agog for the good things dangled before his eyes

6. But what is the Church of God to do, in order to be able to understand what it was the first to have the privilege of believing? It has to enlarge its spirit to receive what it will be given. For this to happen, that is, for the spirit's capacity to be enlarged, the Lord our God has suspended what he promised, not cancelled

it. The reason he has suspended it is for the suspense to make us stretch ourselves out; the reason we need to stretch ourselves out is to grow; the reason we need to grow is finally to attain. Look at the apostle Paul stretched out toward the suspended promises: *Not that I have already received, or am already made perfect. Brothers, I do not consider myself to have obtained possession; one thing, though, forgetting what lies behind, stretching out to what lies ahead, I follow after single-mindedly to the palm of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus* (Phil 3:12-14). He was running on the earth, the palm was dangling from heaven. So he was running on the earth, but in spirit he was ascending. Notice him then stretching out, notice him agog for the good things dangled before his eyes. *I follow after, he says, to the palm of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Be a part of him, who is the only one to have ascended

7. So there is some walking, some traveling to be done; but that doesn't mean ointment for feet, a quest for mules and horses, the provision of ships. Run on affection, with your feelings, travel by love, ascend by charity. Why look for a route or a way? Stick close to Christ, who made himself into the way by descending and ascending. Do you want to ascend? Hold on to him as he ascends. After all, you can't be hoisted up under your own steam, because *No one has gone up into heaven, except him who came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven* (Jn 3:13). If no one has gone up except the one who came down, and he is the Son of man, our Lord Jesus, do you too want to go up? Be a part of him, who is the only one to have ascended. You see, he the head is, with the rest of his body, one person, one man. And since none can go up unless they have been incorporated in him as members of his body, this text is verified, that *no one has gone up into heaven except him who came down*.

I mean, you can't say, "So why, for example, did Peter go up, why did Paul go up, why did the apostles go up, if *none has gone up except him who came down*?" The answer comes right back, "As for Peter, Paul and the other apostles, not to mention all the faithful, what do they hear from the apostle? *But you are the body of Christ, and individually the parts of it* (1 Cor 12:27). So if Christ's body and its parts are one person, don't make them into two.

He, you see, left father and mother and cleaved to his wife, that they might be two in one flesh.¹³ He left his Father, in that he did indeed present himself here as equal to his Father, but also *emptied himself, taking the form of a slave* (Phil 2:7). He left his mother, the Synagogue, of whom he was born according to the flesh. He cleaved to his wife, that is, to his Church. He reminded us of this text,¹⁴ when he proved that it is not right for marriages to be broken: *Have you not read, he said, that God who made things in the beginning, made them male and female? (Gn 1:27). They shall be two, he said, in one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let man not break apart.* And what's the meaning of "two in one flesh"? He goes on to say, *Therefore they are no longer two, but one flesh* (Mt 19:4-6). *No one has gone up except him who came down* (Jn 3:13).¹⁵

Bride and bridegroom

8. Now to convince you that bride and bridegroom are one person with reference to the flesh of Christ, not to his divinity—after all, with respect to divinity we cannot be what he is, because he is creator we are creatures, he the maker we what he made, he the composer we the composition; but so that we might be one thing with him in him, he was willing to be our head by taking flesh from us, in which he could die for us—so to convince you that this whole is the one Christ, he said through Isaiah: *He wound a turban on my head as a bridegroom, he clothed me with ornaments as a bride* (Is 61:10). He's the bridegroom, he's the bride; bridegroom, clearly, in the head, bride in the body. For, says he, *they shall be two in one flesh, and, it is no longer two, but one flesh.*¹⁶

*It would be really extremely difficult to find anyone
who cannot do something for someone else*

9. And so, as being included among his members, parts of his body, in order to understand this mystery, as I said earlier on, brothers and sisters, let us show true piety in our lives. Let us love God freely and for nothing. He who has presented us on our journey with the form of a servant is reserving for our arrival at our final destination the form of God. From the form of a servant he has constructed the roadway; from the form of God he has constituted his Father's kingdom.¹⁷

Of course, it demands a lot from us to grasp this, but it doesn't ask a lot from us to believe it; and as Isaiah says, *Unless you believe, you shall not understand* (7:9, LXX). That being the case, let us walk by faith as long as we are traveling abroad from the Lord, until we attain to the vision in which we shall see him face to face.¹⁸ And in walking by faith, let us do good. In our good works let love of God be free, love of neighbor considerate and kind. After all, we haven't got anything we can do for God; but because there are plenty of things we can do for our neighbor, by helping the needy we shall deserve well of the divine abundance.

Thus we should all do for one another whatever things we have at our disposal. If you have more than enough, lavish it on the destitute. Some people have plenty of money; let them feed the poor, clothe the naked, build a church, use their money for whatever good purposes they can. Other people have the gift of counsel; let them guide their neighbors, dispersing the darkness of doubt with the light of a loving faith. Others have the ability to teach; let them make distribution from the storerooms of the Lord, handing out food to their fellow servants,¹⁹ confirming the faithful, calling back those who stray, seeking the lost, as best they can.

There are things that even the poor can do for each other; they can lend their feet to the lame, the use of their eyes to guide the blind. Others can visit the sick, others bury the dead. Such things are available for everybody, so that it would really be extremely difficult to find anyone who cannot do something for

someone else. And there is that final great thing the apostle mentions: *Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will accomplish the law of Christ* (Gal 6:2).

NOTES

1. This sermon was preached about the year 400; the place is unknown.

2. Augustine is assuming, as indeed is commonly done, that Jesus was asking the Pharisees whose son they thought he, Jesus, was, because Augustine himself and all Christians have been so accustomed to calling Jesus by the surname, so to say, of Christ. But of course Jesus was not asking them who they thought he was; he was asking them who they thought *the Christ* was (Latin's lack of the definite article is an aid to misunderstanding here). He knew they didn't recognize him as the Christ, but he also knew they had definite ideas about the Christ, the Messiah, whom they were expecting, and he wanted to point out that those ideas were inadequate.

However, as the sermon continues we can see that Augustine, in spite of this initial confusion, was close enough to the minds of the evangelists on the meaning of the episode. For them and their readers it was a pointer to the more-than-merely-human status of the Christ, whom they knew Jesus to be. It was the rudiments of a doctrine that was to be more fully worked out in John's gospel.

3. Whom the Jews themselves identify with the Christ.

4. See Rom 1:3.

5. See Is 8:14-15, as quoted in Lk 20:18; also quoted in 1 Pt 2:8.

6. See Phil 2:6.

7. See Lk 11:9.

8. See Gn 3:19.

9. See Gn 1:1.

10. See Job 1:8.

11. See Gal 5:6.

12. See also Mt 23:6. Augustine is preaching on a story, not a particular text. It is possible, in fact, that instead of the gospels as they are, a composite harmony of the gospels was in use in the church he was preaching in. There was such a harmony, Tatian's *Diatessaron* from the second century, and it became "the gospel" for several Syrian Churches for at least two or three centuries. That it was popular among the Latin Churches of the west is clear from fragments which survive not only in Latin, but in various European vernaculars of the middle ages.

13. See Eph 5:31, Gn 2:24.

14. That is, Gn 2:24.

15. He has now proved his point that Christ's members, as his Church, are one flesh with him, and so can be included in "him who came down," and thus can have gone up in him.

16. He hasn't actually shown that "bride and bridegroom are one person with reference to the flesh of Christ, not his divinity"—at least not by his texts. In fact, it is not entirely true, or at least not the whole truth. The axiom that "God became human that humanity might become God" (more familiar, perhaps, in its old form, "God became man that man might become God"), while a favorite principle chiefly among the Greek Fathers, was not unknown to Augustine and the Latins, and certainly was not rejected by them. He will elsewhere state that union with Christ's humanity is the means by which we come to share in his divinity (see 2 Pt 1:4), and in his divine sonship (see Gal 4:4-7).

17. *Patriam* in Latin; but we don't talk about the fatherland in English, and mother country would not do either, being just counter-sexist, and "God's own country" would give quite the wrong impression.

Here he is already, perhaps, qualifying the limited view of our union with Christ which was proposed in the previous section and criticized in the previous note.

For "form of servant, form of God," see Phil 2:5-11.

18. See 2 Cor 5:6-7; 1 Cor 13:12.

19. See Mt 24:45; but there is also a running allusion to 1 Cor 12 and to the various gifts of the Holy Spirit allotted to different members of Christ's body.

SERMON 92

ON THE SAME WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 22:42-46

Date: 425-430¹

Christ to the Jews about the Messiah

1. The problem was put to Jews, and should be solved by Christians. The Lord Jesus Christ, I mean, put it to the Jews, and didn't solve it himself, not for the Jews, that is—but he has solved it for us. And I shall just remind your graces of various things, and you will discover that he has solved it.

First, look at the nub of the problem. He asked the Jews what their opinion was about the Christ, asked whose son he was—because they too are hoping for the Christ. They read about him in the prophets, they were waiting for him to come, they killed him when he was there among them. As a matter of fact, in the same place as they read that the Christ was going to come, they also read that they were going to kill the Christ. But while they hoped for his future coming, foretold by the prophets, they did not see their own future crime there.²

So he questioned them in this way about the Christ, not as about someone unknown, whose name they had never heard, or whose coming they had never expected. After all, it's because they are still expecting him that they are on the wrong track.³ We too, of course, are also expecting him—but to come as judge, not to come and be judged. The holy prophets prophesied both: that he would first come to be unjustly judged, and come again afterward to judge with justice.

So, *What, he says, is your opinion about the Christ? Whose son is he? They answered him, David's.* Straight from the scriptures, of course. But he retorted, *How does David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said to my lord, "Sit on my right, until I set your enemies as the footstool for your feet"?* (Ps 110:1). *So if David in the Spirit calls him Lord, how is he his son?* (Mt 22:42-45).

Descendant of David

2. Here we must be careful not to suppose that Christ denied he was the son of David. He didn't deny he was the son of David, but he was inquiring how this could be. “You have said he is the son of David; I'm not denying it. But he called him Lord. Tell me how the one who is his Lord can also be his son. Say how.” They didn't say, they kept quiet.

Let us say it, then, with Christ himself explaining it. Where? Through his apostle. First of all, how do we prove that Christ himself explained it by that means? Well, the apostle says, *Or do you want experiential proof of Christ speaking in me?* (2 Cor 13:3). So he was graciously pleased to solve this problem in the apostle.

First, speaking through the apostle, what did Christ say to Timothy? *Remember that Christ Jesus has risen from the dead of the seed of David in accordance with my gospel* (2 Tm 2:8). There you have Christ the son of David.⁴

How is he also David's Lord? Tell us, apostle. *Who since he was in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal to God.* Recognize there David's Lord.

If you recognize him as David's Lord, Lord of heaven and earth, Lord of the angels, if you recognize him as equal to God in the form of God, how is he David's son? Pay attention to how it goes on. The apostle has shown you David's Lord by saying, *Who since he was in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal to God;* how does he show him as David's son? *But he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in condition as a man he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, the death indeed of the cross. Wherefore God has also exalted him* (Phil 2:6-9).

Christ rose again from the seed of David, as the son of David, because he had emptied himself. How did he empty himself? By taking what he was not, not by losing what he was. He emptied himself, he humbled himself. Though he was God, he made himself known as a man. He was despised as he walked the earth, though he made the sky. He was despised as a mere man, as though he had no power. Not only despised, but on top of that also killed. He was a stone lying flat, the Jews stumbled over him and were shaken. But what does he say about that himself? *Whoever stumbles over this stone will be shaken; but as for anyone upon whom this stone comes, it will crush him* (Mt 21:44; Lk 20:18; Is 8:14-15). First he lay flat, and they stumbled; he will come from above and crush them, after they have been shaken.

God and man, the whole Christ

3. You have grasped that he is both David's son and David's Lord, David's Lord always, David's son from a point in time; David's Lord, born of the substance of the Father, David's son, born of Mary the virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit. We must hold on to both things. One of them will be our eternal dwelling place, the other one is our liberation from exile. If our Lord Jesus Christ, you see, had not been prepared to become human, humanity would have perished. He became what he made, that what he made might not perish. True man, true God; God and man, the whole Christ.⁵ This is the Catholic faith. To deny that Christ is God is to be a Photinian.⁶ To deny that Christ is human is to be a Manichee. To confess that Christ is God, equal to the Father, and true man who really and truly suffered and shed real blood (I mean, Truth would not have

set us free, if he had paid a counterfeit price for us): to confess both is to be a Catholic.

As such, you have a home country, you have a way to it. You have a home country: *In the beginning was the Word* (Jn 1:1); you have a home country: *Since he was in the form of God, he did not consider it robbery to be equal to God* (Phil 2:6). You have a way to it: *The Word became flesh* (Jn 1:14); you have a way to it: *He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant* (Phil 2:7). He is the home country we are going to, he is the way we are going by. Let us go to him by him, and not get on the wrong track.

NOTES

1. Two scholars propose a much earlier date, 391-405. The later date seems more acceptable; I would also infer it from the terseness of the style. It was probably preached at Hippo, toward the end of June.

2. They *read* it there, he is saying, for example in Is 53; but they didn't see what it really meant.

3. In modern terms one might say waiting on the wrong platform, like the marvelous opening shots in that marvelous film of Jacques Tati, *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*. The Latin, however, though innocent of such a beautiful image, has a neat word play, which I cannot reproduce in English: *quoniam adhuc eum sperant, ideo errant*.

4. An even more comprehensive testimony could be found in Rom 1:3-4—and one more assuredly Pauline.

5. Usually, by the expression "the whole Christ," *totus Christus*, Augustine means Christ the head together with his body, the Church. We with and in him are the whole Christ.

6. See Sermon 71, note 12. Photinus, bishop of Sirmium (somewhere in Hungary), 343-376, taught a kind of adoptionism, that the man Jesus became the Christ by being adopted as God's Son, presumably at his baptism.

SERMON 93

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 25:1-13: *THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN WILL BE LIKE TEN VIRGINS, ETC.*

Date 411-412¹

The ten virgins

1. Those of you who were present yesterday hold my IOU; today I must redeem it, with God's help, not only from you, but also from all the others who have joined us. Investigating who the ten virgins may be, five of them wise and five foolish, cannot be without its difficulties. As regards the contents, however, of this passage, which I asked to have read to you today as well, insofar as the Lord has been pleased to grant me some understanding of it, I don't think this parable or comparison refers only to those who for their special and more notable holiness are officially called virgins in the Church, and whom we are more usually in the habit of calling nuns. On the contrary, if I'm not mistaken, this comparison applies to the whole Church.

Though even if we took it as referring only to those who are called nuns, are there only ten of them? Perish the thought that the great multitude of virgins should be reduced to so scanty a number! Someone may say, though, "Suppose there are many of them in name, and so few in reality, that you could scarcely find ten?" That can't be the meaning.² After all, if he had wanted us to conclude that there are only ten good virgins, he wouldn't have shown five of them to be foolish. The question is, you see, if there are many who are called virgins, why are the doors of the great house shut in the faces of five of them?

The ten virgins refer to the whole Church

2. So, dearly beloved, let us take this parable as referring to all of us, that is, to the whole Church, not only to its officers, whom we were talking about yesterday, nor only to the people, but absolutely to all of us. So why two lots of five virgins? These five and five virgins are all, without exception, Christian souls. But to give you my personal opinion, which I have formed under God's inspiration,³ not any sort of Christians, but only those souls that have the Catholic faith, and seem to have good works to their credit in the Church of God; and yet of these five are wise and five foolish.

So first let's see why there are said to be five of each sort, and why they are called virgins; and afterward we can look at the rest of the parable. The reason that every soul in a body is indicated by the number five is that it uses five senses. I mean, there's nothing we perceive through our bodies that doesn't come through this gate of five posterns, either by seeing or hearing or smelling or tasting or touching. So those who refrain from unlawful seeing, unlawful hearing, unlawful smelling, unlawful tasting, unlawful touching, receive on account of such unsullied purity the name of virgins.

Virgins and lamps

3. But if it is good to refrain from unlawful sense activity, and that is why every Christian soul is given the name of virgin,⁴ why are five admitted and five turned away? They are virgins, *and* they are turned away. Not merely are they virgins, they also have lamps; virgins, because they refrain from unlawful sensations; having lamps, because of their good works: good works about which the Lord says, *So let your good works shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven* (Mt 5:16). Again, he tells the disciples, *Let your loins be girded, and your lamps burning* (Lk 12:35). Girded loins equal virginity, lamps burning equal good works.

Virginity of the body; virginity of the heart

4. One doesn't, of course, normally talk about virginity between married couples; and yet even here faithfulness can be called a kind of virginity, displaying as it does a conjugal chastity. In fact I can show your holinesses that everyone, man or woman, is not improperly called a virgin with respect to the soul, and with respect to that untarnished fidelity by which one both refrains from unlawful things and practices good works: the whole Church, which consists of virgin girls and boys and of married women and married men, is called a virgin in the singular. How can I prove this? Listen to the apostle speaking, not only to nuns, but to the entire Church: *I have betrothed you to one man, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.* And because we have to beware of the spoiler of this virginity, the devil, after saying *I have betrothed you to one man, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ*, the apostle himself immediately goes on, *But I am afraid that as the serpent seduced Eve by his cunning, so your senses too may be corrupted from the chastity which is in Christ* (2 Cor 11:2-3). Few people have virginity of the body; everyone ought to have virginity of the heart.

So if it is good to refrain from unlawful things, which is what virginity here means, and if good works, signified by lamps, are praiseworthy, why are five admitted and five turned away? If she is a virgin, *and* carries a lamp, and for all that is not admitted, where are we to find the person who neither preserves a virgin abstinence from unlawful things, nor wishes to have good works, and so walks in darkness?

The oil is charity

5. So let these things, my brothers and sisters, let these things rather be the matter for our discussion. Any who do not wish to see any evil, do not wish to hear any evil, who avert their noses from the unlawful odors of sacrifice,⁵ avert their taste buds from unlawful sacrificial meats, flee from the embrace of other people's spouses, who break their bread to the hungry, bring strangers home, clothe the naked, reconcile the quarrelsome, visit the sick, bury the dead: there you have virgins, there you have people with lamps.

What more do we want? There's still something I want. "What do you still want?" he says. Yes, there's still something I want; the holy gospel has put me on the alert. Even with these virgins and lamp-carriers, he called some wise, others foolish. How do we tell which is which, how do we tell the difference? By the oil. The oil stands for something tremendous, something tremendously important. Don't you think it's charity? I'm asking it as a question, not rushing through a decision. I will tell you why I think it's charity that is signified by the oil.

The apostle says, *I now show you a yet more excellent way*. What is the more excellent way he shows them? *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have charity, I have become booming bronze, or clashing cymbals* (1 Cor 12:31—13:1). That is the more excellent way, namely charity, which is deservedly signified by oil. Oil, after all, excels all other fluids. Pour in water, pour oil on top, the oil excels by staying on top. Pour in oil, pour water on top, the oil excels by coming to the top. If you keep the right order, it wins; if you reverse the order, it wins. *Charity never falls away* (1 Cor 13:8).

All undergo the sleep of death

6. So what then, brothers and sisters? So now we can discuss the difference between the five wise virgins and the five foolish ones. They wanted to go and meet the bridegroom. What does going to meet the bridegroom mean? To go in spirit, to look forward to his coming. But he was late. While he is taking his time, *they all went to sleep*. All? Yes, both wise and foolish, *they all felt sleepy and went to sleep* (Mt 25:5).

Are we to suppose this is a good sleep? What is this sleep? Possibly, while the bridegroom is taking his time, iniquity abounds and the charity of many grows cold. Is that how we are to understand this sleep? I don't agree with that, and I'll tell you why. Because the wise ones are included; and when the Lord said, *Because iniquity has abounded, the charity of many grows cold*, he went on to add, *But whoever perseveres to the end, that person shall be saved* (Mt 24:12). Where do you want to place these wise ones? Surely, among those who persevere to the end. For no other reason, brothers and sisters, for no other reason at all would they be allowed in, unless they had persevered to the end.

So the chilling of charity hasn't crept over them, charity has not grown cold in them, but it remains piping hot till the end. It's because it remains piping hot till the end that the bridegroom's doors are open wide; it's for that reason they

are told to enter, like that other excellent servant: *Enter into the joy of your Lord* (Mt 25:21.23).

So what's the meaning of *they all went to sleep*? There's another sort of sleep, which no one can avoid. Don't you remember the apostle saying, *But about those who have fallen asleep, I would not have you ignorant, brothers* (1 Thes 4:13), meaning about those who have died? Why should they be said to be sleeping? Surely because in their own time they are to be raised up. So *they all went to sleep*. You don't imagine, do you, that just because they are wise they don't have to die? Be the virgins foolish or be they wise, they all undergo the sleep of death.

Persevere in charity right up to his sleep

7. Now people sometimes say to themselves, "Look, the day of judgment is coming any minute now, so many evil things are happening, such terrible tribulations more and more frequent; the day of judgment is already at hand." Those who say this, and say it in faith, are so to say going to meet the bridegroom with such thoughts. But here we are, war after war, oppression upon oppression, earthquake upon earthquake, famine after famine, nation against nation, and still the bridegroom hasn't come.

So while his coming is hourly expected, they all fall asleep, those who say, "Look, he's coming, and the day of judgment is upon us." As he says it, he falls asleep. So he should look to his sleep, and persevere in charity right up to his sleep. May that sleep find him waiting. Suppose, after all, he has gone to sleep. *Will he that sleeps not go on to rise again?* (Ps 41:8). So they all went to sleep; both the wise and the foolish among them, they all went to sleep.

The midnight shout

8. *Behold, at midnight there came a shout* (Mt 25:6). What's the meaning of "midnight"? When he's not expected, when people have given up believing altogether. He meant night to stand for ignorance. It's as though you worked it out something like this: "Here you are, from Adam so many years have passed, and here you have six thousand years being completed, and straightaway after that, according to the reckoning of some commentators, will come the day of judgment." And the years pass, and go beyond the calculations, and still the bridegroom's coming is delayed, and the virgins who had gone to meet him go to sleep.

And lo and behold, while he's not expected, while people are saying, "Six thousand years they were waiting for him, and look, they've been and gone; how do we know any longer when he's going to come?"—he will come in the middle of the night. What does it mean that he will come in the middle of the night? He will come while you are not aware of it. Why will he come when you are not aware of it? Listen to the Lord himself: *It is not for you to know the times, which the Father has placed under his own authority* (Acts 1:7). As for the day

of the Lord, says the apostle, like a thief in the night, that is how it will come (1 Thes 5:2). So keep awake at night, in order not to endure a thief. As for the sleep of death, willy-nilly, it will come.

Oil, the gift of God

9. But only when there has come a shout at midnight. What can this shout be, if not what the apostle talks of: *in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise up imperishable, and as for us, we shall be changed* (1 Cor 15:52)? Finally, once the shout has been raised at midnight, the shout, *Behold, the bridegroom is coming*, what happens next? *They all arose* (Mt 25:6-7). What's the meaning of "They all arose"? *The hour is coming, says the Lord himself, when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice, and come forth* (Jn 5:28-29).

So at the last trumpet they all arose. But those wise ones took oil with them in their flasks, while those foolish ones did not take oil with them (Mt 25:4,3). What's the meaning of "They didn't take oil with them in their flasks"? What's "in their flasks"? In their hearts. Which is why the apostle says, *Our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience* (2 Cor 1:12). That's where the oil is, wonderful oil; it's entirely the gift of God, this oil. Anyway, people can pour oil in, they can't create the olive tree. "Look, I've got oil." Was it you that created the oil? It's God's gift. You've got oil, carry it with you. What do I mean, carry it with you? Keep it inside you, mind you please God there.

The meanings of "carrying oil with you"

10. I mean, look at these foolish virgins who didn't carry oil with them; by their self-denial which earns them the name of virgins, and by their good works represented by the lamps they bring,⁶ they are intent on pleasing other people. And if they are intent on pleasing other people, and that's why they do these admirable things, they are not carrying oil with them. So you, then, mind you carry it with you, carry it inside, where God can see; carry the testimony of your conscience there. But if your manner of life depends on other people's testimony, you are not carrying oil with you. So if you refrain from unlawful things and perform good works in order to be admired by other people, there is no oil inside you.

In any case, as soon as people begin not to admire you, the lamps start going out. Would your graces please pay close attention! Before those virgins went to sleep it doesn't say that their lamps were going out. The wise ones' lamps were burning from the oil inside them, from the assurance of their consciences, from their inner boast, from their deepest charity. But those of the foolish ones were also burning. Why were they burning then? Because there was no dearth of admiration from other people.

But after they had risen, that is to say, in the resurrection from the dead, they began to trim their lamps, that is, to prepare to give God an account of their

works. And because there is nobody then expressing admiration, all are preoccupied with their own cases, so that there are none who are not thinking about themselves; so there was nobody to sell any oil. Their lamps began to fail, and the foolish virgins turned to the five wise ones: *Give us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.* They were asking for what they had always been used to, that is to say, to shine with someone else's oil, to live in dependence on other people's admiration. *Give us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.*

Wise ones laughing at the foolish ones

11. But they answered, *In case perhaps there is not enough for us and you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves* (Mt 25:8-9). It's a mocking reply, not a helpful one. Why were they mocking? Because they were wise, because there was wisdom in them. They weren't wise, you see, all on their own; but in them was that wisdom, of whom it is written in some book or other that she says to those who ignore her, when the evils she has threatened them with come upon them, *And I myself will have a good laugh at your destruction* (Prv 1:26). What's so strange about the wise ones laughing at the foolish ones? What does this laughter or mockery mean?

The oil of a sinner

12. "Go to the dealers and buy for yourselves; after all, you weren't in the habit of leading good lives unless people admired you for it, selling you their oil." What is selling oil? Selling admiration. Who but flatterers sell admiration? The less notice you take of flattery, and the more you carry your oil inside you, and do all your good works for the sake of a good conscience, then the more likely you are to say, *The just man will correct me in mercy and rebuke me; but let not the oil of the sinner grease my head* (Ps 141:5). "Rather," he says, "that the just man should correct me, rebuke me, box my ears, check me, than that the oil of a sinner should grease my head." What is the oil of a sinner but the fawning of a flatterer?

The good person still trembles

13. "So go to the dealers; that's what you've been in the habit of doing. We, though, are giving you nothing." Why? "In case perhaps there is not enough for us and for you." What does it mean, "not enough"? It isn't said for lack of confidence, but out of a sober and religious humility. Although, you see, a good person may have a good conscience, how is he to know what kind of judgment he will receive from the one whom nobody deceives? He's got a good conscience, he's not tickled by any ideas of neatly planned crimes.⁷ But although his conscience is clear, on account of some or other of those daily sins that go with human life he still says to God, *Forgive us our debts*, having himself done what follows, *as we too forgive our debtors* (Mt 6:12). He has broken his bread

to the hungry from the heart, he has clothed the naked from the heart;⁸ he has performed his good works from the oil within, and yet his good conscience still trembles at that judgment.

A chaste heart

14. See what this conversation means. "Give us oil." They got the answer, "*Go rather to the dealers*. Because you have been in the habit of leading good lives for human admiration, you don't carry oil with you. We, though, are not giving you any, *in case perhaps there is not enough for us and you*. After all, we can scarcely judge for ourselves, how much less can we judge for you?"

What do I mean, we can scarcely judge for ourselves? That when the just king is seated on his throne, who will dare boast that he has a chaste heart?⁹ Perhaps you can't find anything in your conscience; and he, who can see better, whose divine gaze penetrates more deeply, does find something; yes, perhaps he does see something, does find something, perhaps. How much better for you to say to him, *Do not enter into judgment with your servant* (Ps 143:2). Also how much better for you to say, *Forgive us our debts*; because you are also told to say this, you know, on account of those torches, on account of those lamps.¹⁰

I was hungry, and you gave me to eat (Mt 25:35). So what's all this, then? Didn't they do that too?¹¹ They didn't do it before him. Well, how did they do it? In the way the Lord forbids when he says, *Beware of performing your justice before men, to be seen by them; otherwise you will not get a reward with your Father who is in heaven. And do not be like the hypocrites when you pray. For they love to stand in the streets and pray, to be seen by men. Amen I tell you, they have received their reward* (Mt 6:1-5). They've bought their oil, they've paid the price. They've bought it, they haven't been cheated of human admiration; they have set about gaining human admiration, and they've got it. All this human admiration avails them not a whit on the day of judgment.

How did the others do it, though? *Let your works shine before men, so that they may see your good deeds, and glorify your Father who is in heaven* (Mt 5:16). He doesn't say "you";¹² after all, it's not from yourself that you get the oil. Pat yourself on the back if you like, and say, "I've got it"—but from him. *For what have you got that you have not received?* (1 Cor 4:7). So those ones did it that way, and these ones in this.

The arrival of the bridegroom

15. It's not so very surprising, though, that while they go to buy, while they are looking for people to be admired by and can't find any, while they are looking for people to be comforted by and can't find any, that the door was opened, *the bridegroom came* and the bride, the Church then being glorified with Christ, as every single one of her members comes together to form the whole. *And they went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut* (Mt 25:10). And those foolish ones came along afterward. But do you think they

had bought any oil, or found anyone to buy it from? That's why they found the gates shut. They started to knock, but too late.

Time of mercy and judgment

16. It's said, and it's true, and it isn't said to deceive you, *Knock, and it shall be opened to you* (Mt 7:7); but do it *now*, while it's the time for mercy, not when it's the time for judgment. These two times, you see, cannot and must not be mixed up, since the Church sings of both mercy and judgment to her Lord.¹³ Now is the time for mercy; repent. Have you a chance to do that at the time of judgment? You will be among those virgins against whom the door was shut. *Lord, Lord, open to us.* Were they not sorry, because they hadn't brought oil with them? And what good did their late regrets do them, when they were being mocked by the true wisdom?

So the door was shut. And what were they told? *I do not know you* (Mt 25:11-12). He didn't know them, the one who knows everything? So what's the meaning of "I do not know you"? "I condemn you, I reject you, in my art I do not recognize you; my art does not know flawed work."¹⁴ Now this is something extraordinary; he doesn't know flawed work, and he judges flawed work. He doesn't know it in the making, he judges it in the testing. So then, *I do not know you.*

Five wise ones

17. They went to meet him, they went in with him, the five wise ones. How many of you there are, my brothers and sisters, bearing the name of Christ! I hope there are five wise ones among you—but don't just think of five people. I hope there are five wise ones among you, in the sense of people belonging to the wisdom of the number five. The hour, you see, is coming, and coming we don't know when. It's coming in the middle of the night; keep awake. That's how the gospel concludes: *Keep awake, because you do not know the day nor the hour* (Mt 25:13).

So if we are all going to fall asleep,¹⁵ how do we keep awake? Keep awake in your heart, awake in faith, awake in hope, awake in charity, awake in good works; and when you fall asleep in the body, the time will come for you to rise. When you have risen, get your lamps ready. Then may they not start going out, may they be fed then from the inner oil of conscience. Then may that bridegroom be embraced by spiritual arms, may he lead you then into his home where you need never sleep, where your lamp can never go out.

Today, however, we experience difficulties, and our lamps are flickering in the winds and trials of this world and this age. But only let our flame burn robustly, so that the wind of trial and temptation will fan rather than extinguish its fires.

NOTES

1. Probably preached at Carthage. This parable of the wise and foolish virgins is discussed by Augustine in three other places: *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions*, 59; *Expositions of the Psalms*, 147/148; Letter 140.

2. Notice, he doesn't say, "That can't be the case, that among all the many nuns in the Church only ten are really virgins." Not that he actually entertains that thought—but the story of Abraham pleading for the city of Sodom in Gn 18 (see especially v. 32) means he cannot rule out the possibility. But all the while he is concerned with the meaning of the text, and saying it cannot bear this dire prophetic meaning.

3. A very unusual *claim* for him to make, though he often prays, and asks the congregation to pray, that he may receive such divine assistance.

4. Here one suspects the preacher had his tongue in his cheek, since Augustine of all people was not so naive as to assume that even good Christians never misused their senses. He is, in fact, in the process of getting at those self-satisfied souls who did make this naive assumption about themselves, the Little Jack Horners in his congregation.

5. Almost certainly the odor of incense.

6. This last phrase about good works and lamps is supplied by the editors, but not found in any manuscripts.

7. I wonder if Augustine would have thought the enjoyment of "who-done-its" sinful. I fear the answer is probably yes.

8. See Is 58:7.

9. See Prv 20:8-9; Mt 25:31.

10. That is, on account of your good works, in case you haven't performed them wholly from the heart, but also from motives of human respect. He goes on to give the instance of feeding the hungry—and in the words which the just king himself uses to praise the sheep on his right hand side.

11. The foolish virgins.

12. That is, "and glorify you."

13. See Ps 101:1.

14. The figure, together with the language of condemning and rejecting, is taken from the workshop; goods found to be flawed at the end of the production line are condemned and rejected.

15. That is, die.

SERMON 94

ON THE WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 25:24-30, WHERE THE SLOTHFUL SERVANT IS CONDEMNED, WHO HAD REFUSED TO INVEST THE TALENT HE HAD RECEIVED

Date: 425¹

My lords, brethren and fellow bishops have indeed been good enough to visit us and cheer us with their presence; but goodness knows why they refuse to help poor, weary me. The reason I have said this to your graces while they are listening, is in order that your hearing it may somehow appeal to them on my behalf, to preach a sermon or two themselves when I ask them to. Let them invest what they have received, let them be good enough to work, rather than make excuses.²

Tired out though I am, and scarcely able to speak, accept ungrudgingly a few words from me. After all, we also have the booklet about the favors God has granted through his holy martyr,³ so let us listen to that too even more willingly.

So what's the position? What can I say to you? You heard in the gospel all about the reward of the good servants and the punishment of the bad ones. And the sum of that servant's wickedness, the one who was condemned and so severely sentenced, was this, that he was unwilling to invest.⁴ He kept intact what he had received; but his master wanted some interest on it. God is greedy for our salvation. If one who merely failed to invest is given a sentence like that, what should people expect who squander the capital?

So we up here are stewards, we make the investments, you receive them. We want to collect the interest and the profits: lead good lives. That, you see, is the interest on our investments. But please don't assume that making investments has nothing to do with you as well. You can't lay out investments, dispense loans, from this particular high counter.⁵ But you can do it wherever you happen to be. If Christ is attacked, defend him; answer the grumblers, rebuke the blasphemers, distance yourselves from their company. In this way you make investments, in this way you earn some of them as interest.

Do my job in your own homes. A bishop is so called because he supervises, because he has to watch over those in his care.⁶ So everyone of you in his own house, if he is the head of the household, the job of bishoping, supervising, ought to belong to him, how his people believe, seeing none of them drift into heresy,

not his wife, nor his son, nor his daughter, nor even his slave, because he was bought for such a high price.⁷ The apostle laid down rules setting the master over the slave and the slave under the master; Christ, though, paid one and the same price for them both. Don't disdain the least of your people, keep a very watchful eye over the welfare and salvation of all your household. If you do that, you are investing what you have received; you won't be slothful slaves, you won't have to fear so appalling a sentence.

NOTES

1. Preached at Hippo when a shrine in honor of Saint Stephen was being dedicated (late June, early July), and many neighboring bishops had come for the occasion.
2. A very blunt allusion to Mt 25:26-27. He is telling the other bishops they are slothful servants.
3. Saint Stephen. His relics had recently been brought to North Africa, and were everywhere greeted with extraordinary devotion, wholeheartedly encouraged by Augustine, who insisted on a record being kept of all the miraculous cures attributed to the saint's intercession.
4. See Mt 25:26-27.
5. He means the raised apse behind the altar, where he sat with his fellow bishops and other clergy on either side of him.
6. "Bishop" derives from the Greek *episkopos* (Latin just kept the Greek word), which itself comes from the verb *episkepeo*, and just means a supervisor, superintendent, overseer.
7. The price Augustine is actually referring to is not the \$1,000 or whatever it was the man paid for his slave, but the blood of Christ that was the price of his redemption. You could say he is punning on the institution of slavery.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

Abbreviations of Names

(B)	Anne Marie La Bonnardi��re	(M)	Christine Mohrmann
(Ba)	Tarcisius van Bavel	(Maur)	Maurists
(Be)	Bonifatius Fischer (Beuron)	(Me)	Prits van der Meer
(D)	Michel Denis	(Mo)	Paul Monceau
(DB)	Donati��n De Bruyne	(Mor)	Germain Morin
(��t)	Raymond ��taix	(P)	Othmar Perler
(F)	Georges Folliet	(Po)	Suzanne Poque
(K)	Adalbert Kunzelmann	(V)	Pierre-Patrick Verbraken
(L)	Cyrille Lambot	(W)	Andr�� Wilmart

Abbreviations of Works

CCL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Turnhout-Paris, 1953ff.)
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna, 1866ff.)
MA	<i>Miscellanea Agostiniana</i> (2 vols.; Rome, 1930-31). The first volume is <i>Sermones post Maurinos reperti</i> , ed. G. Morin
NBA	Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana (Rome: Citt�� Nuova Editrice)
PL	Patrologia Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1878-90)
PLS	Patrologiae Latinae Supplementum, ed. A. Hamann (Paris, 1957ff.)
PW	<i>Paulys Realencyklop��die der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> , new ed. by G. Wissowa et al. (Stuttgart, 1893ff.).
RB	<i>Revue B��n��d��cienne</i> (Maredsous, 1884ff.).
SL	Sources Chr��tiennes
SPM	<i>Stromata Patristica et Mediaevalia</i> 1 (= C. Lambot, <i>S. Aurelii Augustini Sermones selecti duodevinti</i>) (Utrecht, 1950).

Short Titles of Frequently Cited Works

Borgomeo	<i>L'Eglise</i> P. Borgomeo, <i>L'Eglise de ce temps dans la pr��dication de saint Augustin</i> (Paris, 1972)
Mohrmann	<i>Etudes</i> C. Mohrmann, <i>Etudes sur le latin des chr��tiens</i> I (Rome, 1958); II (Rome, 1961)
Mohrmann	<i>Sondersprache</i> C. Mohrmann, <i>Die altchristliche Sondersprache in den Sermones des hl. Augustinus</i> I. <i>Einf��hrung, Lexikologie, Wortbildung</i> (Latinitas Christianorum Primaeva 3; Nijmegen, 1932)
Pontet	<i>L'ex��g��se</i> M. Pontet, <i>L'ex��g��se de saint Augustin pr��dicateur</i> (Th��ologie 7; Paris, 1946)
Poque	<i>Augustin d'Hippone</i> S. Poque (ed.), <i>Augustin d'Hippone. Sermons pour la Paque</i> (SC 116; Paris, 1966)
Verbraken	<i>Etudes</i> P.-P. Verbraken, <i>Etudes critiques sur les sermons authentiques de saint Augustin</i> (Instrumenta Patristica 12; Steenbrugge-The Hague, 1976)

Nr.	Theme	Date	Edition
51	Genealogy of Christ	shortly after Christmas 417-418	PL 38:332-34
52	Mt 3:13-17 The Trinity	410-412	PL 38:354-364
53	Mt 5:3-12 The beatitudes	419-429 (Bo) Jan 21 (St. Agnes) 413 shortly after 415 (L.Ca)	RB 74 (1964) 15-35 PL 38:364-372
53/A	Mt 5:3-10 The beatitudes	405-411 (K, Be) [fine ministero] (Mo)	[MORIN 11] MA 1:627-635 PLS 2:678-685
54	Mt 5:16; 6:1	409-410 (K, Be)	PL 38:372-374
55	Mt 5:22	before 405 (B) before 409 (Ro)	PL 38:375-377
56	Mt 6:9-13	Christmas season 410 (Mo) 410-412	PL 38:377-386 RB 68 (1958):26-40
57	Mt 6:9-13	Christmas season c. 410	PL 38:386-393
58	Mt 6:9-13	Christmas season 412-416	PL 38:393-400
59	Mt 6:9-13	Christmas season 410 412-415 (Be)	PL 38:400-402 SC 116:186-198
60	Ps 38:7; Mt 6:19-21	05-14/22-397	[LAMBOT 19] PL 38:402-409 RB 58 (1948) 36-42 PLS 2:812
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