

# St. GASPAR BERTONI



At Saint Paul Church, in Verona, at the Baptistry, a plaque in homage to the 200 years of St. Gaspar Bertoni's birthday, dated of October 9, 1977. It is written that 'Blessed Gaspar Bertoni was baptized there in October 10, 1777' and he is the 'Pearl of the Clergy of Verona, Apostle of the Youth and Founder of the Stigmatines'.

## Early Spiritual Writings

### PARISH SERMONS

1800

[Manoscritti Bertoni ## 371 – 405]

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**1800****371****SERMON 1****Humility**

**1800. Verona, in the Church of St. Paul, Campo Marzio, June 8, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the Sunday's dedicated to St. Aloysius. This lasted about one half hour.**

*Blessed are the poor in spirit* [Mt 5:3]. This is the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. How fortunate I am, as it is my task to shed some light on these very words, *Blessed are the poor in spirit*. In this sense, I, too, can say: *Learn of me* [Mt 11:29] - in much the same sense that the Apostle was able to say: *Wherefore, I beseech you, be followers of me, as I also am of Christ*. [1 Co 4:16]. I know all too well the heavenly beauty of this virtue of which I speak now. Whenever a living example is seen of it, even without any words at all, this becomes most eloquent to make it self loved. However, it is my challenge to find the proper expressions in order to be able to direct your thoughts. So, I ask you, do not take my example, gentle audience - do not be hindered by my most proud nothingness, because I am really a sinner. I ask you this so that I might not destroy with my deeds whatever my preaching might build up. Direct your thoughts rather to that holy and very innocent young man [St. Aloysius], who was all that he became, in the final analysis, because of his great humility.

**372:** See how beautiful humility is. It is something like a stunning garment - and I do not know if I should say that it embellishes, or covers. It caresses, something like a gentle breeze on that visage and crowns it. If itself, humility draws more attention than do tasteless garlands that strive to draw the glances of an admiring world. In modesty, humility is as a veil over one's eyes that are never raised to look down on the defects of others, or that scan incessantly seeking to notice faults that really are not there. Humility colors one's face in embarrassment, even at the suspicion of being praised. This virtue imposes a rigid silence regarding the internal qualities that one indeed may possess. Rather, humility is not afraid to make known one's own unnoticed faults, and personal confusion, to lower oneself in the esteem of others. This humble self-deprecation is really sweeter than honey to the taste, and is more melodious than the most harmonious music to the ears of God and of other human beings. Humility shakes loose from one's hand those sturdy canes offered by nature, and rivets one's attention of the Crucified. This enables one to gaze upon the Cross and to imitate this in one's own life. Humility guides one's steps to prefer to be lowly in the house of one's Lord, rather than to be seated and revered in the tabernacles of sinners [cf. Ps 83:11].

**373:** This is humility, and how beautiful it is! My listeners, direct your attention to me, while I speak of this to you. Be content, I beg you, to extend to me your courteous attention. I really hope that I am able to offer even additional reasons to embrace this virtue which is both beautiful and lovable. If only I am able to show you how necessary

this virtue is, how useful and how easy it is to acquire it. this is the challenge that is before me now.

**374:** DEFINITION: Humility lies between two opposed vices

- pride, which raises a person beyond the confines of reason;
- and disordered abjection, which crushes one excessively.

Humility, through the proper acceptance of oneself, moderates one's spirit that it does not raise one's self, thus entering into the sphere of pride. The virtue tends rather to lowering oneself, but keep one always sustained by right reason, and thus does not fall into excessive abjection.

**375:** Its NECESSITY: the first reason is simply because Christ has recommended it. Humility is so necessary as Christ has said: *...Unless you... become as little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven..* [Mt 18: 3, 4].

In these words:.. *unless you become as little children...*, St. Bernard claims humility is his theme. There is a different tone than what is found in this other passage:..*Whoever can take this...* [Mt 19:12], where the theme is virginity. Bernard, therefore, with other Fathers of the Church, concludes that therefore *the latter is a matter of counsel, whereas the former is required*<sup>1</sup>. Virginity is a matter of counsel, while humility is a matter of precept. Where are you now, you who make think that humility is just a counsel that is useful for perfection, and not a precept necessary for salvation? How can you think, then, that humility is not commanded to you, when it is a commandment for everyone to be saved, and that without humility, without 'becoming as little children'. you cannot be saved?

**376:** Christ teaches this.

Please listen, then, also you, since the lessons of your Master are necessary for you: *Learn of Me*, He says [Mt 11:29], *because I am meek and humble of heart.* Learn from Me, being by nature equal to God, I emptied myself [Ph 2:6, ff.], taking the form of a servant. I was not only humble by becoming like a child, but I was born a baby, whimpering as I was stretched out on the hay. For thirty years I was subjected to those I had created. I did this to make Myself obedient and subject to the Father, even unto death, death on the Cross. He was reputed with the wicked, a sinner, acquainted with infirmity [Is 53:12]. I have given you an example of humility, that as I have done to you, so you do also [Jn 13:15]. The servant is not greater than his master [Jn 15:20].

O, Christian! Should Christ be this humble, and you remain proud? The name Christian really should no longer be applied to you. And it would only be fitting that if you do not resolve immediately to embrace humility, that not only would you renounce the kingdom of heaven, which is the kingdom of the lowly - but, even further, you would have to change your title. Think on this a while, as I now turn my attention to those who love this virtue more than you do, and who are already actively pursuing it.

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<sup>1</sup>St. Bernard, *Super Missus*, Sermo 1, 5

**377:** Furthermore, Humility is the foundation.

I can already see that they are already committed to building on stone and on a basis of very solid faith. They are putting up column and walls of unconquerable hope. They are constructing magnificent canopies of charity. They are adorning the building with most beautiful virtues. They are planting gardens where the most pure virginity, or most tender love invite the **Spouse** into the most refined delights. They invite Him to take His afternoon repose in the restful silences of the shady valleys.

What a beautiful building this is! How richly adorned! How inviting! But, have you entertained the idea that first you have to excavate from your hearts all the removable earth of pride, in order to render it more open for grace? Do you not realize that most capable architects can raise a building only on the solid base of humility, and that only thus can there be built such a charming estate only when it is on the firmer foundation?

**378:** O, if you have not laid a good foundation of humility, your building falls into ruin” this is what St. Bernard predicts. O, if your lilies do not have roots of humility, they will wither, St. Gregory adds. And let us put aside all metaphors. The virtues themselves I will turn into your ruin, because as you notice them in yourselves, you will look down on others with utmost pride. And so while you will be thinking that your conversation reaches the heavens, you will still stand so much in need of an extraordinary grace of conversion. And, it is much easier that a manifest sinner be converted, whose very fall is humiliating, than the hidden and concealed sinner who goes around covered with the mantle of virtue.

And now I pass from showing the necessity of being humble, to making clear its usefulness, and first of all, in sinners.

**379:** ITS USEFULNESS: In Sinners

Listen, therefore, to the insights offered by [St. John] Chrysostom<sup>2</sup>. Pay attention to these, all of you, who think you are in the state of grace, and be careful that you do not fall. And give heed to them, all of you who have fallen, and take courage to get up again. Give me, he says two swift carriages; hitch up to them generous steeds. Put pride into one of them, together with all the virtues that there are. And then hitch humility up to the other carriage, even accompanied by all the vices. Lash out with the whip, urge on the chargers, so that they might set out on the course. You will see that the carriage with sin will always pass that of justice, not because of its own power, but due to that very special benefit brought by humility that is riding in it. The other carriage will lag far behind it, not so much because of the weakness of the virtue, but solely because of the excessive weight of pride.

Would you like to see a proof of this? The Pharisee coupled justice with pride: *I am not, says the proud man, like the rest of men, extortioners, unjust... as is also this publican.* [Lk 18:11]. The Publican, on the other hand, brought all his failings to humility and cries out: *...O God, be merciful to me, a sinner...* [v. 13]. *I say to you,*

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<sup>2</sup>St. John Chrysostom, *De incomprehensibili Natura Dei* Hom, 5, 6, ff. t. I, 302, 1 E.

*that this man went down into his house justified rather than the other..., the Pharisee who in his pride looked down on him... [v. 14].*

**380:** Should there be here within these walls some sinful soul, whom I have not upset either by the sense of discomfort for sin, or even with the burden of its chains: I would like to say to such a one - get up, you, too, into this carriage of humility to experience its advantages in the face of the Pharisee who might reject you. God does indeed listen to the supplications of the lowly ones. His word will extend to you a hand that you might climb in. God will know how to lift you up out of all the mud, to place you among the princes of His reign.

**381:** Usefulness of Humility Among the Just:

But, if humility, all mixed in with sin, can still run so well that it would pass by justice mixed in with pride, where would humility not arrive if it were joined to justice? It would reach the very throne of God, in the midst of the Angels.

St .Aloysius Gonzaga was able to achieve this. So it was that by gifts of intelligence and grace that there was no one who surpassed him - yet, very willingly did he subject himself to all others, even to the most lowly of the coadjutor brothers in his religious community. However, that Lord always exalts those who humble themselves - and raises them up not only over other human beings but even above the Angels. St. Aloysius was so exalted by that great gift of virginal purity, of which the mother and guardian is always humility. In like manner, the gardener, in order to bring the water to higher levels in his garden, first makes it run down and conceals it underground. O blessed descent in order then to ascend! How useful is this lowering of oneself in order then to be raised up! How necessary is humility to us, even all the more to our advantage! Where have you concealed until now your benefits, so successfully that we have not been able to recognize them? O, if only we had first known you, and loved you before now! It is true that now we have found you, but we will never again lose you. So, beloved listeners, search your hearts, and embrace this so lovable spouse, humility.

**382:** She is comparable to a fertile mother who brings you to birth and acquires for you, as noble children, all the gifts of God. Added to this are all the virtues, like very charming daughters, because the Lord gives grace to the lowly [Jas 4:6]. The virtues received educate you and sustain you, because the Author of all gifts, the Holy Spirit, comes to rest only within the heart of the humble. Thus, He sustains you and brings to perfection, because in weakness and in humility virtue is perfected [1 Co 12:9]. Finally, those who have been perfected [2 Co 12:9]. Finally, those who have been perfected, she crowns, because with this the kingdom of heaven is purchased. *Blessed are the poor in spirit.* [Mt 5:3], or, rather: the humble in spirit. Why are they 'blessed'? because of them is the kingdom of heaven is composed.

Humility does not wait to crown them only in heaven, as though it did not also bring its own reward on earth. The reason is because if you will learn to be humble of heart, you will find peace and rest for the spirit. Thus, humility accomplishes in itself all

those qualities praised by Solomon for the most lovable **spouse**: i.e., humility renders joyful the heart of the happy man who possesses her [Pr 31:10, ff.]

**383:** Its FACILITY: provided that one knows him/herself

My listeners, I have thought of three realities that could keep you far from humility:

The first one is that many might be of the opinion that they are not bound by any precise duty to practice it. However, here I have demonstrated from the beginning that humility is necessary for all.

The second is that some may look upon it as counter-productive, or at least, that it is of no value. To these, I have shown already that humility is still useful.

The third obstacle, finally, is that some might look upon it as full of difficulties that for all practical purposes are insuperable. Therefore, now I have to show that humility is indeed easy. After this proof, I hope that there is no other impediment that needs to be overcome in order to win over all your hearts.

**384:** So, will you say that humility is difficult? Should that be the case, time does not allow me very much space for the proof. However, here is one means that could render it most easy. And what would this be? Simply, know yourselves. The fact is that the whole difficulty that one might encounter in humbling him/herself springs from precisely this that one lacks such self-knowledge. Some finally esteem themselves more than they really merit, believing themselves superior to all. However, once a person comes to know him/herself, that each is made up of dust and ashes- that no one has anything that does not derive from God - how could it not be easy for such an individual to render the tribute of obsequious reverence of all praise, due to God? The realization that one is indeed a sinner, worthy of hell- that no one has assurance of pardon - that each is capable of the worst iniquities, that there is no certainty of perseverance: how could anyone with like convictions feel any repugnance in his heart, in becoming more unassuming like other human beings?

**385:** It really is easy to know ourselves:

It is quite clear to us now, as you can see, that once a person comes to self-knowledge, it becomes even easier to be humbled. Even further than this, we would add that it is impossible to be aware of one's own miseries and not to be humbled. The whole difficulty, though, comes in knowing oneself well. This seems clear to me. So, it seems that you would wish to bring me to the point of proving actually how easy it is to know oneself. Nothing sounds more pleasant to my ears, nor would make me any happier, because I have already demonstrated this to you. Therefore, I conclude - as you have very well come to the conclusion yourselves, that humility truly is quite simple. Pay close attention to me.

**386:** For anything to be able to be considered easy to know, it is necessary that it be close at hand. Even this, though, would not be enough if one does not have the ability of sensation. Neither is proximity alone enough when the object does not come into one's range, even to the least observant. Now, what is closer to us than ourselves, in order that it might be known? *Your humiliation shall be in your midst.* [Mi 6:14]. To be able to experience our own nothingness, what could be more sensible to us? This would prove to be true even to the least observant- the realization of one's own sins, defects, temptations are obvious to all. Even though we might chose not to think of our sins, but conscience itself constantly brings them before us. The defects that we so often commit are noticeable to all those with whom we may come in contact. The temptations that come to us are so bothersome that they render even our quiet times disturbing. Therefore, it s very easy to know ourselves. So, the practice of humility is easy.

### **387:** PERORATION

Now, if all this is true, what excuse can we give to hide behind? Should we not sincerely resolve right away to practice it - for, at this very moment it entices us on the one hand, with its extraordinary advantages - and, on the other hand, obliges us by its necessity? Does it still seem to us, despite all, to be difficult? does it appear impossible, even in the light of all this? Is it that we just do not know how to exercise it? Well, all right, let us listen to the Prophet as he shakes us up with his cry: *O, sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart?* [Ps 4:3] Human hearts have been created to dominate over this earth [Gn 1:28]. Since you have been born for heaven, how is it that you condemn yourselves to not look at anything else, and not to love anything other than the mud? Do you not, therefore, know how to debase yourselves, and yet do not know how to humble yourselves? Is it not true that you know how to humiliate yourselves in the quest of truly corrupt appetites, that you respond to the least hint of passion? Then, why will you not humble yourselves following the examples of Christ, in response to God's command? You do know how to humiliate yourselves in falling - why can you not humble yourselves to get back up again? You do know how to lower yourselves to give way to the shame of nature - why can you not humble yourselves to be adorned with supernatural gifts, embellishment dear to all heaven? You do know how to degrade yourselves under the very feet of beasts of burden -then, why will you not learn to become humble as other human beings, with whom you share the same nature?

**388:** Let this suffice, then, as I realize that I have gone too far. I see that some are embarrassed on hearing the degradations of others among my devout listeners, even though in themselves they recognize no such conduct. The deformity that i~ have just placed before your reflection is considerable. Alas! just allow me, most kind listeners, to alleviate the most bitter anguish of my spirit by crying out: what blindness! What pride! What stupidity! To you, to you - our most holy protector, St. Aloysius, is reserved the triumph of these hearts, that are so weighed down and full of vanity. No, I am not amazed, either at their, or at my own guilt. I know all too well that while our land is suited to receive genuine humility, it is not capable of producing it. Humility is a perfect gift that descends from heaven. And so, you can have it. And from that

blessed soil where this heavenly plant takes root, you can transplant it into our hearts by your own hand. You can water it, then, with your own example, you can hedge it in with your protection, so that it might grow and be nurtured. We, for our part, can smell the blossoms of sweet joyfulness of peace even on this earth - that we might one day enjoy that fruits of eternal life with you in heaven.

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### Sources

#### OT

Bible quote	MssB #
Gn 1:28	387
Ps 4:3	387
Ps 83 :11	372
Pr 31: 30, ff.	382
Is 53: 12	376
Mi 6:14	386

#### NT

Bible quote	MssB #
Mt 5:3	371; 376; 382
Mt 11:29	371
Mt 18:3, ff.	375
Mt 18:12	375
Lk 18:11	379
Lk 13	379
Lk 14	379
Jn 13:15	376
Jn 15:20	376
1 Co 4:16	370
2 Co 12:9	382
Ph 2:6, ff.	376
Jas 4:6	182

### Fathers and Doctors of the Church

St. Bernard, <i>Super Missus</i> , Sermon. 1, 5	# 375
St. John Chrysostom, <i>De incomprehensibili Natura Dei</i> , Hom. 5, 6, ff. t.l, 302, 1 E	# 379

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**389:****SERMON 2****Fear of God**

**1800: Verona in the Church of St. Paul, Campo Marzio. November 23rd: the Last Sunday after Pentecost. - It lasted 28 minutes.**

In speaking of the holy fear of God it is not all that certain that this reality is one praised by you as most worthy of glory, recommended as most useful, or reputed finally as the most necessary. “So-and-so is a God-fearing man” - may often be on your lips when you wish to praise someone. This title is held in honor by all, much like a summary of a thousand accolades. Even the most malicious tongues respect such a person with reverent silence. *With fear and trembling give glory to God*, you say with Tobias [13:6] to your children. Just keep in mind that you could not leave behind for them any other testament of greater use for them in their inheritance. You do not entrust your earthly goods, not to speak of your off-spring, their endowment in the hands of anyone unless you are at least sure that this person does indeed fear God. Is it not true that you can say most frankly: Where there is fear of God everything is safe? On the contrary, even where there is some suspicion that this is lacking, then you keep a close watch on your possessions, you remain most jealous of your own honor, and take very good care of your lives. And why is this? And you respond that without the fear of God, there is no justice, no faith, no virtue, there simply is no good whatever.

**390: PROPOSITION:** Do you speak in this way? Are these your inner-most thoughts? It seems quite evident to me that I can see how fitting is the theme of my talk that the Spirit of the Church has placed before me and which I follow today. In presenting to you the Gospel of today, we are given for our reflection the terrible signs of the Last Judgment, almost as though the Gospel itself were crying out to us: *Fear the Lord, and give him honor, because the hour of His judgment is some.* [Apoc 14:7].

Now I yearn for that eloquence which certainly is lacking to me to persuade you that you should engage every means, all art, every industry in order to introduce, radiate and maintain in your hearts the holy fear of God. I can see that you are already endowed with a most just estimation of its glory, its advantages and its necessity.

**DIVISION:** It suffices for me to show you that this fear of God is in His own words, such as you correctly think it to be: glorious, useful, necessary. It is certain that as the esteem for it increases in you, then in equal manner the commitment to acquire it will intensify as well.

**391: DEFINITION** <sup>3</sup>: I am speaking of that fear through which a person is converted to God, or is the more closely bound to Him. So, there are two ways in which an individual could fear God: by fearing a most just punishment, either temporal or

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<sup>3</sup>St. Thomas, II-II, q. 19, a. 1.

eternal, with which God can punish our sins; or, by fearing the sin itself by which we can become separated from Him.

If through the fear of the penalty, we have recourse to the mercy of God, being sorry for our sin, or abstain from sin, this is servile fear. Such fear is good...<sup>4</sup>

Such fear is good.

If through the fear of sinning, we turn to God, or become more closely united to Him, such fear is filial, and this is properly the Gift of the Holy Spirit. For your instruction, these distinctions suffice. From now on, I will speak of these today, including both aspects. To begin with, I say that the fear of God is glorious, in the words of God Himself.

**392:** 1. The divine claim that the Fear of God is glorious:

Who would have any doubt concerning this? *The fear of the Lord is honor.* [Si 1:11] - this is how the Scriptures speak. Other virtues will indeed be so honored and worthy of some glory, by which human beings are rendered useful in peace, or strong in war. Yes, it is true, the great people, the judge, the powerful, are held in honor. However, the Holy Spirit goes on to say [Si 10:27]: ... *there is none greater than he that fears the Lord...* As a result, the fear of God is not only glorious, but I would also claim that it is almost one and the same reality as glory. *The fear of God is honor.* [Si 1:11]. In fact, the Psalmist assigns one and the same dwelling for the fear of God and for glory. *Glory,* he says [Ps 111: 1 & 3] *shall be in his house,* and of whom? - of “the man who fears the Lord.”

**393:** Do not deceive yourselves, then, any more by seeking this glory in the palaces of rich princes of this world. That which you see glittering in their vestibules, or sitting majestically on their thrones, is not authentic glory. This is all a vain facsimile, a false and venerated statue, in imitation of the real thing. These baubles have been placed there by the princes that they might fatuously emulate genuine glory, excessively loved by them, but which they do not merit. And you will therefore see at a clash of bad luck, with a breath of envy fall upon that tall statue - or, at least, the drying up of those appearances and the blackening at the same time of their bones along with their images on their tombs. *He made some of them to wither away ... and has made the memory of them to cease from the earth...* [Si 10:20]. But, this is not the direction to take: authentic glory does not look down on the poverty of one's home, or the simplicity of its inhabitants; it goes equally toward the one who is the center of applause and toward the one who seems dishonored. Yes! the authentic glory of the wealthy of those held in honor, as well as of the poor, is the fear of God [Si 10:25]. *The fear of God is honor.* [Si 1:11]

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<sup>4</sup>The words of the Tridentine Canon. Sess. 6, De Justific., Can 8 - Denz 818.

**394:** But, let us come now to facts, that are usually more evident than arguments. In the broad abundance of these facts which the Scriptures present to me, I leave aside all else to lead you into the most significant theater. In this, no less than the whole world is the spectator, and is applauding. I bring you there to ponder a most sublime glory, resulting from such praise of which God Himself is both judge and authority. You may be curious to know just who it is and what kind of heroic virtue could ever merit such praise. ‘Lift up your eyes to the mountain’ - Abraham is sacrificing his only son on it. He is the hero, and his is the action that merits such glory. Do you wish to see how much glory it is that God ascribes to him? *And in your seed, says God [Gn 22:18], shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.*

**395:** What virtue would merit such an encomium? Faith, some might say. But, just a minute: God Himself has assigned another accolade to this: *Abram believed God and it was reputed to him unto justice. [Gn 15:6; Rm 4:22].* Other responses might be: obedience, fortitude. But, the answer is still: No. Just listen to God Himself to which virtue there is to be given the merit of this glory. Abraham put forth his hand and took the sword, to sacrifice his son. And then God immediately intervened: *...now I know that you fear God...* This is the root of such merit: *... you have not spared your only begotten son for my sake...* This is the proof of his fear of God. Because you have done this is because you have proven your great fear, and this is because you fear God: *...And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed...* [Gn 22:12-18]. This is the glory, the root and merit of which is the fear of God. O supreme glory of the fear of God! O fear of God, how glorious you are, as God Himself has indeed made clear! How can human beings ever praise you enough?

**396:** My listeners, allow me some time for a heart to heart talk. My brother, you entertain that girl friend, that relationship. You maintain those flirtations which indeed may not be immoral, and you live in a certain style. I know this: these are trappings that are dear to you, and perhaps the uppermost reality in your heart. But, climb up this mountain and there sacrifice these attachments, this central affection. Yes, in the sight of all, give some proof of the merit. And He will proclaim before heaven and earth from which the sweet echo will arise as it is repeated: *... now I know that you fear God...* [Gn 22:12]. What glory will be held in store for you! I do admit that this undertaking is arduous, because only with real difficulty can one detach the human will from an affection that consumes it. It is really difficult to undertake conversion. But, fear God and all will become easy and sweet. Yes, I can prove this. It will be so good for me to see you reach this glory with its splendor. This will more than cover all the shame with which your vices have stained you. In giving up this more pleasing terrain, I will show to you alone, or to sinners, that the Fear of God is useful.

**397:** Its USEFULNESS: In God’s own words to sinners, because it renders conversion easy.

You see, then, based on the faith of the Scriptures, how this renders conversion easy, sweet and prompt, by gradually sharpening the will.

This is the first step: through the medium of a most moving apprehension that is aroused in the heart of the sinner, of the supreme evils that surround him in this life, and even more terrifying for the life hereafter, one is inspired to enter into oneself. A person begins to think over his/her own shallow and distracted thought and to reflect on the unfortunate state of life into which one has fallen: ... *he that fears God will turn to his own heart...* [Si 21:7]. Weeping bitterly over these defects with their accompanying terror, and seeing flame up brightly the single unfortunate source of such wrong being one's own sin, very soon the individual is reduced to indicate an abhorrence for it all: ... *The fear of God hate evil...* [Pr 8:13].

In this state, one begins to become detached and to withdraw his/her affection, and this leads the person to change direction from the sinful path: ... *by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil...* [Pr 16:6]. However, it seems that very violent temptations remain and do not consent to this withdrawing of one's affections. The passions that have been denied are aroused, and do not seem repulsed. Do not entertain any doubts, for: ...*No evil shall happen to him that fears the Lord, but in temptation God will keep him and deliver him from evils...* [Si 33:1].

**398:** Fear of the Lord is thus victorious over temptations and puts sin to flight [Si 1:27]. Sinners, in fact, hear in their hearts, after a few victories, something like a voice from heaven that says to them: ... *You that fear the Lord, hope in Him, and mercy shall come to you for your delight...* [Si 2:9]... *They that fear the Lord, will prepare their hearts, and in his sight will sanctify their souls...* [Si 2:20]. Then they will hear deep within themselves the voice of a thousand Angels in festival, chanting their conversion: ...*salvation shall be to them that fear Your name...* [Mi 6:9].

And even more than this, in their hearts they will have proof positive with a thousand consolations of that mercy that reaches out from generation to generation to those who fear the Lord [Lk 1:50]. Does it seem to you now, o sinners, that the fear of the Lord is useful? What do you men, just useful?

**399:** Its NECESSITY, in God's own words, for sinners

I should really have said that it is necessary: ... *For he that is without fear, cannot be justified...* [Si 1:28]. Therefore, just as justification and the expulsion of sin are necessary for salvation, so, too, the fear of God is necessary. Without it, sin cannot be driven away, nor is the soul justified. And you still do not make the resolution to fear God? Are you, therefore, so little moved toward salvation? I will return to you in a few minutes: in the meantime, allow me a word also to the just who are listening to me here and who may today be unhappy with me. I will be with you, all you who are just, after a brief rest.

**400:** To the Just

Does this, therefore, mean that for you who are just that the fear of God will not be necessary? Unless *you hold yourself diligently in the fear of the Lord, your house shall be quickly overthrown* [Si 27:4]. Thus speaks the Holy Spirit. It is so - your

spiritual edifice will fall down, that which you have painfully built up with such real effort at fasting and mortification, only after such a long exercise of the most arduous virtues. This edifice of yours will fall down even if you have rooted its foundation in the most perfect holiness. Ezechiel states: *Even the greatest saints... shall be in the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them trembling, every one for his iniquity.* [Ezk 7:16].

**401:** I will go even further: if you do not attain to the fear of the Lord, your house will fall, and it will fall swiftly, even if you have built it in heaven. In fact, even those who can say: *.. But, our conversation is in heaven...* [Ph 3:20] - and: *... we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven...* [2 Co5:1] - and even when we do not have it precisely that way, but we dwell there in contemplation, really assumed into the third heaven and we have already, as it were, taken possession of it, still the Apostle was afraid: *... lest perhaps... I myself should become a castaway...* [1 Co 9:27].

And how many there are who do not fear with him; even though they, too, might seem to be immovable stars in the heavens, and they fell. And so, for how many did the immortal light of their virtues suddenly be transformed into an insane flame of impure affections. This has rendered them, I will say, not only the butt of the jokes of the uncouth lout, but they become the object of the ridicule and derision of hell itself.

**402:** Let us not speak ill, my hearers, at the fall of these cedars, since we are like fragile fir -trees, and we howl [Zc 11:2]. We have been shaken by the awful terror the ruin of others, and we exhort you, too, to fear lest you fall. Even further, it is no longer we who exhort you: it is God Himself, God Himself who commands this to everyone. He commands the just: *I am clean and without sin ... he has found complaints against me...* [Ps 33:9, 10]. *And now, Israel what does the Lord your God require of you, but that you fear the Lord, your God, and all in His ways, and love Him and serve the Lord, your God...* [Dt 10:12]

He also commands this to sinners: *And fear not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul: but, rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body to hell...* [Mt 10:28].

**403:** PERORATION: So, who among you would be that foolish servant who would refuse to obey such express commands of the sovereign God? Would it perhaps be that individual thinking that he/she is in the state of grace, and is so sure that he can remain there without living in perpetual fear? Or, would it perhaps be some other person who has already lost grace, knowing that it cannot be gained by any other means than through fear? Or, lastly would it be the one who is already convinced without any fear that he cannot be saved? Who would ever resolve thus to be lost eternally, just for not choosing to set out on a street that is recognized as the only sure one - only one who is insane. Oh, no: it could be that sinner, who has been blinded, and who refuses to express fear in order not to embitter those dear to him. Where could this wretched person be? I would like to throw myself at his feet, and embrace them, and even more with my tears than with my words, I would beg him to be careful, to accede at least out of pity for his own soul.

**404:** Even should he not surrender to my tears, I would like to say to him: Come on now, such fear is necessary for you. You do not want to express it now? All right, rejoice in peace, and even make fun of the one who is trying so hard to persuade you to express such fear. The day will come - and it is no longer very far away - when on opening your eyes from this sleep of yours, you will finally realize that your salvation could be lost: *Those seeing it, shall be troubled with terrible fear... [Ws 5:2]. ... repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit... [v. 3]* - but all to no avail. How much better would it not be to express fear now that the fear of the Lord is still so useful and glorious for you?

But alas! where am I? What do I imagine? Am I not speaking to a people that is docile by their natural traits? How, then, can I even imagine that this people is closed to the commands of God? These are devout listeners, on whose lips nothing sounds more often than this beautiful name of God, either to honor Him with praise, or to recommend this to others. Could I even begin to think that such people would ever contradict with their deeds such beautiful words?

**405:** And finally, is not this that city in which all of us are proud to have been born, especially since our ancestors procured for it the very glorious title of “God-fearing City”? Am I to be led, therefore, to believe that she is about to lose this glory? Even further, were we not the very ones who in past misfortunes, gave proof of maintaining this glory? And is it not true that such glory has increased even in our name? Let us keep, therefore - I would say even better - let us keep for ourselves this glory, in order to leave it as a precious heritage to our next generation. Thus will the fear of the Lord render praiseworthy our memory here on earth, and assure us forever of the possession of immortal glory.

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