

# **St. GASPAR BERTONI**



A view of the top of the Saint Paul Church in Campo Marzio,  
where St. Gaspar Bertoni preached most of the Parish Sermons.

## **Early Spiritual Writings**

### **PARISH SERMONS**

**1803**

**[Manoscritti Bertoni ## 714 – 875]**

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## SERMON 15

The Beauty of Grace

**For New Year's Day 1803. - Preached in the Venerable Church of St. Paul's of C.M.**

*...so we also may walk in newness of life... [Rm 6:4]*

A new year, a new life, ladies and gentlemen. And many among you indeed - rather, all of us, as I am firmly convinced, want this. Thus, all love what is best and only naturally yearn for this for themselves. All want to be good and to acquire virtue, if this is lacking - and to increase it, if they are already in possession of it.

**715:** With all courage, then, I can on this day, with the holy Apostle, excite you to lay aside all that for years in the past you have done. My effort will be for you to extend significantly your desires for better goals that await you. Thus, when you will have finished your course it will happen that you will obtain that reward for which God has called you. Whatever opposition that I might pretend to presume regarding any among you, does not come with regard to the final end of it all. Rather, the difficulty may come with regards to the means of achieving this, these means that I of necessity have to propose to you. **All that is arduous, all that is difficult** <sup>1</sup> that might be perceived in these means, this is what frightens some, disheartens them, and almost lends them to despairing to take up the challenge.

**716:** And it is precisely this difficulty, which is not insignificant, that is my challenge to overcome - or, at least, to lessen. I trust in God's favor to meet perfectly this challenge. And I would want to conquer it by not paying any heed to it. I would wish that you direct your affections toward the goal that you do love it. And I am sure that love conquers all<sup>2</sup>. This newness of life, which is the scope set before myself, and also you, is nothing other than the state of grace, desirable in itself. And since many and excellent qualities in themselves explain the grace of God for it to be loved, for the sake of brevity, I will select only one. This quality is not by chance, nor is it the least of all, nor the least convincing: it is its beauty. As you, both by nature and by your fined education, have hearts that can either be touched easily, or swept away with violence by such an appealing motive, I have no doubt to have already captivated your hearts and have them tightly bound.

**717:** My challenge is to make known the beauty of grace that is totally spiritual and heavenly. So, the task before me is to do my best to draw this beauty closely to your senses, and have it come down to you, and present it within your gasp. On your part, it

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<sup>1</sup>**Translator's Note:** an expression reminiscent of **CF # 185**; cf. above also **# 532**.

<sup>2</sup>Virgil, *Eclogues*, 10, 69.

is fitting that you rise up to meet this challenge, to sharpen well your view. I would even say that you will have to open other eyes in order to be able to admire it.

No matter how refined and pleasurable the judgment you may have formed regarding the beautiful, you have done this by observing and comparing the sensible objects that surround you. Yet, all this is too lowly and crude to be applied to discern a beauty on the spiritual level. These other realities can only serve as a kind of ladder so that your minds might climb out of the mud of corporal appearances. It would be necessary to have a purified view that one would encounter in seeing a most excellently beautiful reality, but one that is beyond the grasp of the senses. Perhaps it will be the view of some that I have already gone too far in my reasons regarding this principle, thus leaving much else aside that needs to be said. And indeed, not all have the facility of concentrating on a single point and of rising up to other considerations from it.

**718:** Just picture before you two individuals. The first that I present to you for your consideration is an old man, already full of years and stooped. His head is bald, his face furrowed, his eyes sunken in, his cheeks hollow. His mouth seems almost as though inserted between his nose and chin. He is all bent over, as though tipping toward his grave, hardly able to hold himself up on spindly, thin and trembling legs. Observe him well, in that he is lacking all exterior charm.

And then near him imagine a boy, who is very nice looking, in excellent form, as is evident by the color on his cheeks, his graceful proportions, his graciousness, and most comely in his gait. Now you have these two before your mind's eye. Now imagine that this young man is really a thief, a liar, one who commits sacrileges, dishonest, avaricious, an adulterer, an assassin, homicidal. The old man, by contrast, thinks of him as a just man, innocent, from his childhood years. He is chaste, an alms-giver, gentle, kind - one, then, who expresses every virtue that would render him lovable before God and other human beings.

**719:** What does it mean, ladies and gentlemen, that all of you after such a testimony would already withdraw your gaze, in some bitterness and disgust from the second of these two individuals? Would you not look away from him as though from a plague? And would you not draw near in your hearts to this old, but virtuous man? What if he is indeed emaciated and deprived of all apparent beauty? Do you not feel simply drawn to love such a person, and to delight in him? See, then, as St. Augustine<sup>3</sup> would say and you will see that the hidden and secret beauty has a much greater force than that which is present to the senses. Spiritual beauty that can only be seen by the mind as the stronger of the two. And you have already seen this for yourselves, in that your hearts have been attracted by such beauty, taken in by it, and conquered by it. This is the beauty of virtue.

**720:** You have already, then, taken a healthy step forward to ascend to where I would like to lead you, but we cannot stop here. The reason is that grace is of a

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<sup>3</sup>St. Augustine, *In Io*, tr. 3/21, 312 A, ff.

superior order than even virtue. Now, the beauty of virtue is such that it so strongly attracts the human heart, in spite of its rather displeasing and disagreeable appearance. This is because sensible beauty is all the more seductive in comparison to it, so that virtue seems abominable and odious. [Yet, virtue that we have observed is nothing more than a natural perfection of the spirit]. Yet, how much greater will be the beauty, the splendor, the decor of grace, which is a supernatural and indeed, celestial quality?

**721:** Indeed, I could tell you that a soul in the state of grace possesses such a rare beauty that is quite close, and indeed, is equal to that most brilliant and pure beauty that is proper to those celestial spiritual natures. I am referring here to the Angels, indeed to those spirits which are among the most sublime and even supreme, namely, the Cherubim, or the Seraphim. Even admitting this, I still am saying very little. The truth is that grace is a participation in the very nature of God, as St. Thomas <sup>4</sup>states: that which God is substantially, comes to be accidentally in the soul that shares in the divine goodness.

**722:** It would be necessary to understand God's own beauty in order to have a correct idea of the beauty of a soul in grace. The realization that our thought cannot reach such a sublime level is really having already achieved it in some way. One correct idea is that which exceeds every material idea is to have come to the conclusion of not being able to formulate such an idea.

The soul in God's grace is much like a mirror that is quite shiny in which there is reflected only the very brilliant sun of the divinity. What, then, is its light in itself? What would be its candor, what would be its clarity? Would you like to see it? Christ tells us: *...And the glory you have given Me, I have given to them...* [Jn 17:22]. Like the iron immersed in fire shines in the nature of fire, in like manner, the soul permeated by the grace of God participates in the divine being.

**723:** I am treating of most sublime matters with you, because it is to these realities that you have been called. You have not only been called like those to whom such sublime promises were made, but you are already in possession of such precious gifts, as St. Peter writes: *... By whom he has given us most great and precious promises: that by these you may be made partakers of the divine nature...* [2 P 1:4].

I am speaking of your souls, my brothers and sisters, those of you who fear God, and who remain in His grace. I am speaking of your soul, poor, hard-working artisan - of yours, simple woman. I am speaking to all of you, who in the shadows of a lowly existence, under the squalor of rough, poor garments - all of you, who have kept unobserved to the eyes of this world, a gem that is so rare of a celestial splendor. O happy poverty that defends such wealth! O lovable deformity, under which is covered such a divine beauty!

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<sup>4</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, I-II, q. 110, a. 2, ad 2 um.

**724:** However, I do not want to forget my promises. Up to this present moment, you have responded well to my expectations, by elevating and sharpening your vision on higher realities. It is indeed my challenge to approach your thought with more sensible images. Perhaps I had left myself open for some criticism, but now I can do this with greater assurance and freedom.

**725:** Let us consider the beauty of grace by descending to its effects. Justification itself, that is, the justice of the soul, is one of its effects. And this justice implies a rectitude of order in the same interior disposition of the human being. The result is that the superior part of such a person, that is, the spirit, is subjected to God, and these interior forces of the soul are under the control of the superior. And who is there who is not able to form from such an outstanding effect of grace some idea, not far from the while truth, of its sublime beauty? Is it not true that such beauty, as has been defined by St. Augustine in several places <sup>5</sup> has nothing other than a pleasing, harmonious, ordered correspondence, or a sweet ordering of well proportioned parts? And so that you might be able to see even with your very own eyes, **I take from Sacred Scripture the colors to paint this beauty** in almost sensible manner as it is found in a soul that possesses it.

**726:** Let us begin from the beginning. Do you wish to see first its hair? The hair is blond, on a par with gold. The hair is neatly set, since the heavenly thoughts that the Holy Spirit places in this soul inflame its heart with love. And by the same Spirit in God, and in Christ, all is ordered, closed in, composed [Ct 5:11].

The eyes are like doves [v. 12], as they are supremely clear and shining with a natural splendor. They are still simple, that are not threatening, nor malicious, but sincerely fix their gaze on all. There shines out from them a bright light of wisdom. There is in them a lovable sincerity with which they are endowed, by which they do not attach themselves on earthly matters that are abject. This is why they go up to God, in Whom they find their repose as in their own home. The cheeks are rosy and endowed with bright red of modest shame, which proceeds from their internal delicacy and chastity [v. 13].

**727:** The lips are red, almost ruby, that is, full of the most ardent charity. Thus, whenever a person so endowed speaks with God, or with another human being, it is not so much the individual who talks - rather, it is the love within and the charity itself that seems to control the discourse. And because charity is always joyful, it is not dissolute. This explains why its lips have on them a sweet modest smile. This enables the teeth to show, which are like white pearls, in a double row, composed in good order.

**728:** But here, I have to cede **my brushes to a better painter**. This would be St. Bernard <sup>6</sup> who so delicately describes it. He tells us that the teeth are white. And what

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<sup>5</sup>St. Augustine, Letter 3, 4. t. 2, 5 E; *De Musica*, 6, 38. t. 1, 531/B, ff.

<sup>6</sup>St. Bernard, On Canticles - no citation given.

indeed could ever be more candid than this soul, which rejects from itself every exterior uncleanness, thus keeping its purity even to its thoughts? They are strong. And who is any stronger than this soul before whom tribulation is considered relief; contumely is thought of as honor; and poverty is looked upon as abundance? The teeth do not have flesh. Yet, grace living in the flesh, is forgetful of it, as the Apostle puts it: *... But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit...* [Rm 8:9].

**729:** They do not have skin, or a rind, that covers them, because they do not have any restless concern and the excessive worry about worldly matters. They sleep and repose in God [Ps 4:9]. The teeth do not suffer unless some small particle gets in between them and exerts pressure on them. This implies that any and every impediment grace considers intolerable, when it slows one, or separates one from God. The teeth are closed over by the lips. In similar manner, grace buckles up within and defends itself with the tireless exercise of the virtues, at the very appearance of its enemies.

The teeth chew the food for the whole body. Grace thus prays and intercedes for the entire body of the Church, that is for the living and no less fervently for the deceased. These teeth lastly are not so easily consumed, because as the years go on grace increases in fervor. With ever greater rapidity, it hastens to run, the more it sees the palm of victory is the closer at hand.

**730:** Do you want me to continue with a description of the neck? This is its prayer. And just as the neck supports the head above the shoulders, in similar manner prayer raises the mind from earth to God. And just as through the neck there is drawn the breath from the mouth for the cooling and the comfort of one's insides, in similar manner, through prayer, the Spirit of God is drawn in, who cools the heat of concupiscence. He animates the soul and strengthens it in accord with this saying from the Psalms: *... I opened my mouth and panted...* [Ps 118:131]... and drew the Spirit within me.

However, I notice now that the time allowed for me is running too short for me to complete my picture. Let it suffice for you that I have been able to draw only the heard, and that you have been able to see to this point the very many and very beautiful virtues. You will have noted that all are connected by a delicate order. This enables you to note some idea at least of these and from their effects alone. This might give you some adequate idea of the indescribable beauty of grace.

**731:** I really believe, my revered hearers, that there is no one to be found among you, who, after heaving even so briefly contemplated the beauty of divine grace, would not experience a fire enkindled deep within. At least, there would be the fiery sparks in each heart in the form of fervent desires. Allow me, then, to speak to you with all simplicity and from the heart, which is my usual manner of speaking.

Just reflect within yourselves for a few moments, and undertake a careful scrutiny of your inner life. Do you possess such a lovable beauty? Are you now in such a desirable state of God's grace? If God's grace indeed is in you, what

resolutions will you make today never to lose it ever. To what extent will you commit yourselves with supreme fervor to study the means most necessary and most useful in order to conserve it? With how much boldness and holy bravery will you not act to remove immediately those occasions that tend even from a distance to destroy it?

**732:** And if you have already done all this, both by yourselves and with the counsel of the one who interiorly guides you, You will have already taken the cautious provisions and those well planned by thoughtful people. And will you not now make every effort with God's help each and every day to increase it and further it? Have you not heard many times perhaps that the path of the just is like the shining light of the sun: *... it goes forward and increases even to perfect day...* [[Pr 4:18]? Have you not often been advised that the Lord has disposed in your hearts many grades, much like a ladder? Is it not so that as you ascend, you do not stop from going up until you come to see the beautiful face of your God above in heaven?

**733:** However, should there be any among you, who on inner reflection, realizes that he, or she, has already lost grace, what then? O God! If there has indeed been a mortal sin, would you not make every haste to get rid of such a foreign deformity from your spirit? Would you not make the resolution at this minute to wash yourselves clean as soon as possible in the waters of sacramental penance? Will not these waters remove all the ugliness, in order to vest you once more in the former beauty that has been lost? How could anyone put off even for a moment, cleansing through the tears of much bitter contrition those stains? Is it not so that these faults really stain one in a most marked way, and stain so indecently the human heart?

**734:** *... O sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity, seek after lying...* [Ps 4:3]. You have before your eyes the true light, and do you still choose to remain in the darkness? Truth has shown itself to be so sweet and lovable, and will your vain errors still hold you with their empty flattery? There has been uncovered for you a beauty that merits all your affections, and your heart is still bound and disheartened in the mud and filth?

But, o, if so senselessly and brainlessly such as these may have looked at the years that have passed, may they take another look on this day and be renewed. Let us all turn to God with all our hearts; let us convert ourselves to Him once and for all, and grieving for the faults already committed, let us implore Him for His Mercy. Have mercy on us! Be merciful to us, o Lord!

**735:** *... Create a clean heart in me, o God...* [Ps 50:12]. O my Creator, my true Principle, my God! Just look at all these creatures who at my word alone prostrate themselves in Your sight. All are confidently united here in one single desire, and they pray to You with a new and strong insistence: "...create in us a clean heart..." And just who is it who could ever make clean what is drawn from uncleanness from its very origin, if not You Alone, my God? Thus, who is it who is able to produce from nothing and to call to new being anything at all? And here I would not be referring to such a good reality as is Your grace - but, who else could cleanse, purify, and re-embellish our hearts, if also not You Alone, my God?

**736:** We recognize absolutely nothing in us regarding being, nothing pertaining to merit. We are in fact, so to speak, included within nothing, because of our multiple sins. But You, we still hope, can and still choose to do so, constitute our hearts from such a horrible nothingness, into a new being according to grace. In pardoning and in bestowing of mercy you are used to manifesting singularly Your omnipotence <sup>7</sup>. And once we have become as new creatures, we can walk in this newness of life [Rm 6:4].

And this is why we dare, knowing that our good desires are acceptable to You, to pray to You still to renew a good spirit deep within us [Ps 50:12]. Renew our spirit, o my God, since they have aged excessively through long practices on our part and due to the old habits of iniquity. And straighten them because our enemies have bent our souls down. And we, on our part, by consenting have cured our spirits downward by lowering them toward earthly concupiscences.

**737:** Then straighten up anew with that rectitude with which You first created them. Lift up these spirits to a higher hope in You, so that each one of us might experience how good You are, o my God, as those whose hearts are in order [Ps 72:1]. And we ask that one day we might, at long last, see you, no longer under the veils and in the shadow of obscure faith how we now adore You under the sacred species. But, we ask that we might see You face to face, as You have promised those who are clean of heart [Mt 5:8]. We ask that we might contemplate You, love You, possess You forever, true Center, sole term and ultimate end of our hearts. ...*create a clean heart in me, o God: and renew a right spirit within my bowels...* [Ps 50:12].

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### Sources

#### OT

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|----------------|-----------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| <b>Ps 4:3</b>  | <b># 734</b>                | <b>Pr 4:18</b> | <b># 732</b> |
| <b>9</b>       | <b># 729</b>                | <b>Ct 5:11</b> | <b># 726</b> |
| <b>50:12</b>   | <b>## 735[ 2 x];736;737</b> | <b>12</b>      | <b># 726</b> |
| <b>72:1</b>    | <b># 737</b>                | <b>13</b>      | <b># 727</b> |
| <b>118:131</b> | <b># 730</b>                |                |              |

#### NT

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|-----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------------|
| <b>Mt 5:8</b>   | <b># 737</b> | <b>Rm 6:4</b>  | <b>## 714; 736</b> |
| <b>Jn 17:22</b> | <b># 722</b> | <b>8:9</b>     | <b># 728</b>       |
|                 |              | <b>2 P 1:4</b> | <b># 723</b>       |

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<sup>7</sup>cf. Liturgy. Tenth Sunday after Pentecost.

Liturgy

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

# 736

Fathers & DoctorsSt. Augustine, *De Musica*, 6, 38. t. 1, 531/B, ff.

# 725

*Epist.* 3, 4. t. 2, 58

# 725

*In Io.*, tr. 3, 121. t. 3/2, 312 A, ff.

# 719

St. Bernard [no citation - Portrait of Grace]

# 728

St. Thomas Aquinas, I-II, q. 110, a.2, ad 2 um

# 721

Other AuthorsVirgil, *Eclogues*, 10, 69

# 716

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**738:****SERMON 16****The Lenten Fast to be accepted in Joy**

**Preached on the First Sunday of Lent, in St. Paul's of Campo Marzio, Verona, on February 22, 1803.**

Most revered listeners, and very welcome bothers and sisters in Christ - if ever before, if at any other time, that I have ascended this pulpit, to discuss with you regarding various matters of great interest for your own spiritual progress, I have never felt more joyful than right now. My heart is indeed in jubilation at your devout presence. I find great comfort as well in my natural timidity at the pleasant sight of seeing your faces, courteous and modestly composed. So, this time, prior to presenting myself, I experience the joy and the courage increase within me so that I am forced to manifest this in words.

**739:** It is so good to see you, with such piety gathered in this Church on a day when the world is proposing to you its indescribable invitation and yearnings, for its seductive delights. The world would like to draw you from all Christian recollection. It would keep you from an object such as this that is so appealing that it could not but wound your hearts in tender manner and to move them to love sincerely the good for your souls. I have no hesitation in professing to you this is the direction of my own heart. So, it is therefore quite easy to guess how much love there is in your hearts, how much hunger for the divine word, and how predominant in you is the yearning to offer your obsequious how predominant in you is the yearning to offer your obsequious devotion to the divine even when confronted with the more powerful, desirous, attracting commitments to this world.

**740:** And here I am again, already given courage by your excellent dispositions. I am here to expose to you simply and without any other preambles that which I did not think could be done, other than presenting the theme with great caution: that is, to offer to you the purpose that is both useful and interesting, for which I have come here this evening. I would like and I think I can dispose your souls to receive with all joy that already proximate Lenten fasting. My theme is perhaps somewhat unexpected by you. But, I know all too well that what is necessarily to you is accomplished with all promptness, almost by choice. Listen to my reasoning for a few moments, and then you, too, will be fully convinced of it.

**741:** There is just one favor I ask of you, my listeners: that in judging that you never be taken in by first appearances, and even less by the imprudent and prejudiced usual way of thinking. I ask that you weigh very well, with tranquil minds every argument brought forward. Acting this way, you will be able quite easily to perceive how the soft delights and the crude licentiousness have always been the tragic cause from whence are derived the most pitiful diseases, and therefore, the even more fatal death of souls. And for this reason, the Lenten Fast, with all the other exercises of Christian penance that accompany it, are the surest and most valuable remedy to regain lost health, or to keep it. This is what taxes out the evil from its true and principal root.

**742:** Remember in the times of Abraham such a large tract of the land was over-run and consumed by an evil that was so [Gn 19:24, ff.] frightful that even God Himself judged it incurable. He finally came to the conclusion of consuming inflames all the numerous inhabitants of the entire five cities. They were like living cadavers and He decided to burn them rather than bury them under the ruins of their own homes, as He did in other cases. This time, though, there was the concern for the contagious stench that would bring havoc to the rest of the world. Just ask Ezechiel now the real cause for such a terrible evil, and he will respond: *...pride, fullness of bread, and abundance...* [Ezk 16:49].

This was that Hebrew people, taken up out of Egypt, nourished and fed by God's Providence. They were taken from the slopes of Sinai, where they were witnesses of the heavenly prodigies. While they were awaiting the Law, the sacred history attests, they sat down to eat and to drink and began to "play". Under this honest word "to play" are implied the most crude and shameful dishonesty [Ex 32:6].

**743:** However, in the final analysis, our first parents, after the original sin, remained with their nature so weakened and debilitated, that they were like sick people. Even the slightest disorder was enough to lead them to death. What exceeds all wonder is to see Adam, in the state of innocence, surrounded by all those delights, and then falls because of a wretched satisfaction of his gullet. His collapse left him so mortally ill that he lost such a precious life of the soul. And, at the same time, his physical life, that had once been so happy, in those days was radically changed. And you judge if you can what poison was ever so potent as that, that it sufficed to waste a human being who by nature, and been so healthy. By grace, he had been immortal, and this corruption he took in extended to all his innumerable posterity, to infect it and to contaminate it [Gn 3:1, ff.].

Hence, God was very well provided you with the means to stave off such grave damage. Right there in the earthly paradise, He laid down a rigorous precept of fast and abstinence. And how fortunate would we not all have been, had our first parents kept this precept! Nonetheless, even in our misery, we can still find true happiness. Once we take note of their failing and our ruin, we will come to know better to make use of a remedy that is all the more necessary as it is efficacious.

**744:** The case of Nineveh is a similarly convincing proof of its value and power. The well-being of this unfortunate city had come to such a despairing end that a prophet was sent by God, and at high speed. He had already predicted to them that absolutely, after a brief period of forty days, the city would its procedure under its own ruins. However, this ruin would not fall on these abandoned citizens right away. They were led by their fear to seek through fasting the extreme remedy for their wrongs. They resolutely undertook to attempt the trial, that changed the aspect of their situation. And in this way, God was placated. With all ease, they obtained pardon, and even that decree was changed that when it was enunciated, it seemed as though it were immutable [Jon 3:1, ff.].

**745:** You see now with what strength and promptness that fasting is able to work such prodigious cures, even in the most desperate cases. Observe, however, again its efficacy, which is no less than its necessity, in still another happening, referred this time by the Gospel.

One day, the disciples came back to the divine Master, somewhat saddened. They had made very effort a number of times to release a possessed man from the devil's power that had been so amply communicated to them. Over this person they had made all kinds of attempts, even without number and experiments that had not been without effect, or themselves.

**746:** However, immediately all wonderment ceased in them when they received from Him such a beautiful explanation in response: *....But this kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting...* [Mt 17:20]. It was precisely this type of possession that is the most unclean and filthy of all. And this is the very type which in our own times has taken possession of the hearts of the greater part of our Christian brothers and sisters. Thus, the devil might indeed be thought of as the god of this age.

To cast out such a dominant malady, fasting is made all the more necessary. Prayer, too, is likewise requested for the healing. However, prayer takes on all its force in working, when joined to fasting. The Holy Spirit Himself has said: *...Prayer is good with fasting...* [Tb 12:8]. Indeed, prayer is good, not alone, but joined with fasting. It is fasting that renders the mind agile, alert and free, and lends it wings to ascend up to God.

**747:** O my Christians, let your complaints cease, that your prayers are empty - and that every day your temptations increase, threatening to overthrow you - and that you no longer can see any way out to liberate you from your infirmity. And understand once and for all that even that which the most powerful exorcisms render vain and empty, can only be obtained - and in fact is obtained - by the most efficacious and proper **medicine**, which is fasting.

**748:** Do not think, however, beloved hearers, that fasting's total usefulness is terminated in the soul. This would leave for your wretched bodies nothing more than that bitter and badly tasting **medicine**. This would be even the most efficacious remedies that are thus experienced, without bringing any beneficial effect. It is right here that I would want all to hear me well. All who either by malice would want to discredit such discreet and gentle laws of the holy Catholic Church - or, all those who by false concern exaggerate these, should listen. Such as these can bring great scandal to the weak, and aggravate the discomfort of fasting. I speak now to all who are still too timid and delicate, those Christians who look on Lent with such horror. They think of it as a slow martyrdom, or slaughter. They consider it as though they were being asked to destroy their own being, as they are influenced by a very strong self-love, even though really they are incapable of true love of themselves.

**749:** And so not all such persons know how useful and how necessary is fasting to maintain that body of theirs healthy, in all their worry about it. It could even lengthen

their lives for which they suffer such concern. Perhaps you do not believe me? Let them believe, then, in the Holy Spirit. These are His words: *...By surfeiting, many have perished: but, he, that is temperate, shall prolong his life...* [Si 37:34]. By over-eating and drinking many end their lives sooner and shorten their time of living. Abstinence, by contrast, is the most sure means of lengthening life.

This is the way it is. That rejoicing, that taking delight in banquets and cups, that inability of ever denying satisfaction to the gullet, some think that all this will maintain the body even more vigorously and for a longer time. What it does is sicken the body, corrupts it, kills it. Whereas mortification, sobriety, abstinence that they hate as almost the capital enemy of their bodies that they love excessively - these are what cure it, strengthen it and maintain it.

**750:** Those severe penitents, who used to live in the desert solitudes, battled until evening against their hunger and thirst in starving their stomachs, waited until sundown. As it was setting, then they partook of bitter roots and the insipid fruits of those wild plants, as their daily diet. The fresh waters of the near-by springs served as their simple and customary beverage. And yet, with such meager suppers they lasted entire centuries, as some even lived more than a hundred years.

**751:** And finally, in our own times, just observe these religious who live enclosed in a cloister. They practice a very austere and very great penance. They keep almost a daily fast and a perpetual Lent. And this is all without considering those other sufferings with which their bodies are afflicted. They walk in the cold snow in bare feet, and have contact with the hard ice in the deep of winter. They walk bare-headed under the blazing sun of the summer heat. They sleep on bare tables or on old hay, and they interrupt their short rest with their lengthy singing of the Psalms. And yet, among such as these, you can often find a very robust health and an even greater old age. Only in vain can there be sought among the well-off and more delicate, well-fed people in the world, those that can surpass these monks. Thus, the statement of the Holy Spirit has been proven to be so true, that the art of prolonging life is abstinence [Si 37:34].

**752:** If this is the way things are, my hearers, there is nowhere a remedy that is not only useful, but also necessary for the salvation of the soul, why are we not joyful and full of happiness at taking it on? Let us leave aside those worldly people who are afflicted by the proximate cessation of their delights. We, on the other hand, may await in the drawing near of this time of penance, which for us is so happy. Let them go through these days of tumult, feasting, sin and their most pleasant festivals. With more reason, we will celebrate on those days, in which we will be withdrawn from the scandals and the dangers of losing our souls; we will enjoy peace, joy, tranquility, in the security of a good conscience.

**753:** The Gospel cries out: *... Woe to you that now laugh: for you shall mourn and weep...* [Lk 6:35]. And Proverbs states: *...mourning takes hold of the end of joy...* [Pr 14:13]. How wretched indeed and how bitter the present consolations of this world, that quickly pass! How empty it is to neglect an eternal happiness that will never be lost! Of what value will it be for these unhappy people at the moment of their deaths to

have enjoyed much here? The Prophet Amos states: ... *Woe to you... [6: 1]... you that sleep on beds of ivory, and are wanton on your couches: that eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the herd... [v. 4]... they that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the best of ointments... [v. 6]* -- and they think of these delights as lasting, and not as fleeting and passing. Woe to all these! Rather: ... *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted... [Mt 5:5]*.

**754:** O how fortuitous will penance seem on that day! And how fortunate solitude! How precious will not sufferings be esteemed! Christ said: ... *you shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice; and your sorrow will be turned into joy... [Jn 16:20, ff.]* Let us love, therefore, that which lasts, and let us disdain spiritedly that which very soon comes to an end. Let us hold our souls in high regard. Let us think of cleansing them, of healing them if they are infirm. Let us keep them in health that they may presently enjoy, also for the future. Let us be not like children who refuse the most beneficial medicines because they might leave a slight bitter taste on their tongues.

**755:** Let us look to the saints to see what they have done, how much they endured, how much they suffered for the salvation of their souls. We are Christians. With His example, Christ will give us courage to take this remedy willingly. For He, too, observed a strict fast for forty days. And will we look for exemptions; will we try to find every excuse to dispense ourselves - we who have such a need of this? And will it seem excessive that for just a bit of fasting we will win a paradise, where we will be eternally satiated by an immense beatitude? And will it seem too much for us that for forty days of a rather manageable fast, we will avoid an endless fire? For so little, is it too much to ask to escape from an eternity of torments, that have been prepared for us because of our grave sins?

Let us think these thoughts, and thereby let us dispose our souls to meet with much joy this sacred Lent. For in this way, we will be purged deeply by means of fasting from our faults, and we will be endowed with holy virtues. We have been made worthy to participate fruitfully in the Eucharistic Bread here on earth so that we might then afterwards be introduced into the eternal banquet up in heaven.

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**Sources****OT**

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| Gn 3:1, ff.  | # 743      |
| 19:24, ff.   | # 741      |
| Ex 32:6      | # 742      |
| Tb 12:8      | # 748      |
| Pr 14:13     | # 753      |
| Si 37:34     | ## 749;751 |
| Ezk 16:49    | # 742      |
| Am 6:1       | # 753      |
| 4            | # 753      |
| 6            | # 753      |
| Jon 3:1, ff. | # 744      |

**NT**

|               |       |
|---------------|-------|
| Mt 5:5        | # 753 |
| 17:20         | # 745 |
| Lk 6:25       | # 753 |
| Jn 16:20, ff. | # 754 |

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**756:****SERMON 17****Frequent Communion**

**Preached on the Fourth Sunday of Lent, in St. Paul's, of Campo Marzio, on March 20th, 1803. On the left bank, in Verona.**

Beloved brothers and sisters, whenever I consider the Gospel for today [Jn 6:1-15], I am always much moved by those hungry crowds which followed Christ. While they put aside all other cares, Christ corresponded to them with a provident liberality. He fed them prodigiously with the multiplied bread. Each time I read this there comes to my mind a kind of pleasant, welcome comfort. This is present in witnessing your devotion towards this most august and divine Sacrament, expressed also in the laudable frequency you approach It. This is particularly so in these days, when you approach the sacred altar seeking there that same loving Master and Lord. He has chosen to remain with us even to the consummation of the world, veiled under the sacramental species.

**757:** While the fervor of those crowds may be admired, in you there is even more to be admired, your faith. This assures you of seeking with all firmness that which your senses do not perceive. And therefore, without doubt even greater is the gracious correspondence that He renders to our affections. He is not multiplying for you an earthly bread, but offers you a heavenly loaf and Himself as your food, to nourish your spirits superabundantly. But, if the fact from the Gospel crowd has served to excite your faith, your faithful religious practice every day is the ore needed each day for the outstanding edification that is very necessary in these times that see such dissipation and transgressions.

**758:** The fact that many Christians today are tepid, or almost cold to surprising degrees, and so only rarely, or, at the least, they are almost forced to approach Christ once a year. They all need to be enkindled and inspired to this. And so, far as I can see what provides greater fruit is the good example of the many, if they persevere. This is worth more than words, even though I do add my own today. Perhaps this is easier to do as you all move on ahead of me to obtain with the good odor of your example, the desired result. I follow along, as though to urge onward with the efficacy of the divine word, to attract some. It may very well be that there may be some here who perhaps just by chance are here to listen to me. I hope to inspire in them a greater willingness for the future, to come to this celestial banquet.

It should not be believed, my listeners, that these surely are not very fervent Christians will not have ready their apparent arguments and subtle excuses. All of these serve to dispense the frequenting of this sacred table. And these are precisely the ones that I feel I must have primarily in my sights to take them by the hand. Otherwise, as they are still standing, every other even more efficacious means to persuade them will be in vain.

**759:** One of the most usual excuses is that of the duties of their state in life, the need to watch over their families that are their responsibility. These requirements do not leave them either the time, nor the commodity as would be necessary in order to come more often to the Sacraments. But, I would really like to ask them if these matters and those cares every keep them from sitting each day down to the earthly tasks that they magnify a bit, ever leave their bodies without food, even for a single day - and I would not say for weeks, or months.

**760:** And if they reply that these matters are indeed necessary and absolutely indispensable, I would reply: And do you not have a like necessity to feed your souls frequently, and a need to restore your forces lost in sustaining your lives? And is not the Eucharist the soul's daily bread? For the Lord has said: *...For my flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed... [Jn 6:56], ... He who eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has everlasting life... [v. 55]... except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you... [v. 54].*

So, they feel so deeply the requirements of their bodies that to satisfy them, they feel it necessary at different times every day to interrupt their most interesting cares to meet them. Could they, then, remain so insensible toward the needs of their souls already languishing and exhausted by such a long fast! It seems that it never even enters their heads for many weeks on end that they cannot find even on feast days, the need to nourish their souls with its own bread!

**761:** But, if they would only they would approach Christ more often than what they are presently doing, how much help would they not find in this also for their earthly matters! By uniting themselves to the true Wisdom, which Christ is, their minds would be better illuminated to handle their interests with even greater prudence. Were they to come and find strength from Fortitude Himself, they would be more able to sustain the weight that wears down on them, without being overburdened. They would even be helped and their cares lightened as Christ Himself tells us: *... Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you... [Mt 11:28].*

**762:** And would they not perhaps be better assisted in all their needs? In this day, the disciples showed themselves in the Gospel that they were afraid that such a numerous crowd would die of hunger. They had all abandoned their own self-interest to follow after Christ. And you know how Christ was able to multiply the bread for them, that many basketfuls remained over. Even St. Peter, left behind his own means of earning a living, and followed after Christ. And when it was time to pay the tribute, did not Christ provide it, by having it taken right from the fish's mouth? [Mt 17:26]. And another time, when they had worked the whole night through without catching a single fish, the divine Master came upon them. In the next instant they drew in the net so full of fish that his own boat, and that of his companions, almost gave under the weight [Lk 1:5, ff.]. This is all so true that the loving Lord not only takes delight in bestowing graces on the soul, but also takes very special care of the interests of those who lovingly approach Him.

For we see indeed - for it seems to me that I a being approached by these tepid ones - we can see how useful it would be for them. And we will then be even the more easily convinced to interrupt our occupations to participate more often in such a wonderful good. We should pay no heed if the observation of the world come to deride our frequency, and call us names that surely would be displeasing to us.

**763:** O, such an excuse is more worthy to be pitied than to be combated! O, such an excuse is more worthy to be pitied than to be combated! This would mean that the Christians of this time would be ashamed to follow Christ and to be called Christian. They would be like those important people among the Hebrews who really did believe in Christ. Yet, they did not dare to approach Him out of respect for the Pharisees, and for fear of being excluded from the Synagogue. They would lay more account to the honor of this world than being honored by Christ. And so, for a vain and base glory they lose one that is authentic and eternal. Christ has already made it quite clear in the Gospel: *... For he that shall be ashamed of Me and My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed...* [Lk 9:26; 12:9]. If anyone will not be ashamed of confessing My Name before men, then neither will I be ashamed of confession his Name before My Father, Who is in heaven. And in another passage: *...Blessed are you when you shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, for my sake...* [Mt 5:11]...*Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven...* [v. 12].

**764:** Surely, if we have been courteously invited by an earthly Prince to His table, and were treated there as friends and members of his household, we would not pay very much attention to the empty criticisms of an unknowledgeable crowd. In comparison to the honor that we would receive from the Prince, and from his courtesans, we would never just because of the futile views of others, lose so favorable a grace.

But we - the timid souls might reply - if only we thought of ourselves more worthy, we would approach this sacrament with every good will. But, we are sinners, full of imperfections, and far from that fervor in which we see so many other good souls. Therefore, we are afraid of receiving condemnation, rather than salvation.

**765:** And this is the final argument that to them seems invincible, under which they cover their timidity. I would like to respond to this in kind, since they seem to be citing the very words of the Apostle: *...for he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord...* [1 Co 11:29]. Such as these, should also note the text that is connected with this one: *... But let a man prove himself: and so let him eat of that bread and drink of the chalice...* [v. 28]. These words are so interpreted with every assurance from the constant practice of the entire Church. They require that all the faithful examine their consciences. Should anyone find that he is cognizant of a grave fault, he should hurry in sorrow to purge it through sacramental Confession, along with the fir proposal not to sin any more. And then: *...let him eat of the bread...* When this is done, then such a person could approach and

eat without any fear of that bread. St. Augustine speaks of it in these terms <sup>8</sup>: receive it securely, for He is Bread, not poison.

**766:** And if Christ is indeed Life, and comes to give this, how could He ever give death to those who come to Him in order to live? And if He indeed did die in order to give us life, even while we were still enemies [Rm 5:10] - how, then, now will He give eternal death of damnation to those who have been reconciled and washed in His Blood?

Such as these should keep in mind the reception accorded the prodigal son whom his father in the Gospel received so lovingly. This son returned to his father's feet after having consumed his patrimony in the most infamous vices. He confesses that he has sinned, and immediately receives the most tender signs of affection. He is dressed anew in fine clothing after removing his coarse garment and he is introduced into his father's house to share in that festive banquet. [Lk 15:11-32]. Let the timid all notice that these importunate fears are nothing more than deceptions covered over by the devil.

**767:** Let them understand this well, states St. Cyril of Alexandria <sup>9</sup> that all the baptized have been made participants of divine grace. If, for a long time, through a false practice of religion, or, out of some very harmful fear of going to communion, stay away from it, they may deprive themselves of eternal life. Should one decide not to receive, even if he should be kept away by fear, or by humility, he creates scandal and sets a trap for other souls. It would be more fitting that one make every effort and take every care to set about cleansing the soul taking on a new resolution to live. All should, therefore, hasten forthwith to the participation in life. The devil uses various stratagems to deceive. First he may induce one to live licentiously. Then, when one has a real heavy burden of vices and sins, such a one is persuaded to have a horror for the very sacrament through which he could indeed be **healed**.

**768:** Thus far the thoughts of the saint. St. Ambrose <sup>10</sup> and St. Augustine <sup>11</sup> and St. Bernard <sup>12</sup> all agree in this: they all say that the Eucharist is an excellent **medicine** against sin. St. Cyprian <sup>13</sup> wrote this: The Lord's chalice inebriates the one who drinks it in such a manner that it makes him sober, that it conducts the mind to spiritual wisdom. It reaches anyone who has a taste for this world and directs such a person to the reflection and taste for God. And as happens to anyone who drinks earthly and common wine, that the mind is loosened, and the spirit is recreated, and there is chased away all sadness. In like manner, when the Blood of the Lord and this

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<sup>8</sup>St. Augustine, *In Io.* 26, 11. t. 3/2, 4980.

<sup>9</sup>St. Cyril of Alexandria - no citation given.

<sup>10</sup>St. Ambrose, *De Benedictionibus Patriarcharum*, c.9, 39. t. 1, 525 b.

<sup>11</sup>St. Augustine, *Sermo* 17. t. 5, 96 G.

<sup>12</sup>St. Bernard, *Sermo in Coena Domini.* 3.

<sup>13</sup>St. Cyprian, *Epist.* 63, 11. pp. 229 b, ff.

salutary drink, the memory of the old person goes away. There is forgotten all worldly conversation. The heavy and sad breast that first was oppressed by sins that brought anguish to it, is exchanged for the joy of the gift bestowed by God. All anguish is resolved, and worries are discharged.

**769:** As for those who do not want to receive Communion and adduce as their reason that they do not feel fervor, act just like those persons whose faith is cold. They do not want to approach the heat until they are already warm. St. John Damascene <sup>14</sup> teaches that the Eucharist is a burning coal that chases away the cold and tepidity. hence, just as those who go away from the fire feel the cold more and more - so, those who keep away, armed with variously depicted pretexts, from this celestial fire, will end up frozen, and totally hardened.

And it is very salutary, as I will conclude with St. Bonaventure <sup>15</sup>, and also useful for person to prepare to take this **medicine** often, and strive to partake of it the most devoutly as he possibly can. And although it sometimes happens that one feels totally bereft of fervor, such a one should confide in the divine mercy and receive it with great trust. When one feels unworthy, then all the more is it necessary for such a person to seek out the **doctor**, the more he feels the illness.

**770:** I confess, my listeners, that after having responded to the objections of the tepid individuals, that I think that I may have disarmed them from those arguments, under which they covered themselves. Now all that remains is to urge their hearts on. In order for me to do this, it would be only right for me to have my own ardor and all aflame, to be able to accomplish this effectively. I know quite well the task that lies before me. I will beg them to turn their glance but once to that sacred ciborium, and to listen with the ears of their hearts to that sweet invitation that this divine Lover of their souls extends to them: ... *Come, eat My Bread...* [Pr 9:5].

**771:** This is the table that I am preparing for you: that same food that in heaven the princes of My court nourish themselves with. It is precisely this that I present to you, pilgrim exiles one earth: ... *take and eat. This is My Body...* [Mt 26:26]... *for this is My Blood... which shall be shed for many unto the remission of sins...* [v. 28]. This has redeemed you from slavery to your enemies. Just look at how many sufferings, how many agonies, the kind of death, the preparation of this table for you cost Me. Can you, then, render Me any less gratitude than to go along with My desire that you frequently make use of this Sacrament?

Therefore, I will stay here all days and all nights: ...*and behold I a with you all days even to the consummation of the world...* [Mt 28:20]. Will you, then, allow even years to pass before coming to Me? Do you care so little for My love? And to whom will you go, then, in order to receive life, if you do not come to Me, Who alone can bestow it on you? And who will give you peace of soul? And who will satisfy your

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<sup>14</sup>St. John Damascene, *De Fide orthod.*, 4, 3.

<sup>15</sup>St. Bonaventure, *De Profectu Religiosorum*, 2, 77.

desires of your hearts, if not Me, since: ... *I am the Alpha and the Omega, beginning and the end...* [Apoc 1:8].

**772:** Is it that you are afraid to approach Me? Is it that you are afraid to approach Me? I am your Master, Father, Friend, Brother. And if you are infirm, I am still your **Doctor**. I am your Health, and one day, I will be your Beatitude, your Glory. While I do reside here as though on a throne, with all the splendor of My Majesty, I would have compassion on your timidity on your pusillanimity. But since I am in this Sacrament, hidden and brought to your level to be with human beings - then, why do you not approach with every confidence, knowing that all my delights are to be with the children of men [Pr 8:31].

O, my listeners, my brothers and sisters! Who is there among you with hearing so dense that he would not listen to these loving words, and these most binding invitations in the depths of your hearts? - Blessed are they who hear the divine voice: ....*Blessed are they rather who hear the word of God, and keep it...* [Lk 11:28].

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#### OT

|         |       |        |       |
|---------|-------|--------|-------|
| Pr 8:31 | # 772 | Pr 9:5 | # 770 |
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#### NT

|             |       |            |       |
|-------------|-------|------------|-------|
| Mt 5:11     | # 763 | Lk 12:9    | # 763 |
| 12          | # 763 | 15:11-32   | # 726 |
| 11:28       | # 761 | Jn 6:1-15  | # 756 |
| 17:26       | # 762 | 54         | # 760 |
| 26:26       | # 771 | 55         | # 760 |
| 28          | # 771 | Rm 5:10    | # 765 |
| 28:20       | # 771 | 1 Co 11:28 | # 765 |
| Lk 5:1, ff. | # 762 | 29         | # 765 |
| 9:26        | # 763 | Apoc 1:8   | # 771 |
| 11:28       | # 772 |            |       |

### Fathers & Doctors

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| St. Ambrose, <i>De Benedictinibus Patriarcharum</i> , c. 9, 39.<br>t. 1, 525 B             | # 768          |
| St. Augustine, <i>In Jo.</i> , 26, 11. t. 3/2, 498 O<br><i>Serm.</i> , 17, 5. t. 5/1, 96 G | # 765<br># 768 |

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| <b>St. Bernard, <i>Sermo in Coena Domini</i>, 3 [138]</b>            | <b># 768</b> |
| <b>St. Bonaventure, <i>De Profectu religiosorum</i>, 2, 77 [140]</b> | <b># 769</b> |
| <b>St. Cyprian, <i>Epist.</i> 63, 1 [pp. 229, B, ff.]</b>            | <b># 768</b> |
| <b>St. Cyril of Alexandria [no citation: on frequent Communion]</b>  | <b># 767</b> |
| <b>St. John Damascene, <i>De Fide Orthod.</i>, 4, 13</b>             | <b># 769</b> |

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**773:****SERMON 18****Perseverance**

**Easter Monday, the 11th of April 1803. Preached in St. Paul's of Campo Marzio, Verona.**

Here you are, beloved sinners, at long last in these days that are so holy, already reconciled with God. You have already been restored into the home of your good heavenly Father and fed at His divine table. You have already begun to: *...taste and see that the Lord is sweet...* [Ps 33:9] - and how: *... rich is His Mercy...* [Ep 2:4]. Your hearts will already be at peace and your spirit consoled in the joyful festivity in which the entire world has entered, to celebrate the most joyful moment of your return. You have already been re-established into the arms of your good Father, never to leave again. You have been invited to dwell in His house all the days of your life. [Ps 26:4].

**774:** I approve of your resolutions, I rejoice at your fervor, and have no doubt regarding your constancy. However, I still believe deeply that today is a good time to confirm it. Even those disciples, whose story we have read in this morning's Gospel, had very firmly believed in the promises of their divine Master and Savior, that He would indeed rise on the third day. However, they left the city at the setting of the sun of this third day, on their way to the castle of Emmaus. As they still had not seen Him, their faith began to waver and they needed their redeemer to appear to them, already risen up, to re-establish them and confirm them.

Please do not take it badly that I imagine in you now a danger in which I do not think you are actually in, but would only like to take steps to avoid it beforehand. And just listen to what briefly my heart yearns to say to you in order to fortify your spirits in its proposals, and to animate you to a holy perseverance.

**775:** The Holy Spirit adverts in the Scriptures: *... when you come to the service of God... prepare your soul for temptation...* [Si 2:1]. In fact, the devil is envious of the good of souls, and he scarcely comes to realize that one has been placed on the straight road, making a very good start with strong proposals, that he makes use of all the artifices at his disposal to make one turn back, or hinder and set traps all along the path. He puts before one's eyes the difficulty and the annoyance of such a long and strenuous journey, so that it be tried of and soon that one would lose heart.

**776:** He would say to some among those sinners, or just recently converted to God: how can you expect to last on this path for thirty, fifty, or sixty years of your life that might still remain before you? How can you go on in such a very hard journey? Will you always be able to resist against your passions, always remove yourselves from capricious conduct? How can you always mortify your senses, and never again to recreate them with pleasing treatment? Can you always be vigilant over the movements of your heart, without ever having repose or peace? This is how the devil insinuates, and this is how he lodges one of the most powerful temptations, one that is

very clumsy to overcome, and even to recognize. Be very careful, then, of his most subtle astuteness in his deceptions.

**777:** For one thing, he makes it look very sure and amplifies beyond all measure that you have a long life ahead of you. But, this is the most uncertain of all, for no human being can assure himself of a single day beyond this one. Hence, we are advised in the Gospel not to think about tomorrow [Mt 6:34]. And this is also true in our own case here, that you should strive to elude his machinations: Just live each day as though there did not remain anymore time for life.

**778:** Who is there who would not be able to sustain at least the fatigue of a single day? Would not this be even more possible, by thinking of the reward which God has prepared for anyone who bravely combats against his enemies? Is not salvation promised to those who persevere [Mt 10:22; 24:13]? Is not eternal glory promised, for those: ... *who reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared to it...* [Rm 8:18]? And if life shall be granted to you also tomorrow, then tomorrow you will return to establish again your proposals, and to work through just that day, as though no others were to be granted you to win heaven.

**779:** Who can ever say to you how far death is from you, death which is the goal of your course? What would become of you, if after having just put yourself to the journey, that you would just stop running? What would it mean if you begin to think that the finish line is too far away, when maybe all that you need are a few more steps to reach it? You would unfortunately lose that pallium to which you have been called from above. Those from below are trying to take from you that crown which has already been prepared for you. The Holy Spirit exclaims: ...*Woe to them that have lost patience, and that have forsaken the right ways, and have gone aside into crooked ways...* [Si 2:16]. Indeed, woe to such as these! For just a few days that could really be fewer than one may think, to choose to lose eternity - what lack of judgment this would be, what an extravagant absurdity!

**780:** The other deception in this temptation is that the devil makes it seem that the necessary fatigue and difficulty are excessive. These are indeed experienced in the beginning from renouncing the false pleasures of sin, and one commits himself to serve God. This does not mean that they have to last that way at the same intensity all through life. It does not stand to reason that this temptation will always increase, making itself each day more difficult to sustain the deprivation of past defects. This is blatantly false. The reason is that the fatigue only lasts for a certain time. It is then rendered easy by force of habit, changing what was once arduous. It becomes even joyful and delightful.

**781:** This, in fact, is what is written in Ecclesiasticus: ... *A patient man shall bear for a time, and afterwards joy shall be restored to him...* [Si 1:29]. The Holy Spirit also declares: ... *I will show you the way of wisdom...* [Pr 4:11]. “Wisdom” according to the etymology of the word, in the teaching of St. Bernard <sup>16</sup>, is “the sweet knowledge of

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<sup>16</sup>St. Bernard, *In Cant.*, Sermon 85.

God". So, it is as though He were saying: I will show you the path through which you will arrive at the supreme taste and sweetness in knowing, loving, and serving God, as you see that the Saints have done.

**782:** And just what is this path? - ... *I shall lead you by the gates of equity...* [Pr 4:11]. Instead, at the beginning, the narrow paths of virtue find the entrance to be difficult. But when you will have entered upon this path, your steps will no more be held back, for: ... *when you run you shall not meet a stumbling block...* [Pr 4:12]. This is precisely what the Wise Man has said in another passage: ... *Behold with your eyes how I have labored a little, and have found much rest to myself...* [Si 51:35]. And again, in the Psalm there is read: ... *Much peace have they that love Your Law, and to them, there is no stumbling block* [Ps 118:165].

**783:** And observe that the Holy Spirit has not said [Pr 4:11]: When you will have completed walking along these paths, you will then find the way both easy and broad-but, emphasizes when you have "entered" upon this way. The reason is that from the very outset the Lord begins to make it delectable. And He caresses those souls that He sees resolved in applying themselves to His service and to combating their bad habits. If they do not rest, and begin to lose heart, He continues to favor them, until He will have placed them in their repose with His People in the beauty of peace [Is 32:18]. For it is here that the Spirit gently at work reposes one in God.

**784:** This is why Ecclesiasticus has said in another place: ... *For in working about her, you shall labor a little and shall quickly eat of her fruits...* [Si 6:20]. And the Apostle wrote this to the Hebrews: ...*Now all chastisement for the present indeed seems not to bring with it joy, but sorrow: but, afterwards it will yield, to them that are exercised in it, the most peaceable fruit of justice...* [Heb 12:1]. If you, then, courageously make the resolution to begin, and if you pay no attention to those present and passing difficulties, you will see very soon the Lord at work. Your hearts will become filled with consolation and joy, and you will bless the Lord who has shown you the path to arrive at such peace.

**785:** Not only will He be content to show you the way, but He shows Himself ready to lead you along this path: ...*I will lead you by the paths of equity...* [Pr 4:11]. Reflect well on this, because in this manner I respond to those fears that disturb your hearts. It is through these that the enemy strives to excite them the more in you, and all of this to make you fall away from your resolutions. No matter how long this road may be that you have to journey: and no matter what the fatigue you experience, never cease in trying to hold on to the right way; and even though the dangers that you have to encounter are really grave; and while the enemies who contest your way are powerful, and the traps they set are perpetual - you should not worry: ...*whom shall I fear...?* [Ps 26:1]. ... *I set the Lord always in my sight: for he is at my right hand, that I be not moved...* [Ps 15:8]. How can you be afraid of falling? - ... *You shall not fear them, because the Lord, your God, is in your midst, a God mighty and terrible...* [Dt 7:21]... *For He has delivered me from the snare of hunters: and from the sharp word...* [Ps 90:3]... *lest you dash your foot against a stone...* [v. 12]. How can you be overcome?

- ... *Your good spirit shall lead me into the right land...* [Ps 142:10]. What greater assurance could be had?

**786:** And you can see very well that when a soul is indeed guided by God's Spirit, such a person goes with assurance. Note also that this Spirit has promised this to anyone who asks for it. This is the way Christ speaks in His Gospel: *...If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him...?* [Lk 11:13]. *... Ask and you will receive...* [Mt 7:7]...*whatsoever you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive; and they shall come unto you...* [Mk 11:24].

**787:** All this is God's word. Does it perhaps seem to you now that He is not powerful enough to keep it? - ... *he has done all things whatsoever he would...* [Ps 113:3; Heb 11:3]. Would you say that He has no will to do so? The apostle responds: *... If we believe not, he continues faithful, he cannot deny himself...* [2 Tm 2:13]. The Divine Word had already declared regarding Himself: *... I am... the truth...* [Jn 14:6]. God cannot fail to be God; therefore, He cannot fail to be the Truth. And therefore, he cannot fail to carry out His promises.

**788:** What remains to be said? Nothing other than you contribute the sole condition on which He has obligated His infallible word: that you ask for it: *... Being confident of this very thing, that He Who has begun a good work in you, will perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ...* [Ph 1:6]<sup>17</sup>. This "good work" is your sanctification. He gives you the grace for your conversion, and He accomplishes this by aiding you with efficacious helps, even to the very end.

**789:** There just is no place in which you should not ask for this help: *...I will therefore that men pray in every place...* [1 Tm 2:8]. There is no time in which you would be impeded: *... Pray without ceasing...* [1 Th 5:17]. And if your tongue were perhaps impeded, the eyes would suffice to intercede with all promptness: *... I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from whence help shall come tome...* [Ps 120:1]. And should all the other senses fall silent, the heart speaks, one's desires speak, that are heard even as they are coming to birth and before the heart realizes that they have been formed: *...The Lord heard the desire of the Poor: your ear has heard the preparation of their heart...* [Ps 9; Heb 10:17].

**790:** Courage, my brothers, Courage, my brothers and sisters. If the time is short, well, the fatigue will be even shorter. If God will come to our assistance, we will stabilize our wills, reconfirm our resolutions. Let us run without stopping, until we have arrived at comprehending that to which all the thoughts of our minds should be directed, and all the desire of our hearts.

Let us imitate those rapid streams that never stop in their head-long flow, until they arrive at the sea. Or, let us be like that heavy stone which, being detached from the stony cliff on the rough summit of the mountain, rushes down precipitously, ruining

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<sup>17</sup>**Translator's Note:** Ph 1:6 is a favorite text of Fr. Bertoni – cf. CF # 185.

all barriers that stand in its way. It breaks down every obstacle until it comes to rest almost in the very center of the valley below.

**791:** Let us rivet the bok of our minds on our final end, which is God. Let us never lose sight of Him: *...while we have the time, let us work every good...* [Ga 6:10]...*let us pray without ceasing...* [1 Th 5:17]. Let us combat with valor without tiring, or ever surrendering, until we have succeeded in possessing Him: *... No man putting his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God...* [Lk 9:62] - says the Gospel. But, let us forget our past struggles, and always keep before our desires headed toward greater goals.

**792:** If we are thus resolved from the very outset, all travail and every difficulty will soon cease. Furthermore, there is nothing more than this that can frighten our adversaries than a courageous person. And just as toward those who show themselves timid and irresolute, these enemies never cease offering disturbance. They seek all means to interrupt the pathway with varied and troublesome temptations. In the words of a great Saint who experienced this in life, bold resolutions of a generous heart suffice to put the enemies all to flight. Thus, they hardly dare to turn around and make any further trouble.

**793:** If, at the beginning, we were not so resolute in succeeding with such courage, by breaking through the first assault of our adversaries, let us not lose heart at all. And if, due to our weakness, some **wounds** are inflicted upon us, let us not be crest-fallen. We know that both a ready and an efficacious **medicine** is at hand. Let us restore ourselves right away, and with even greater courage than before. Let us trust ever more in God, and continue on with our course. And when we least expect it, we will see every difficulty overcome. The enemy will be weakened and there will be assured to us that crown. This is promised to all who battle legitimately, that is, with perseverance, until the end [2 Tm 2:5] <sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup>St. Augustine, *Ad Fratres in Eremo*, Sermo 8, App. t. 6, p. 313 G - spurious.

SourcesOT

|                 |                |
|-----------------|----------------|
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| Ps 9 [Hb 10]:17 | # 789          |
| 15:8            | # 785          |
| 26:1            | # 785          |
| 4               | # 773          |
| 33:9            | # 773          |
| 90:3            | # 785          |
| 12              | # 785          |
| 113: [Heb11:5]3 | # 787          |
| 118:165         | # 782          |
| 120:1           | # 789          |
| 142:10          | # 785          |
| Pr 4:11         | # 781;782; 785 |
| 12              | #782; 783      |
| Si 1:29         | # 781          |
| 2:1 [“ordeal”]  | # 775          |
| 16              | # 779          |
| 6:20            | # 784          |
| 51:35           | # 782          |
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| Mt 5:34                                 | # 777      |
| 7:7                                     | # 786      |
| 10:22                                   | # 778      |
| 24:13                                   | # 778      |
| Mk 11:24                                | # 786      |
| Lk 9:62                                 | # 791      |
| 11:13                                   | # 786      |
| Jn 14: 6                                | # 787      |
| Rm 8:18                                 | # 778      |
| Ga 6:10                                 | # 791      |
| Ep 2:4 [ <i>Dives in Misericordia</i> ] | # 773      |
| Ph 1:6[special to Fr. Bertoni]          | # 788      |
| 1 Th 5:17                               | # 789; 791 |
| 1 Tm 2:8                                | # 789      |
| 2 Tm 2:5                                | # 793      |
| 13                                      | # 787      |
| Heb 12:11                               | # 784      |

Fathers & Doctors

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| St. Augustine, <i>Ad fratres in eremo</i> . Sermo 8,<br>Append. t. 6, p.313 G - spurious. | # 793 |
| St. Bernard, <i>In Cant</i> . Sermo 85  | # 781 |

**794:****SERMON 19****The Purity of St. Aloysius Gonzaga**

**Proposed for Imitation on the Third of his Sunday's, in the year 1803, on the 5th of June, in St. Paul's of Campo Marzio, in Verona.**

Since it is my challenge today to speak to you about St. Aloysius; angelic purity, and to propose this succinctly for your emulation, how happy I am that we are touching upon an argument dear to your hearts. But, at the same time, I am much afflicted in the realization of my own awkward thoughts on the matter as well as my unlearned tongue, that so poorly dispose me for such a task. I feel much like having a rather **rough, unartistic hand put to a very delicate canvas**, that is pretending to draw the outline in light sketches of a gentle face. How I would like to draw at least the plan of the work in its general lines.

**795:** However, it is not necessary for me to presume on **my inadequate ability. Much like an inexpert painter**, I really do not have to make **an expressive portrait of a beauty** that you already have before your eyes, almost in the living original. Is it not true that the countenance of this angelic young man is the very face of purity? And if the image is already deceased, still this lovable virtue is not dead, but makes itself still seen. It is still alive, because the devout look of an innocent heart is found in it, that still attracts in a gentle way, and has one come to love it. It is still vivid, because an unclean heart lifts up its face boldly. But, very soon it has to withdraw in shame, beaten back by a tempest of criticisms, and struck by a lightning bolt of confusion.

**796:** What else remains to me other than, as though with a present object, to point out with attentive observation, the lovable qualities that may elude a general, or confused glance. My challenge, then, is to inflame your wills to love, and to forming the efficacious desire to possess this virtue, is it not so, and in its greatest possible perfection for your particular state in life? For my part, I am really hoping that the excellent dispositions of your souls will supply for the insufficiency for my speech. I rely on this more than a repeated experience that I could rely on of my own capacity.

**797:** All the virtues are beautiful. However, to this virtue, about which we are speaking, there is attributed professedly a special decor and beauty, as St. Thomas<sup>19</sup> teaches. And it is the eminence of this quality that I would like to present to you in the first place. Humanity is composed of two substances, the one corporeal, and the other spiritual. Consider this? Thus, human beings are in the middle place between Angels, with whom human beings share intelligence - and the animals, with which humans have in common animal life. If a human being raises up to make use of his mind, he is like an Angel. When he lowers himself, and obeys his ... *concupiscences, which are on his members...* [Jas 4:1], he is more like an animal.

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<sup>19</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, II-II, q. 152, a. 5, c.

**798:** This is why Scripture, speaking of human beings, who abandon their sublime place to which they had been elevated, by living in accord with reason and the spirit, in order to condescend to their flesh, expresses itself in this way: *...Man when he was in honor did not understand he has been compared to senseless beasts, and made like to them...* [Ps 48:21].

This is like the light compared to the darkness. And the light renders the shadows even more darkened, and the darkness is more luminous than the light. This happens when one does not realize better one reality when compared to its opposite.

**799:** In fact, one will never understand better, nor with greater clarity, the beautiful disposition of the parts of the human body than after some capricious hypothesis, its order is upset and its inherent symmetry ruined. If a person places the human head under the feet, to take their place - and in-grafts the feet where the head should be – what a horrible monster, what a deformed spectacle would this not be to see?

**800:** This is the very reason, not someone's imagination, but in truth, what a dissolute human being does with life, and even much worse. Such an individual takes support from that superior place where God has placed it to rule and dominate. He casts it under his feet, making it serve human passions. Of their nature, the passions require law and restraint, and the unruly person substitutes them for his head, to lord it over his life and to prevail. What could be more obscene, more filthy, and more base? These are the deformities that fall before our eyes every day and every hour. They draw the laughter, derision and ridicule from the uncultured crowd, and they bring nausea, horror and rejection from the more receptive.

**801:** O, just by looking in a mirror, not a false one, or one that flatters, but one that relays a true image, certain men and women are deceived. In these days, they make of their confusion an object of pomp, their shame becomes their glory. I am sure that they would be amazed at recognizing their monstrous appearance, and they would change the motive of their vain and delirious follies into an object of the highest abomination. Those here present would do so. And the reverence of this place does not remove from me the permission to descend to more minute descriptions. I am certain that all would break out in blushing shame, at seeing themselves so basely and vividly depicted.

**802:** Then, how even more beautiful is this virtue that conserves the order and dignity of human beings! This virtue is presented in its excellence for sublime reverence, in the words of the Psalmist, speaking in such elevated tones, to God Himself: *... Lord, You have made man a little less than the Angels...* [Ps 8:6]. It is this virtue that maintains for human beings that sublime sovereignty in which they have been constituted above all visible creatures. There pertains to purity that august splendor that much like a glorious diadem distinguishes its principality. The Psalmist continues in his description of it: *.... You have crowned him with glory and honor... [v. 6]... and You have set him over the works of Your hands... [v. 7].... You have subjected all things under his feet... [v. 8].*

**803:** It is from purity that there proceeds the recognition of that noble image of the divinity impressed on human beings, so that it can indeed be said: ... *the light of Your countenance, o Lord, is signed upon us...* [Ps 4:7]. Through its activity as it resides in the human heart, that there is built up a living temple of the Holy Spirit. By it, the human body itself becomes an instrument of God's Glory, and even more His dwelling place and footstool. This is what St. Paul wanted to say in these words: ... *your members are the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you...* [1 Co 6:19]... *glorify and bear God in your body...* [v. 20].

It is this virtue, finally, that renders a human being gracious in the sight of God, His friend, because of the likeness that he finds there. Such persons are much like those immaterial and celestial persons, so dear to humanity, that are both honored and feared even by their enemies.

**804:** But, let us proceed still further to uncover more the intimate excellency of such a noble virtue. This is why the glory, the decor, the beauty that results almost eternally from that order that purity introduces into human life. Furthermore, tranquility, peace, joy, are also daughters of this same order. Thus, a person so endowed rejoices within his own spirit, without need of going much outside, and enjoys this in the intimacy of his own being for its own worth.

And it should be noted here that in order to make clear the joy of its exercise that is so pure, although hidden, and perhaps by many still unobserved - there should not be neglected the comparison with its sorrowful opposite. At least in this discourse, it is clear that the trouble brought by illness makes all the more evident the joyfulness of good health.

**805:** Give me a human being, taken over by unregulated love, and you will see how much bother, how much anguish, and to how much turbulence his heart is subjected. His interior is comparable to a city in which everything is upside down, in revolution and tumult. The passions, comparable to a seditious and turbulent faction, assail the reason with blind and furious impetus, and free from all sides, put pressure on it and strive to influence it, as to usurp an improper and violent principality. The spirit groans in its chains of wretched servitude, and the generous character of its native greatness excites it to repair its losses, and to restore itself to its sovereign status.

**807:** All the while, God with His illustrations does not cease to call upon the will in this spirited war to re-establish God's order, and He promises abundant assistance to it. But, on the other side, the devil is employing all his artifices to fan the flames of the war of division and to keep the discord alive. The battle goes on this way day and night. All is confusion, all is frightful, all deception, anxiety, trembling in wrath, emitting ferocious shouts, cries of desperation.

**808:** Those noble virtues that were like a strong armed guard that kept watch over the bed of the peaceful Solomon, are like what assured the repose of his spirit. But, they fell extinguished and moribund at the fierce onslaught of his predominant vice. O God, what slaughter, what devastation! The Temple of God had become a throne of

sin, and then like a tyrant, it exercises its very aggressive dominion. It despoils the spirit of its arms by taking away from one every confidence of being able any more to be delivered from it. And the armor, says St. Paul, blinded by a frightening, infernal darkness that closes off for one every path from which help might be expected. This is the will, lacerated by the cruel remorse in the grasp of a despairing desolation.

**809:** From such dismal images we turn our terrified thoughts to find consolation in the rejoicing of chaste and temperate soul. And oh, it is here that there is verified the saying from the Psalms: ... *He has placed peace within your borders...* [Ps 147:3]. Indeed, all the exterior senses with their modest and virtuous composition, give off the impression to the outside, and to the entrance to this realm, an air of tranquility and the security that dwells there.

**810:** Let us enter into the heart and spirit of this. The reasonable will reigns there much like a queen, authoritative in aspect, but gentle. Her loving courtesans are a thousand affections, vested in candid innocence and of genuine simplicity. I see way down there the passions, but they offer their obsequious service to her laws, They are under the powerful custody of ordered and directed virtues. They increase considerably the glory of the one who restrains and governs them with such wisdom. A pleasing and gracious harmony of all the faculties fills everything with gentleness, joy and jubilation.

**811:** The only enemy is one who would put itself forward to disturb the calm, because this has been for a long time weakened and rejected. There is a brilliant and serene light which sparkles always in the upper heaven of the soul. This renders it impenetrable even to malicious deceptions and to dark plots. The security and the faithful witness of the good conscience fill the bones with joy, and provide a perpetual banquet of solid joy to the heart. And hope, made even more sure by the experience of abundant consolations that God showers down in comfort, almost opens to it the blessed gates of heaven. And there it can see reserved its crown and as the place of its ultimate possession. And a broad way attracts it to that unchanging happiness, to hurry in anticipation along the sweet-scented and fecund earth of this immaculate soul. The Psalmist already spoke of such persons: ... *Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the Law of the Lord...* [Ps 118:1].

**812:** Just look at the kind of virtue that I have proposed for your imitation in St. Aloysius. It seems that I can almost see this young Angel in the flesh. He is turning his handsome face of paradise toward you that is joyful and serene, beyond all measure. He is reaching out his virginal hands to call you with his gentle, kind invitation to follow him.

And it seems that he is saying: If I, if I among the most desirable delights, living in the most liberal of courts, among the most manifest of dangers - if I was able to conserve in tact my lily of purity, why can you not keep yourselves pure, protected as you are, in the environment of a simple and private condition?

**813:** I, too, dwell within the same flesh as you do. The blood runs also at war in my veins, and in this sweet April of my days, my members, my members flourish freshly and vivaciously. And if I, by keeping always a virginal chastity have surpassed nature itself, why can you not at least remain within its reasonable boundaries? Why will you not obey its common laws, by keeping that chastity that your particular state demands of you?

**814:** And if my eyes always willingly abstain even from furtive glances of earthy beauties, no matter how chaste and innocent, how is it that your looks will not suffer a discreet restraint that would suspend them, or withdraw them from staring with an excessively free malice? And if my delicate boy accepts so well such a rigid torment of protecting penance- then, why would not your bodies accept the privation from those voracious indecencies and from those enflaming drinking bouts?

**815:** Just look, look at this numerous array of innocent young men and virginal young women. Both these young men and women, then, will be able from very close at hand, each day to follow along in my arduous footsteps - could you not, at least from afar, follow the sweet perfume of my examples, that everywhere are so widely spread and diffused?

**816:** This is how he speaks to you, my hearers, this prototype of innocence. And how do you respond to His invitations?

Would one say perhaps: - It might even be true that St. Aloysius, and many others, who approach him by their imitation, might have been able to follow such arduous counsels. But, as for me, it is impossible even to observe the simple precepts.

The proposal is too absolute and as such merit to be reproved by the Church as a manifest heresy. It is necessary to limit it.

**817:** If one would respond to me this way, it is better to speak up with the very words of the Wise Man: ... *And as I know that I could not otherwise be continent except that God gave it...* [Ws 8:21]. I admit this. But I also add with the authoritative words from the Council of Trent <sup>20</sup> that: "... God does not ask impossibilities, but by commanding admonishes you both to do what you can, and to pray for what you cannot do..." And not only the saints could with their own forces do this, but only with the comfort of grace. God does not deny anyone who rightly asks Him in prayer. Thus, He is most ready to make the burden of His yoke both light and sweet [Mt 11:30]. Surely the weight of His law could indeed appear to seem perhaps to be strange, and even insupportable to the forces of our weak human nature.

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<sup>20</sup>Council of Trent, Senz. # 804.

**Sources****OT**

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|----------------|-------|
| Ps 4:7         | # 803 |
| 8:6            | # 802 |
| 7              | # 802 |
| 8              | # 802 |
| 48:21          | # 798 |
| 118: 1         | # 811 |
| 147: 3 [v. 14] | # 809 |

**NT**

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| Mt 11:30  | # 817 |
| Rm 13:12  | # 808 |
| 1 Co 6:19 | # 803 |
| 20        | # 803 |
| Jas 4:1   | # 797 |

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**Council of Trent, Decree on Justification, Jan. 13, 1547.  
The Observance of the Commandments and the  
Necessity and possibility thereof. # 817**

**Fathers & Doctors**

**St. Thomas Aquinas, II-II, q. 152, a. 5, c # 797**

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**818:****SERMON 20****The Evangelical Law**

**Preached on the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, in the Church of St. Paul's. Campo Marzio, on the left bank of Verona - on August 21, 1803.**

*... Blessed are the eyes that have seen the things that you see... [Lk 10:23].*

My very beloved brothers and sisters, these are the very words of Christ to His Disciples. In my opinion, these words were meant not only for those present, as at that moment there the Apostle and others who followed Him. Christ meant this also for His future followers, in whose number we also are called as we are for the eternal praises of God. In fact, our destiny is in no way inferior to theirs.

**819:** And what is it that they saw for them to be called "blessed"? And what do we see now in order for us, too, to be called "blessed"? Their eyes saw their Preceptor, as had already been prophesied by Isaiah [30:20]: *... and your eyes shall see your Teacher...* However, in that same place it was also predicted for all of the future of the Church, that there would never be taken away from her Master. And Christ Himself has made this promise also to us: *... behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world... [Mt 28:20].* Will it perhaps be that those who... *have known Christ according to the flesh... [2 Co 5:16]* - will be more blessed than we who have not been able to know Him according to the flesh? Rather, I read now: *...blessed are they who have not seen, and have believed... [Jn 20:29].* So, what does this mean: *.... Blessed are the eyes that see the things that you see...? [Lk 10:23].*

**820:** The response is that there are two ways that one can "see Christ" by the senses, and by faith. In the first way, Christ was seen also by His enemies. And this sight of itself is so far from making them blessed; in fact, it even made them more wretched, as He Himself has stated: *...If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin... [Jn 15:22].* The Apostles saw Him in both of these ways, and so their eyes merited to have been called "blessed". In the second and the more perfect way, we can see Him now, that is, by faith. And this is why we are no less "blessed" than they were, even though we cannot see Him in a sensible manner.

**821:** Let us, then, now consider this beatitude of ours briefly. It consists in God having called us into His own admirable light [cf. 1 P 2:9], to a lot among the saints [Ac 26:18]. He has enlightened the eyes of our hearts [Ep 1:18]. And our hearts have been justified through His Law of faith [Ga 2:16]. And so, we can see how happy is our state in His Gospel and in His grace. In order to emphasize such a great benefit that has almost been forgotten by many in these times, that gratitude that we owe to God commits us. The love for our salvation necessarily binds us, in order to have it for our use for the increase of our justice, that we might never abuse it, to our greater punishment.

**822:** Three realities have to concur to make a human being happy on this earth: honor, wealth, delights. But, what state in this world has ever been, or, will ever be more honorable than our own? I know the level of honor the Psalmist believed that the Hebrew nation was raised: *...God has not done in like manner to every nation: and his judgments He has not made to manifest to them...* [Ps 147:20]. Then, add to this what the Apostle has said: *... to the Israelites belongs... the giving of the Law...* [Rm 9:4]. Moses, in fact, had received the Law written by God on the tablets of stone for all that people... *so that the children of Israel would not steadfastly behold the face of Moses, for the glory of his countenance...* [2 Co 3:7]

**823:** But all of this is very much inferior to our own state. The reason is that they had the law written externally on marble, but we have it written intimately into our hearts. Our forefathers were given the letter, but to us has been given the Spirit [v. 5]. This is what God tells us through Jeremiah [speaking of our times]:

***...Behold the days shall come that I will make a New Covenant with the House of Israel, and with the House of Judah... [Jr 31:31].***

***Not according to the Covenant which I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand t bring them out of the and of Egypt; the Covenant which they made void, and I had dominion over them... [v.. 32].***

***But this shall be the Covenant that I will make with the House of Israel, after those days,, says the Lord: I will write My Law in their minds and I will write it on their heart: and I will be their God, and they shall be My People... [v. 33].***

***And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying: Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least of them even to the greatest, says the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more... [v. 34].***

**824:** To make this matter even more clear, perhaps it will be not out of place to introduce here the brilliant doctrine of the Angelic Doctor <sup>21</sup>. And even before him was the teaching of St. Augustine <sup>22</sup>. In the Law of the Gospel, two realities need to be considered: the principal aspect, this is the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who is given to us through Faith in Christ. The secondary matter is the letter, or the Scripture of the Holy Gospel, in which are contained only those matters that pertain to grace, either as a disposition to receiving them, or as pertaining to the use of this grace itself.

**825:** As a disposition, then, of the intellect for the reception of faith, through which grace is received, there are contained those truths in the Gospel that refer to the manifesting of the divinity and the humanity of Christ. As far as the affections are concerned, there are contained in the Gospel those inspirations that pertain to the disdain of the world, through which a person is made capable for the grace of the Holy

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<sup>21</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, I-II, q. 106, a. 1.

<sup>22</sup>St. Augustine, *De Spiritu et Lettera*, 17, 30; 21, 36; 26, 43. t. 10/1, pp. 101 E, f.l 194 D; 108 C.

Spirit. The reason is that the world, that is, lovers of this world, cannot receive the Holy Spirit, as is read in John [14:17]. The use of this spiritual grace resides in the works of virtue to which in many ways the Scripture of the New Testament exhorts the faithful.

**826:** Now, just like every other reality is defined and seems that it is constituted by that which is principal in it, as a human being by reason - so, principally, the New Law of Faith [Rm 3:27]; the Law of the Spirit of Life in Jesus Christ [Rm 8:2]. And the above-mentioned St. Augustine <sup>23</sup> says: What else would these Laws of God, written by God Himself in our hearts, be if not the presence of the Holy Spirit? This is the level to which the glory of our state is elevated.

**827:** Not only was there never a state in this world more worthy than this one - there could not even be one, as I said from the beginning. And this can be proven by comparisons and through evidence. A reality is the more perfect the closer it is to the last end. And there is nothing that can be closer to our final end, as that which immediately introduces one to this last end. But, this is precisely what the New Law does, as the Apostle has said: ... *Having, therefore, brothers, a confidence in the entering into the holies by the blood of Christ...* [Heb 10:19]... a new and living way which He has dedicated for us ... [v. 20]. Therefore, in this present life there could not have been any state of superior dignity, or excellence.

**828:** Let us see, then, now if this state, so illustrious for its honor, abounds as well for its wealth. Speaking of this to the Ephesians, the Apostle states: ... *that the God of our Lord, Jesus Christ, ... enlighten the eyes of your hearts that you might know what hope is of his calling and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints...* [Ep 1:1, 17, 17]...*and what is the exceeding greatness of his power towards us, who believe...* [v. 19].

**829:** In the Old Law, the Hebrews had temporal promises, earthly abundance, visible opulence. It was a fertile land that ran with milk and honey. There were rich spoils, copious tributes that their already conquered enemies gave them. As far as the precious treasures of gold and gems, and of all that is rare in this world, at one time the royal palaces of their monarchs were endowed with these. And all was well with them, since they were servants, and God promptly each day paid them their wages.

**830:** We are children, and as such our heavenly Father does not offer us a daily salary, as this was not fitting. Rather, He has prepared for us an inheritance that is indeed most proper. Is it perhaps because the mercenary is able to show some payment in his hands that we would say that he is richer than the son who is waiting for the inheritance, and to whom the Father has said: ...*all that I have is ours...* [Lk 15:31]. Certainly not. And should there be still some among Christians who esteem some part of present blessings present in this life, this would not surprise me. For St. Augustine has said <sup>24</sup> that there are very many in the Gospel Law who are Christians

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<sup>23</sup>St. Augustine, *De Spiritu et Lettera*, 21, 36. t. 10/1 104 D.

<sup>24</sup>St. Augustine, *De Hagar et Ismael*, Sermo 3. t. 5/1, 10 C.

in name only. They still live under the Old Law, not under that of grace. They belong to the Old Testament that generated slavery.

**831:** Those who pertain to the New Testament understand well and enjoy hearing that teaching - one of them the same Holy Doctor <sup>25</sup> cries out: You are not called to embrace a land, but to acquire heaven; yours is not a vocation to an earthly felicity, but to a heavenly one. Yours are not to temporal successes, or fleeting prosperity, but to an eternal life with the Angels. They are also happy to hear what St. Paul says: ... *That no man should be moved in these tribulations: for you yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto...* [1 Th 3:3].

**832:** Even further, it should be pointed out that our wealth is not only in a right to a future heredity. We have here already the possession of many most sublime goods. For who would say that one does not possess grand wealth if one possesses a reality that is beyond price [Jb 28:13]? In the comparison with this gift not even gold and silver can stand [Pr 16:16]. This surpasses in value so many goods that stand so high in the esteem and in the imagination of human beings [Ws 7:8, ff.]. And this exquisite good is wisdom, which, among other things, is proper to all who in this state have received the Spirit. It comes from the infusion of His Gifts, or the unction of the Spirit Himself, as St. John has said of all these: ...*his unction teaches you of all things...* [1 Jn 2:27].

**833:** What will I say, then, about the charity diffused into our hearts [Rm 5:5]? The Angel of the Apocalypse speaks of it [Apoc 3:17, ff.], the one sent to the Church of Laodicea. He pointed out that the Church was indeed poor, even though it did have an abundance of material wealth. The Angel expressed himself in these terms: ... *Because you say: I am rich, and made wealthy, and have need of nothing: and do not know that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind and naked...* [Apoc 3:17]... *But I counsel you to buy of me gold fire tried, that you may be made rich...* [v. 18]. And in another place, we read: ...*if a man should give all the substance of his house for love, he shall despise it as nothing...* [Ct 8:7].

**834:** It indeed can be said with the Apostle: ... *that in all things you are made rich in Him, in all utterance and in all knowledge...so that nothing is wanting to you in any grace, waiting for the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ...* [1 Co 1:5 & 7].

**835:** It still remains now, after having established the felicity of a state that is so honorable and abundant, for me to pass to showing you how sweet and delightful it is. However, I realize that I am already close to reaching the limits prescribed for me by our customary brevity. And so, I do not want to tire your very careful attention that you have shown me in such courtesy up to this moment. I think, then, that after a brief rest, I will be able to ask you to continue your attention just for a little while longer.

**836:** Christ so gently invites us: ...*Come to me, all you that labor, and are heavily burdened, and I will refresh you... For My yoke is sweet and My burden is light...* [Mt

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<sup>25</sup>St. Augustine, Sermo 296, 6, 7. t. 5/2, 1200 F.

11:18 & 30]. This is exactly what St. John has said: ... *and His commandments are not heavy...* [1 Jn 5:3]. St. Augustine comments on this <sup>26</sup>: They are not burdensome, he says, to the one who loves; but, they are very bothersome to one who does not love. And the reason for this is clear, because as the Philosopher <sup>27</sup> teaches: to do what the just person accomplishes is easy, but to carry it out the way he does - that is, with promptness and delight - this is most difficult to one who is not endowed with justice. And precisely in justice, in peace and in the joy of the Holy Spirit, is the Kingdom of God, as St. Paul assures us.

**837:** For one who loves, all is easy, all is sweet, even adversity itself, concludes St. Thomas <sup>28</sup>. Observers of the Law will experience hardships, even though they do not come from the Law itself. Nonetheless, out of the love in which this Law consists, they are easily tolerated.

**838:** Furthermore, what is more delightful, more sweet, more joyful than love? What could be more pleasing than to be guided and governed by the Spirit of love? And this is that special characteristic, the mark of those that have in the New Law received the adoption as children [Rm 8:15]: ... *For whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God...* [v. 14]. The Psalmist has exclaimed: ... *O how good and sweet is Your spirit, o Lord, in all things...* [Ws 12:1].

**839:** What can be more delightful than to act in accord with the instinct of interior grace? Is it not true that this inclines one to operate correctly? Does it not move us to carry out our tasks freely, and to accomplish all that is demanded by grace, while avoiding whatever is repugnant to it? Hence, it can truly be said: ... *where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty...* [2 Co 3:17]... *[a true liberty, a holy freedom, ... wherewith Christ has made us free...* [Ga 4:31]. All is in accord: ... *[with] the oath He swore [to our fathers]...* [Lk 1:73]... *that being delivered from the hand of our enemies, we may serve Him without fear...* [v. 74]... *in holiness and justice before Him all our days...* [v. 75].

**840:** And this is that happy state of anyone who dwells on the Holy Mountain [Ps 14:1]. This is His Church: ... *which He has purchased with His own blood...* [Ac 20:28]. It pertains to the New Law of His Gospel. Thus, one is happy because of honors, happy because of riches and happy by delights: ... *Blessed are the eyes that see the things you see...* [Lk 10:32].

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<sup>26</sup>St. Augustine, *De Natura et Gratia*, 69., t. 10/1, 164 C.

<sup>27</sup>Aristotle, *V Ethic.* c. 9, ad finem.

<sup>28</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, I-II, q. 127, a. 4, ad 2 um.

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| 75       | # 839           | 5:16      | # 819       |
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**841:****SERMON 21****The Divine Benefits**

**For the last day of the year, 1803. - Preached on St. Stephen's Day, in the Venerable Church of St. Paul's Campo Marzio, in Verona, on the left bank.**

I am unable, most distinguished hearers, I simply cannot easily express the sweet commotion that has come to my spirit this evening by your devoted presence. Indeed, I can think of the most noble and virtuous motive that has brought you here this evening in such numbers, with such alacrity, with hearts so open. I can see that you have come to give thanks to this divine goodness which throughout this whole year, that is now passing, has most generously benefited you in so many ways. Seeing this in you, broadens my spirit, and raises it above its usual thoughts. This moves me to my duty of accompanying the sincere acts of your gratitude, and to approach that sublime, sovereign generous Majesty.

**842:** This has suffused into me a further sentiment of tender happiness and reverent fear into my breast. For there is indeed happiness, seeing in such a beautiful disposition of your affections. And yet there is at the same time some fear, noting in myself an insufficiency to carry out that high office entrusted to me. Also, I see that your desires that are made evident here commit me to spell out with my tongue the innumerable benefits of the divine liberality received. This must be justly and perpetually recognized by our testimony.

**843:** But who is there who could ever properly magnify this even for a single divine benefit, let alone the very many most gracious gifts? And who is there who could ever presume simply to remember them all, or even the greater part of them or at least, the most important of them? Is it not true that the greater number of them and in their principal greatness these remain in fact hidden and secret within us, and surpass all the more the power of our natural understanding?

Should we be silent, then? Of course not! For we have the commandment to praise Him with our tongues, to praise Him as much as we can. Indeed, we are clearly advised that all our praise will remain always inferior to what He merits.

**844:** The foundation of all these gifts is certainly being itself. For indeed, how could we be enjoying all the goods with which this, our human sojourn, has been so abundantly enriched. What if we had not been given being, but remained enshrouded in the obscure darkness of a silent nothingness? However, my listeners, the fact that being can be said to be the principal among all the divine benefits, you should not think that we have received it just once. It is not simply a matter of God having created once your souls and infused them into your bodies that gives existence to your composite. This has been renewed for you every hour by conserving your being. And since even at this very moment God keeps your being in existence that He has given you; at this instant, it is as though He were giving it to you all over again. And since in all the days, in all the hours, and in all the moments of this whole year now over, your

existence has been sustained, you have to realize that every day, every hour and every instant, He has wondrously created you, as though previously you did not exist at all.

**845:** Does it seem to you that I am saying something new? Just listen to St. Augustine <sup>29</sup>, and in his other work <sup>30</sup>: “There is no other way that God conserves them in being other than by always giving them being.” Indeed, there is no other way in which God keeps His creatures in being than by His always creating them. If He did not always confer on them new being, they would fall back into their nothingness that was theirs previously. Indeed were God to withdraw from them His sustaining action, it would be seen how continuously it is necessary for them: were He to withdraw this action, they would all be reduced to nothingness [ib.].

**846:** That omnipotence of which God has made us to draw you from nothing, He has exercised all throughout this year in your behalf. All the days that you have passed, He has conserved you to this very moment that you open your eyes to recognize such a benefit. Because of its continuation and its closeness, this has perhaps remained either unknown, or unnoticed by you. He has carried you to this point with the strength of His infinite power. And you have not even felt these very powerful arms that bore you up.

**847:** O sublime and supreme benefactor! This is that dependence that our whole being recognizes for Your goodness! These are the depths of that care that your solicitous goodness extends toward us! Now you will understand, my hearers, the power of those words of the Apostle: ... *For in Him... we are...* [Ac 17:28]. We have our being in God as in the One Who conserves us in being, by giving it to us in every instant. And not only are we “in Him...”, but: ...*we live and move...* as He in like manner conserves life for us that in addition to simple being He has also bestowed on us.

**848:** In this regard, have you ever observed how multiple and hidden are those causes on which the life in our bodies depends? Is it not so that there is no machine that for it to run there could be a more complicated, well-ordered, delicate harmony of its movable parts? Is it not likewise true how beyond number and how unknown are those contrary accidents that can upset this delicate balance? Is it not so that these can impede its efficacy, by practically stopping its vital motion and bring death?

**849:** Just imagine from the little that it has been granted you to know what assiduous and vigilant assistance there is required of this Sovereign Artificer, to maintain this temporal life of ours. And if you do recognize as having been conserved by Him this life of yours, throughout the whole course of this year, you will then understand more the obligation that presses in on you, for His provident, tireless care of you.

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<sup>29</sup>St. Augustine - as quoted by St. Thomas Aquinas, I, q. 9, a. 2, c.

<sup>30</sup>St. Augustine, 4 Gen., ad litteram, 12, 22. t. 3/1, pp. 167, E, ff.

**850:** Even when you were not noticing it, He was watching over you so that you might inhale and exhale through your mouth the free air. He made sure that your blood might accomplish its ordinary course. He saw to it that your heart would have its necessary movement, and that there might reign the necessary equilibrium and temperament among your humors. By His care, your food was distributed proportionately through your members, and was converted into the substance of the flesh.

**851:** And what wonder is there, that even without your thinking about it, He operated with such care in your regard. And any time that you wanted to be active with either your interior or exterior faculties, was it not also necessary that each time that He, as the Author of Nature, with His assistance helped you? Without this assistance, your intellect would never have been able to reach the act of thinking about the least matter. Your will would not have been able to desire anything, nor could your eye, or your hearing, or any of the senses, represent anything to you. And so, you would not even have been able to move your foot, raise your arm, direct your hand - if He at the same time, with you, had not moved and guided them

**852:** Such is that most certain, necessary dependence, that is known also to philosophers, that secondary causes have from the very reason of their being, in producing also their proper and natural operations. So, St. Paul has put it very well: *...For in him we live, and move and are...* [Ac 17:28]. But, would just this have been enough for God, this care of His within us, and around us, in order to maintain our lives just for this year? Surely not; but you have to extend His care even broadly beyond us: over the fields from which we show their abundant harvest, and those green olive trees where their abundant fruit matures. His care extends to those mountains that find their nourishment and then, well-fed, nourish us. Their hair is shorn to dress us. It is quite true as the Apostle has pointed out: *...Therefore, neither he that plants is any thing, nor he that waters; but God that gives the increase...* [1 Co 3:7].

**853:** Therefore, all through this year God was in continuous operation within you, as well as outside. And do you not also think that He was active above you as well? Who is it Who sends down the timely dew? Who gives power to the sun to fecundate our earth? Who is it who gathers the clouds? And as you can also remember, are these not greater when the need is the more, when the fields at first seem to be languishing? Has it not also been so that very inconsiderately this moisture is sometimes absent from the sky, and for many days on end, there was denied that necessary, immediate relief because of the scarce rain?

**854:** The drought of this past summer lasted unbendingly for many months, scourged our region with fierce force. It seemed to be coming back again, and threatened even more sad and gloomy effects on the season that was not even yet adult and mature, but still tender and in the time of growing. With foreboding the farmers feared with pale face a terrible famine. It seemed to be coming down from the sterile ravines of the mountains. This image was one of a wan, black horse, riding across our plains, having the meager balance in hand, stammering forth severe edicts. It seemed to be already

at the gates of this afflicted and unfortunate city, as though to wreak even further his much suffered evils.

**855:** But then, all of a sudden, as the danger was imminent, recourse was had to our good heavenly Father. He immediately heard these prayers, and repeatedly bathed the land in good time. The earth was then able to enrich us with the abundance of its products.

O supremely admirable, and truly lovable Providence of our most pious Benefactor!

**856:** Let us stop here, please, my listeners, and consider for a few moments just to whom it is that such grand, continuous benefits are granted. Is it perhaps to obedient children? Is it to friends, truly interested in His honor? Would it be to subjects who fear His laws? If such were the case, it would still be a most extraordinary wonder. Just imagine a kind God, so glorious, so powerful, so sublime, who would lower himself to make any account of creatures that are so poor and vile. But, the fact that He would endow with such graces and gifts children who have already most discourteously distanced themselves from Him, is even more wondrous. For we have been open enemies to His glory, rebellious subjects to His laws, and this exceeds all stupor.

**857:** And is it not true that this is a just description of us? Would you respond perhaps that at least our heavenly Father is honored by us? But, how can this be? Is it not so that every day, and publicly, in every square, on every street, at every cross-roads of our city, His holy, terrible Name is taken in vain [Ps 110:9]? Are there not hard frequent curses, swearing of the most terrible kind? Deny this, if you dare, a fact that is so manifest! And where is that obedience due to His Laws? It has to be said that indeed we have rebelled against Him, and broken away from every restraint, every vassalage.

**858:** And what about that manner of conduct, on the part of men, as well as that of women? Is there not a scandalous manner of dressing and life-style? Is it not true that such immorality is borne on high, almost in triumph, against all laws that God has sublimely promulgated in His Scriptures? Is not this manner of life against all the edicts of His Vicars on earth, reprov'd with the most severe Papal Bulls? Has not this immodesty invaded even our churches, against all the canons and decrees, formulated in so many particular and also universal Councils? Is not this lack of taste against the Church? And lastly, is not such ostentation against the repeated statutes, and explicit notification of our Bishops? And, regarding these, is there anyone who could dare to allege ignorance? Is it not true that all this while, preachers very zealously have placed these matters before your minds and kept them in your memories, with their cries, that are more resounding than trumpets? And by what other name, I ask, can this common and public scandal be named if not a declaration of a revolution against God?

**859:** I can just hear what many will respond in their hearts: I am not this way; I have never dressed as some people do, disciples of an ill-tempered Satan. My actions and

my conduct in public have never gone beyond the most modest limits. I have never spoken badly of God, by cursing, nor against His religion. While I might concede all this, and indeed I have been witness to the modesty of so many men and women among you. Still, go slowly before withdrawing yourselves from the number of rebels against God.

**860:** Not only those who actually do evil sin, but also those who consent to it. They, too, sin, whose responsibility it is in some way, that they might be able to impede the wrong, and yet do not do so. I think now of you, mothers of families, you personally are not enrolled under the standard of the immodest styles, but why do you allow your daughters to follow them? And you, gentlemen, why do you not prohibit those scandalous styles from you wives, who are also your subjects? And why, you who are fathers of families, do you not correct your children who bear the corruption of the most unrestrained impurities through the public streets? And you who are friends, why do you not admonish one another? And why do not the masters of households correct their servants? And why do not the ladies of the house raise their voices against the most terrible shamefulness of your serving girls and serving boys? Why is there not observed by all that most severe duty of fraternal correction.

**861:** And what about those, who even in a worse manner, cooperate in such wrongdoing with their praise, their affectation of acceptance of it - by still sewing such garments of evil, by paying for them, by approving them, and also by ordering them? Whenever a faction, or another flag is raised up against the prince, all subjects become soldiers. Whoever, then, does not take up arms in the defense of the divine honor, is not a faithful subject in times such as these.

**862:** And yet, if to many there may be lacking the arms of the tongue, there is available to all the weapons of prayer. Really, who is there who with fervent zeal, with the commitment of charity, and with tireless perseverance, prays for the conversion of so many mis-guided brothers and sisters, who are walking, even running along this precipice?

**863:** This is why St. Augustine <sup>31</sup> and, after him, St. Gregory the Great <sup>32</sup> have written: that whenever in a city, or in a nation, sins have become public, and evil has spread to universal dimensions, only with great difficulty can there be found a few, or perhaps even one, who is not guilty. The reason is that those united to others also commit the evil: either by consenting to it, or because the required correction is not given, or lastly, because prayer is not offered with the required intensity, so that the evil would cease altogether, or at least, would not spread so.

**864:** So, in humility, let us all recognize ourselves to be sinners, and very unfaithful subjects of our God. To our great confusion, we know that even though we are rebels, God nonetheless has blessed us. And even though we do merit even greater

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<sup>31</sup>St. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, 1, 9. t. 7, 8 F, ff.]

<sup>32</sup>St. Gregory the Great, *Epist.* 114. t. 2, 708, 2 A/

punishments, God showers even more sublime gifts upon us, as will be shown to you, after I take a brief rest...

**865:** It is very true, my listeners, that once I resolved to speak to you with greater liberty, that this kind of sin into which public and scandalous styles have fallen, is serious. For this kind of sin, God once unleashed a flood of water on all the inhabitants, even though they were many, over the whole earth. And by another unrestrained fire, He burnt up one of the most fertile and delightful provinces of Palestine.

**866:** I would never end were I to take up both the sacred and profane histories, both ancient and recent, that would show entire monarchies overthrown, nations and countries made desolate by famine, wars and pestilence. This I could very easily do, just following the comments already made by many and serious writers. As for ourselves, we can see that the possibility is very near and all around us that the vindicating sword of God can lash out. While in past instances, He has spared our lives and only in some way lessened our substance. But, very soon, God lowered His right arm and its scourge, and filled us with even greater gifts, to draw us into His bosom.

And what are these principal gifts if not those that pertain to the spirit, and lead to eternal life? I will just consider two of them so that I will not go on too long. These two are among the most common, leaving it up to you to uncover the others and those particular to each one.

**867:** The first one is the gift of faith that He, and not without prodigality, still conserves among us. And how can His gratuitous mercy not be considered a prodigy? Is it not so that this is bestowed on us among the overwhelming waves of a sea that is so agitated, among the various blasts of such a powerful wind, under the weight that is so intensified by such iniquity? Would not all of this have led us to a wretched shipwreck? And what about the very intense darkness, and the thick smoke that has come up in these days with so many heresies? Does this divine light still shine despite all this? And in all the mud of such licentiousness, and in the dung-heap of such depraved customs, has this rare heavenly pearl lost something of its beauty, or has something of its splendor been darkened?

Let us read the ecclesiastical annals. The life-style of those nations that have lost the faith should be compared with the customs of our own times. We could meet there and this is all the more reason why we should be deprived of such a grace. At least, there will be recognized the even greater benefit it is for those who have conserved it.

**868:** The second gift, which is also most important, is the preaching of His divine word. Suffice it to know that this is the ordinary and most efficacious means for the conversion of sinners, and for the sanctification of the just. And yet, how little have we merited this! The ministers of God still preach against all this immodesty, and who abandons them? Preaching continues against such evil practices: and who abstains

from them? There are sermons against the modern styles: and who sets them aside? Not only are life-styles not changed but they have become excessively worse. Not only are the admonitions not heard, but they are derided.

**869:** What a powerful motive God has for castigating us with the most terrible of His punishments - and for taking His word out of the mouths of His ministers! And yet, we could never praise enough His extraordinary benefits! Say it yourselves in your faith, whether or not it does not see that in these times He has redoubled His spirit in His Gospel heralds? Is it not so that you have heard it spoken with more intense constancy, more fervor and freedom?

**870:** My beloved brothers and sisters, let us not abuse - o, let us not abuse such singular gifts. Let us even fear the gifts themselves, if very soon we do not convert. For, all the more desperate will be our abandonment, as the more we are taken care of over time and with ever more extended patience. And if we have indeed resolved to be converted entirely to God, let us do all we can to see that still others are converted. By so doing, we can be confident that we will have and receive even greater benefits. For while God showers His benefits on us while we are still His enemies, how much more will He when we will have become reconciled to Him and become His friends? Let us lift up our hearts, and let us in harmony raise our voices to thank and to bless such a sublime, loving, infinite goodness. Let us praise it, and confess it: ... *We praise You, o Lord, and we confess You as Lord...!*

**871:** From the sublime threshold of Your glory, graciously hear, O Lord, our prayers. "Save Your people, o Lord!" Because if You do not listen, who will save us? Is it possible that one man could save another? This could never be: ... *for vain is the salvation of man...* [Ps 59:13]. Could a person save himself? And the response here is also "no": ... *neither shall he be saved by the abundance of his strength...* [Ps 32:17]... *Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved...* [Ac 4:12].

**872:** So, save this People Yourself. You, to Whom this people belongs, save it from every evil. Especially, save it from any irreparable future evil, eternal harm: save it from the fury of the wrath of Your judgments. Save it from past evil, that is, from its own iniquity, by helping all to get up and become clean. Save it from present evil, with which its spirit is afflicted and its body tormented. For either the people is liberated from all its tribulation, or in You it might derive the profit of its spiritual gain, and never encounter harm being with You: ... *Behold the hand of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save...* [Is 59:1]. This is still so in our times. You would want this, I hope, because this people is not estranged from You, or alienated, but it is Yours: "this is your People!". This people was purchased with the great price of Your blood [1 P 1:19]: ...*save Your people, o Lord...!*

**873:** Do not only save it from evil; but further, shower upon it a large abundance of many gifts. What a powerful motive this people has to wait all blessing from You, since they are Your heirs! "And so, bless Your inheritance!" And this inheritance should be very dear to You, because it is offered to You by the Father, when He said: ... *Ask of*

*Me and I will give you the Gentiles for Your inheritance... [Ps 2:8]. And who is it whom You do not love, whom You do not conserve, who would not want the inheritance increased?*

**874:** Should the earth of our hearts be deserted, arid, solitary, then this is all the more reason why it is worthy to be inherited by You. Only to You there is not lacking the ability and the knowledge to bring it to cultivation. And then it will be seen that: ... *waters are broken out in the desert, and streams in the wilderness... [Is 35:6, ff.].* And this will produce in the desert all delights [Is 41:19]: ... *I will plant in the wilderness the cedar...* There will be a garden there, whenever You bathe it with those showers of gratuitous benedictions: ... *You shall set aside for Your inheritance a free reign, O God... [Ps 67:10].* And all that is weak of itself, all will be perfected by You. All, therefore, will be for Your glory.

**875:** Save this people of Yours, o Lord. And it will be Your joy to see this people rejoicing in the liberation obtained from all its evils: ... *that we may rejoice in the joy of Your nation... [Ps 105: 5].* Bless Your inheritance, and our inheritance, enriched by You with so many goods, and will form an eternal object of Your praise: ... *may You be praised with Your inheritance...! [ib.].*

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### SOURCES

#### OT

|              |       |
|--------------|-------|
| Ps 2:8       | # 873 |
| 32: 17       | # 871 |
| 59:13        | # 871 |
| 67:10        | # 874 |
| 105: 5       | # 875 |
| 110:9        | # 857 |
| Is 35:6, ff. | # 874 |
| 41:19        | # 874 |
| 59:1         | # 872 |

#### NT

|          |             |
|----------|-------------|
| Ac 4:12  | # 871       |
| 17:28    | ## 847; 852 |
| 1 Co 3:7 | # 852       |
| 1 P 1:19 | # 872       |

**Fathers and Doctors**

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| St. Augustine, <i>4 Gen., ad litt.</i> 12, 22. t. 3/1, pp. 167 E, ff | # 845 |
| <i>De Clv. Dei</i> , 1, 9. t. 2, p. 708, 2 A                         | # 863 |
| St. Gregory the Great, <i>Epistula 114.</i> t. 2, p. 708, 2 A        | # 863 |
| St. Thomas Aquinas, I, q. 9, a. 2, c                                 | # 845 |

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