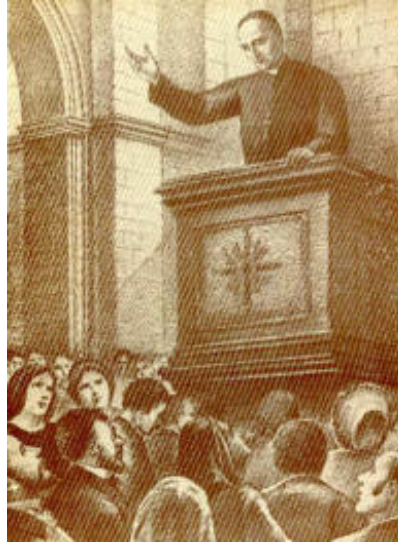


St. GASPAR BERTONI



An illustration of St. Gaspar Bertoni preaching his sermons.

Early Spiritual Writings

PARISH SERMONS

1804

[Manoscritti Bertoni ## 876 – 991]

**Translation into English
Rev. Joseph Charles Henchey, CSS
1972**

Electronic Edition: Holy Thursday, 2005

1804

876:**SERMON 22****True Joy**

For the Fourth Sunday of Lent, preached on March 11, 1804, in St. Paul's of Campo Marzio, Verona.

I would believe, my devout hearers, I would think, that I would separate myself in some manner, from the most gentle spirit of our common Mother, the Holy Church, as on this day, she excites her children the most vivid joy. This would be so were I to wish to produce for your fraternal consideration a theme of sadness, or of mourning, no matter how useful this might seem to me, and if you would allow me to do this, even unwillingly. So, this is why I speak with the very words of Isaiah with which all the mouths of the entire Church resound today to exhort you: *....Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you that love her... [Is 66:10, ff.]. ...that you may suck, and be filled with the breasts of her consolations: that you may milk out and flow with delights, from the abundance of her glory... [v. 11].*

877: This is the purpose and the scope that I think is like my religious duty to direct my words: toward that true and solid joy of heart. This is a purpose and a scope that is dear and sweet to all equally: both for those who already perfectly live in following Christ, as well as for those who even though they are still slaves to vanity, and love the world. With this difference, however, that whereas the former verify this in the prudent election of means, the latter wander basely to their excessive harm. Allow me, then, on this day to speak of this to these alone. This is so that I might draw them away from such a pernicious deception. I would do this by showing them what is the right road to reach authentic joy. My goal will be that they might follow surely that path that up to the present they have only yearned for in vain.

878: First, let us see what way worldly people are following to arrive at that end that they are seeking with such avidity. I think that by the common judgment of the world, every delight, every joy, would be based on those secular benefits, that the Psalmist has already enumerated as by a false prince: *.....Whose mouth has spoken vanity: and their right hand is the right hand of iniquity... [Ps 143:8].*

879: Some would take glory in prosperous youth, and in their florid years, they trust in the vigor of their exultation: *... Whose sons are like new plants in their youth... [v. 12].* To admire the beauty of the body, and with the useless out-pouring of supreme riches to decorate it, and to embellish it much like a temple, was already noted by the Psalmist: *... their daughters are decked out, adorned round about after the similitude of a temple... [v. 12]. ... their storehouses are full, flowing out of this into that... [v. 13]. ... their sheep fruitful in young, abounding in their goings forth... [v.13]...their oxen fat... [v. 14].... there is no breach of wall, nor crying out in their streets...*

880: These are the delights of the world: ... *They call the people happy that have these things...* [v. 15]. But the spirit of the prophet knows how false this opinion is of true happiness. So, for the common disabusing of this idea, he immediately adds his own judgment: ... *but happy's the people whose God is the Lord...* [v. 14]. This is where genuine joy is to be found the authentic happiness: in recognizing God as our Master, in serving Him faithfully, that is, in living in accord with God. This statement is found in Scripture.

881: Blessed is that person who never goes in accord with the evil, nor has stopped his feet along the path of vice: ... *blessed is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners...* [Ps 1:1]. Blessed rather is that person whom God would instruct to walk in His ways: .. *Blessed is the man whom You shall instruct, o Lord, and You shall teach him out of Your Law...* [Ps 93:12]. And blessed are they who walk with immaculate feet along the way of the divine commandments: ... *Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord...* [Ps 118: 1]. Blessed are those who trust in God: ... *blessed are they who trust in Him...* [Ps 2:13]. And blessed are they who fear the Lord: ... *Blessed is the man who fears the Lord...* [Ps 111:1].

882: And so, there will never be found in the sacred letters anyone called “happy” who abounds in much wealth, or who is outstanding because of the nobility of his birth, or associations, or one surrounded by glory, or one who lives in much comfort and delights. But rather, we will find in the Gospel those declared “happy” who are humble, meek - happy are they who weep, who suffer persecution for justice' sake: ... *Blessed are the poor in spirit..* [Mt 5:3]... *Blessed are the meek...* [v. 4]. .. *Blessed are they that mourn...* [v. 5]. ... *Blessed are those that hunger and thirst after justice...* [v. 6]. This is so true that only that life , well instituted in accord with the divine rule, is truly happy. And only that virtue, no matter how harsh and destitute it is of external delights and honors, but even enveloped still in tribulations, is joyful, content and happy..

883: If you notice well the fruits of these trees, they may be quite remarkable for their lack of color and shape. But, when you taste them, they are most delicious to the palate. And yet, the roots from which then proceed such loveliness and sweetness lies underground, horrible looking and very bitter tasting. So it is, St. John Chrysostom says ¹ that the sadness of one who lives in accord with God, does produce most sweet fruits of rejoicing.

884: All know this by experience who have been afflicted for a time to express their sorrow for faults committed. Such as these have offered their deep sadness in prayer before God, and how much joy later, then, did they gain for their hearts. They have purged their consciences: and who can describe the joy that therefore is derived from this? St. Paul said: ... *For our glory is this, the testimony of our conscience...* [2 Co 1:12]. And, in another text, Scripture compares the joy of a sure conscience to that of a perpetual banquet [Pr 15:15].

¹St. John Chrysostom, *Ad pop. Antioch.*, 18, 3. t. 2, III, 2 B.

885: From a well purged conscience arises good hope. And if those who are hoping to be the heirs of much money, or of rich possessions, or of some principality are so happy in their expectation, how much greater should not the joy of a soul be who awaits with well founded confidence the inheritance of a celestial, eternal realm? If indeed, such a person raises his eyes to heaven, and faith points out the high honors, the supra-human wealth, the most pure delights of that happy homeland, hope immediately then responds in his heart: and these goods are for me, rather, they are indeed mine. What comfort, what jubilation, what exultation!

886: If, then, we have well composed our lives, we, too, will be able to enjoy a sweet, tranquil and perpetual happiness. Not even the external tribulations will ever be able to take it from us, but it will last always even in the midst of the absence of all earthly delight. So, it is not what is outside us, whether prosperous or adverse that consoles us or afflicts us, but much more the internal disposition of our spirit.

887: Much like a person whose body is ailing, or feverish, even if he reposes on soft cushions, or sits on bejeweled thrones, or walks about in pleasant gardens, or sits down to sumptuous banquets, with pleasant music playing, he does not find delight in all this, but only sadness. But when one's body is indeed healthy, even if he sleeps on hard straw, he sleeps joyfully: even if he eats at a poor table, he does so with delight and with appetite. It is this way with regard to the soul, but even more so. Should I want to be happy as though enjoying good health, even if the body is sick, I simply cannot. But, I am able to heal my soul well, should I choose to do so, to the point of finding joy.

888: Come now, give me a person, St. John Chrysostom continues ², of whom up to now I have followed his interpretations, and **almost his very words** - give me a person who has nothing within him that would condemn him, but is assured by his good conscience. Such a one would aspire fervently to the future realities, in the expectation characteristic of blessed hope. I ask you, will there ever be anything that will be able to sadden him? Does it not seem that death is the most intolerable reality pertaining to this world? But, the expectation of death to such a person does not sadden him, but much more consoles him. The reason is that such a person knows that death is the liberation from present fatigue. It is the course that is to be followed to arrive at the crowns, at those rewards set aside for those who struggle for virtue.

889: Perhaps the premature death of his children would sadden him? He would even courageously sustain even this, and would say with Job: *... the Lord gave, and the lord has taken away... [Jb 1:21]. As it has pleased the Lord, so it is done: blessed be the Name of the Lord...* So it is that neither death, nor the loss of his children, can sadden him, and much less could the loss of riches be able to inflict a blow on this generous spirit. And what if he should become ill? Then, just listen to the words of the wisdom teacher who admonished him saying: *...in your sorrow, and in your humiliation, keep patience... [Si 2:4]... For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation... [v. 5.]*

²St. John Chrysostom, *Ad pop. Antioch.*, 18, 2. t. 2, 110/1 B.

890: But, no more speculations and no more hypotheses. Let us come to the fact in which truth alone is grasped. There it is not only seen, but is also felt. St. Gregory comments ³ and tell us that in his times in Rome, there was a man by the name of Servulus. He also speaks of this another time ⁴. This man was well known to him and to his listeners. He was both poor and sick, and near death because of the length of his malady. It seems that from his earliest years right up to the very end of his life, he was an invalid and in much pain. He was unable to stand up, and he could not even sit up in his bed. He was not even able to turn over from one side to the other. What else? He could not lift his hand to his mouth to take food, but he always had to have his mother, or bother, feed him, whenever they came home again after having received for him a bit of bread, or alms for him.

891: So, in one individual man you see a compendium of the major calamities of this life. Who would ever believe that in such a state there could have been joy, jubilation, even mirth? But, just listen. He did not know how to read, but by putting aside a little money by going hungry, he was able to buy the codices of sacred Scripture. And all the religious men who happened by his house, he begged them all to read uninterruptedly in his presence. And it so happened that as far as his intelligence would allow, he learned sacred scripture.

892: This was, then, his occupation, day and night, in the midst of all his sufferings: he sang psalms, hymns, lauds and thanksgiving to God.

O God! Just imagine that sweetness, that joy that passed from this heart to that tongue, that expressed itself in lauds even on that bed of pain. The sufferings once brought him to complain, but it was converted. What was once the most bitter gall became the most sweet honey of the chants. His sadness became **music**. But, prepare yourselves, after my brief repose, to assist at his death.

893: When the time came that God wanted to remunerate such virtue of that servant of His, and when he himself felt that death was near, he invited some persons who were in his home to get up, and to sign Psalms with him, while awaiting his passing. And while the Psalmody went on, in his dying moments he joined in with them. All of a sudden, shouting aloud he interrupted his chanting, saying: Be silent. DO you not hear how the lauds are resounding in heaven? And he meant by this that he was listening with the ears of his heart to those lauds that he could hear within himself. And with that, his beautiful soul departed, separated from his body.

894: And as he departed such a fragrance permeated that place. It was such that all those present were filled with inestimable sweetness. It seemed to them that they were in a place of high renown, in that as they were signing their praises, this beautiful soul was being received in heaven. And it is certain that he was worthy of being gathered into that beautiful choir of heavenly cantors. For in life he had always

³St. Gregory, *Homil. in Evangel.*, 15. t. 2, 260 2 D.

⁴St. Gregory, *Dialogues*, 4, 14. t. 1, 1040 1 B.

emulated their fervor, their joy, their spirit. He sang like an Angel the praises of God without ever giving halt to them.

895: Let us, then, pursue virtue if we desire genuine joy. Let us compose well our lives, and there will never be lacking to us a solid, stable happiness. Even the adversities of this life will never be able to take it from us, nor even diminish it. Let us cleanse well our consciences, and with this good witness we will not only live tranquil days, peaceful, happy days - but, at that very terrible instant of death, we will have nothing to fear. Usually at such a time the vain joys of this world are exchanged into fearsome grieving. But, we would have nothing to fear, our security will be confirmed, and our joy redoubled. And for the few years of happiness that we will have passed in the Fear of the Lord here on earth, there will be added eternal centuries of sonummate joy, in rejoicing itself.

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SOURCES

OT

Jb 1:2	# 889	Ps 143:13	# 879
Ps 1:1	# 881	14	# 879
2:13	# 881	15	# 880
93:12	# 881	Pr 15:15	# 884
111:1	# 881	Si 2:4	# 889
118:11	# 881	5	# 889
143:8	# 878	Is 66:10	# 876
12	# 879	11	# 876

NT

Mt 5:3	# 882	Mt 5:6	# 882
4	# 882	2 Co 1:12	# 884
19	# 882		
20			

Fathers & Doctors

St. Gregory, <i>Dialogues</i>, 4, 14. t. 1, p. 1040/1 B	# 890
<i>Homil. in Evang.</i> 15. t. 2, p. 260/2 D	# 890
St. John Chrysostom, <i>Ad Pop. Antioch.</i>, 18, 2. t. 1 pp.110/1 B	# 888
<i>Ad Pop. Antioch.</i>, 18,3. t. 2, pp. 111/2 B	# 883

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896:**SERMON 23****Freedom from Sin and the Devil**

For Easter Monday. Preached in the venerable Church of St. Paul's of Campo Marzio, on April 2, 1804, on the left bank of Verona.

If I look around at you all, most beloved brothers and sisters, on this day, I can sense that the most sincere love that I bear for you almost divides my heart. This is torn with much violence into two feelings that are too contrary between them.

897: On the one hand, an impetuous jubilation transports me. These most joyful days of salvation produce in me the well-founded hope and the sweet idea of your liberty. On the other hand, I experience a troubling fear, that leads me to turn within and to sorrow. For I see, or think I can see some among you still bound by the ignoble chains of their slavery. And I see others who think themselves already freed, in that they are no longer captured by a vain yearning by their adversaries. These nonetheless still surround them and hem them in, even though at a somewhat greater distance.

898: In fact, my brothers and sisters, if truly all of you have been freed by that liberty in which Christ wishes to liberate you in these days, some differences will be noted. There will no longer, then, be seen among you anyone of means, in whom there will still dominate avarice. There will be no noble among you in whom there will be excessive pomp. There will be no artisan in whom there will be baseness or drunkenness. There will be no young man given to obstinacy or impurity. And there will be no woman in whom dominate ambition, shamelessness. There will be no more who will hate his neighbor, none who will calumniate him, nor detract from another's reputation. There will be no more plots against the honor of others, nor attempts at their goods.

899: Charity will be substituted for envy, mercy toward the poor will take over from stinginess, modesty will cover up that bold licentiousness in dress and conduct. Sobriety and moderation will conquer intemperate luxury and gluttony. The shameless theaters will be off-bounds for you, the game-halls will be reduced to silence, the ball-rooms will be left desolate, tongues will be held in check, hands will be restrained. The taverns will be locked up, licentious styles will be put away, eyes more guarded, and the body will be dressed with decency and seriousness.

900: Will this be the way it is for the future? Will it be so for all? What do you say? Will it just be for a few days, until the feasts are over? Perhaps this is true. Will it, then, be always that way? I strongly fear about that possibility; you yourselves doubt it, and even more deem it impossible. And if you are enslaved, how is it that the noble nature of your spirit is not ashamed at this base captivity? How is it that the most sure means, which are at the same time, the easiest, why will they not be accepted? Are these not available to all to re-acquire each one's innate liberty?

901: If you had been of an abject and servile condition, then such shame would not be aroused in you for your miserable slavery. In this, there is no compassionate destiny, but only anger and envy that would keep you from your implacable enemies. Who are you? I ask you this. Have you, perhaps, in the gloom of your enslavement, forgotten the nobility, the excellence of your class?

902: Do not look around you, or outside yourselves. There are some among you who may be dressed in rough clothing, enveloped in a sad poverty, with unwashed bodies, imprisoned by the fog of their own judgment, that they will not recognize themselves in too poor a light. Enter into yourself: enter into that most sublime part of you. Just tell me: what are you? Are you perhaps not a most clear image of the divine countenance? Who are you? Are you not perhaps the master s constituted by God over this earth, where all creatures are to serve you? The heavens themselves with their brilliant light are in your obsequious obeisance.

903: And all this by considering just your nature. By grace, then, have you not been elevated to the very same order of the divine nature in which you have participated? Are you not the children of God? Is not your Brother perhaps Christ Himself? Are you not called God's heirs? Are not your souls **the spouses of the Holy Spirit**? And has He not set aside a very rich dowry of most precious gifts? And have not the most sublime princes of heaven been assigned to pay court to you here on earth? And what is more, has not the very Son of God descended from heaven, vesting Himself in our nature to converse with you? And will I be able to look upon with indifferent eye, with tranquil heart, the masters of this earth, the princes of heaven, the children of God, His heirs, His **Spouses**, wallowing under the base turpitude of their slavery to the most vile choices, having been made their lords and tyrants?

904: And who are these tyrants who have subjugated your natural liberty? Sin, the devils. These are indeed horrible masters whom you serve. What is more horrid than sin, that goes up against the perfections of God Himself? Is it not true that it can be said that as much as God is good, beautiful, lovable - so much is sin deformed, abominable? The most poisonous scorpions, the most revolting sewers would be rather sweet, gracious and lovable, compared to their gloomy countenance of their unthinkable horror.

905: The devil is the eternal enemy of God, confirmed in evil, condemned to burn in perpetual fire, a bandit exile from heaven in which he had been created. He had been granted the most exalted place in the heavenly militia by the divine magnificence. Ungrateful, and proud, he turned against God. He withdraws his subjection due to God and into his camp and unto his ruin. He drew with him a third part of that most noble army of such sublime Spirits. His pride is still not overcome even in that total ignominy of his penalty. He has undertaken a war against God. And even after so many defeats, he remains obstinate, with the impotent forces of his wrath, he is totally committed to contrasting His sovereign dominion and glory on earth.

906: He is also, then, the most implacable enemy of men and women. They have taken over those brilliant places from which the devil had been deposed. So, humanity

has become the most angry object of his envy, of his desperation. He tried in the first parents, by a single blow, to cast all of us from our blessed destiny into his damnation. And were it not for the kindness of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we would have lost all future hopes. We would have been deprived of earthly happiness, by his sowing on earth a formidable evil: ... *but by the envy of the devil, death came into the world...* [Wis 2:24].

907: And not any less than this, he has woven around each one of us in particular his webs. At every moment, he renews his assaults, reinforces his sieges. Totally unfeeling regarding his shameful destiny, because of which one day, he will have to submit his forehead to our feet, he makes use of in every artifice, illusions, even violence, to involve us in his own shame, to drag us into his perdition.

908: And will one be able even to look at, I repeat, can one watch without the tears of supreme anguish, such a fearsome monster of malice? Is he not a most unjust enemy of God and of our souls? Has he not been deposed, damned, cursed? Is he not proud, having ascended on a throne, to exercise his tyranny? And where? Where is all this happening? In your hearts! O God, and in what heart? In that very heart where first, though in a choice temple, God dwelt with His noble accompaniment of His gifts and of holy virtues. Oh, the horrible change that has occurred in you! First, your souls were decorated with the presence of the Lord of the heavens: and now, all is made filthy by the debased dwelling of the most vile slaves of hell. First, your souls were revered, loved by the Angels, as the daughters, **the spouses of their King** - and now, they are abominated, as a confused slave, like a prostitute.

909: But this is still only a slight matter. Just consider, wretched slaves of sin and the devil, the shameful manner in which your uncouth patrons treat you. I have read many times in histories how some cruel and proud conquerors have condemned the kings subjugated by them, to drag like horses the decorated chariots of those who have triumphed over them. But, such as these have never been able to reach - even though they were most haughty, inhuman - that pride, that cruelty of the devil in treating your hearts subjected by him. Not only does he have you serve his splendor, like the most lowly animals in his stable, but - what is unheard of and unbelievable, and has never before been seen - he changes you into beasts, he transforms you. He has so been able to lower your nature, that he puts you even below these.

910: The fact is that your judgment can only with great difficulty reflect upon yourselves. You judge yourselves by that which exists in your companions, who are also unhappy, detained in the same slavery. You look at the avaricious person, that hot-head, if he is not a lion, or she, a tiger.

And even worse: while these beasts eat other animals, they do, however, respect those of their own species, with which they are at peace. But, he avaricious person, the hot-head, are the most vicious precisely with their own kind.

911: Look at the person given way to impurities, and see if he is anything more than a beast of burden. Just look at the impudent young man, to see if his conduct, his manner, does not seem to you much like an unruly dog, an unbroken bull, a lascivious girl, and see - does not their petulant immodesty seem even more monstrous than the Sphinx, more soiled than the Harpies?

912: You blush, and even get angry with me when I talk this way. And you do not blush in recognizing in your own selves the shamefulfulness. You blush at my words, but you do not rather blush at your own actions. You blush when I depict you in this way, and you do not blush when you appear just in these terms en in the Churches. You do not blush, o senseless husbands, to see your wives appear this way. And you do not blush, o mothers, for your daughters.

913: You do not blush, dressing yourself in these styles, these bestial fashions, hat are truly animal like, monstrous, to receive applause. You support these with an excessively affected dissimulation in your subjects. And you do not even blush over what is the height of shame, you do not blush over your unworthy slavery. And where is the noble character of your spirit? And where is that simple love of your natural liberty? And to what point will you remain held down by these kinds of styles? And for how long will you suffer being subservient to such monstrous tyrants? Why are you not thinking of the way to recover yo ur freedom, your own mastery, your own glory?

914: I know all to well that these tyrants of yours are all around you with their thousands of scarecrows. They threaten you, they hem you in, and they lead you to understand that you have no strength to escape from their hands. I know that the chains of bad habits are reinforced, and the difficulties are exaggerated to hold you. I know all this precisely how in this Easter season you could escape from them. But what does that matter? Their artifices are already well known and their malice is manifest. If you will only listen to me for a while more, I will open up to you an easy and most pure path for flight. And I have ready the most safe haven in which you can save yourselves for ever from their deceit, from their fury. And thus you will see clearly whether it is indeed a most sincere love that I bear for you that has led me to show you the high folly of your slavery, and almost to fear for the freedom of all of you to insure it the more.

915: Come on now, even before I advance my proposals, recognize just who it is who is speaking to you. In the august character connotated by these insignia, recognize in me a Minster of His Divine Majesty. Unworthy servant though I am, it is in His Name that today I carry out this solemn ambassadorship in your behalf. This is how much His Divine Majesty takes pleasure through me, to promise to all among you who will respond. All who are confused and sorrowing because of the shameful slavery, efficaciously desire the restitution of their dignity, of their glory, of their liberty.

916: I Myself, says the Lord, I Myself will descend to liberate you from the hands of your enemies. I will fight Myself for you against them. I will place them under your feet to be trampled under ground. I will make Myself the Custodian of your recovered glory and liberty.

What can be doubted, o my brothers and sisters, why any more delay, why wait any more? It would be enough for you to say: “I want it”, and the omnipotence of God Himself would come to your aid. Just if each one of you would say this with the efficacy of your hearts, and you will be free.

917: Do not be afraid of your adversaries, if God is on your side. Do not fear your own weakness, if God is with you. Make your resolutions, be determined and make your proposals. This is the point. The glorious Victor, Christ Jesus, has risen after having conquered sin and the devil with His death. Increase the glory of His triumph by bringing it about that He has also conquered sin and the devil also in each one of you in particular. O, what a solemn festival will then be celebrated in heaven! And o what peace your good will could enjoy also here on earth! And O the abundant consolations that your loving Savior has prepared for you! And o! the sweet congratulations that we also will be able to extend to you!

918: Come on now, follow me with your hearts, as I precede you with my words:

- Accursed sin, I detest you. Accursed demon, I renounce you. Damnable chains of immodest styles, of immodest clothing, debauchery, intoxication, lasciviousness, intrigues, infamous love-affairs, avarice, ostentation, ambition, vanity, accursed chains, odious bonds, abominable shackles, I break you all I break you on this day, and I break you for good. **And to You, Jesus, my God, I surrender, I hand myself over, I abandon myself.**

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SOURCES

[only one noted]

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Ws 2:24

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919:**SERMON 24****Imminent Death**

For the Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost. Preached in St. Paul's of Campo Marzio, on September 29, 1804, in Verona.

...for many are called, but few are chose... [Mt 22:14]

This is a terrible sentence, ladies and gentlemen, a terrible sentence! Many are called, and few are chosen. How come! Do you not grow pallid, do you not feel shivers, are you not amazed? Do I perceive even a slight reaction on your faces? Are you so solicitous for your salvation? But, recall your thoughts: reflect, consider that your souls are being discussed. This is a matter of eternity that is to mete out either an eternal joy or eternal weeping.

920: Indeed, to an eternal joy that will be above in heaven, many are called; and few are elected. And does this not make you tremble? Are you not frightened? And what confidence is there that could make you so sure of a happy ending but one which is at the same time, so uncertain? Is it the fact that you were born in the Catholic Church, and that promises of eternal life were made to you? All that this means is that you have been called with many others, but not that you are elected with the few. How many baptized are also damned? How many professors of the true religion are not lost? Even in the Gospel that we read this morning, to **the royal nuptials** many have been invited, and even introduced into the court and admitted into the grand hall. And yet the one that was nonetheless excluded from the **banquet** in that very instant that they were all about to sit down with the others at table because he was found to be without **the nuptial garment**.

921: O God, how many have been invited to glory, who already are awaiting it, who are already prepared and ready to take hold of it, in the very last hour of life? As they are about to take perpetual possession of it, they are rather cast outside into the darkness to gnash their teeth and to weep forever. They are like those who were found to be without the proper garment at that heavenly banquet. In other words, they were without God's grace.

Sinners, sinners! If Christ had come to you at this moment, as He will most certainly come in the instant of your deaths, what good would it have been to have been called? What advantage will there be then for having been invited, almost drawn to the very threshold of paradise, and there you are found deprived of grace, and you will have instead an eternal exile?

922: O God, what are you doing, what are you doing? Many are indeed called, and few are chosen. And you still take your time, you still put off the recovering grace, and renewing your lives? You think that you have all the time you need, and much more ahead of you to hold in reserve as you approach the end, and that you can hold off the resolution that could save you? It is all false, false. You do not have any other time than the present: death is already at the doors, it is near, it is imminent: and I will prove this.

923: I do not speak with those who have already spent the greater part of their lives, who realize that very easily they are to depart from here in but a little while. It is already too evident that such as they do not have time to waste if they wish to think about their souls. I am talking with the young, in the prime of their lives: vivacious women, robust men, with ruddy complexion, vigorous health. I remind you, I solemnly announce to you that death will not only come, it is on the way, it is coming: ... *Behold, I come quickly...* [Apoc 3:11]. And it is coming so close that if you would like to wait for it, you might say, as for one whom you know is coming, and one awaits for him along the street. And when he comes into sight and is recognized, it is said: There he is, there he is: it is he who comes: ...*Behold, he comes...* [Apoc 1:7]. And death might be able to respond, raising its voice to you: you see me, you recognize me: ...*Behold I come, I come - quickly...* [v.11].

924: You should not think of it as having been recognized by the eye as still far away from you, as even though it is on its way toward you, it would still have to pass much time in order to arrive. No, it comes "quickly", soon, because it is coming on horse-back. This is the way it was seen by St. John in the Apocalypse: ...*And behold a pale horse, and he that sat upon it, his name was Death...* [Apoc 6:8]. He runs along with such agility that he passes by the most swift and capable runners. Job attests to this, saying: ... *My days have been swifter than a post...* [Jb 9:25]. He rather does not merely run, but flies with equal pace with those birds that cut through the air with their light feathers: ...*They have passed by... as an eagle flying to the prey....* [v. 26]. They overtake and pass that ship that pierces through the sea, driven on by the wind: ... *they have passed by as ships...* [v. 26]. It comes like a shadow that leaves no sign or mark in its invisible flight: ... *flees like a shadow...* [Jb 14:2].

925: And not further, that death never makes a stop, and never slows down in its flight. It was precisely about this point that the Holy Spirit was solicitous to advise you: ... *Remember that death is not slow...* [Si 14:12]. Remember well that death never interrupts its journey with postponements, or delays. It does not need to rest, or to restore its strength, or to freshen up, since it never tires in its course. And what is even more wondrous, the more the journey that it makes, the more it runs, the stronger it gets.

926: Like a rapid stream, the more it advances along a path, coming on from different sides, more water gathers, and it increases in strength at every step of the way, its impetuosity intensifies in its zest: ... *We all die and like waters that return no more, we fall down into the earth...* [2 K [S] 14:14]. Look, then, if death is already on the way towards you, if it has already arrived within your view, and if it is running along the way, with indescribable swiftness, and never stops, and does not ever slacken its pace - then, how little time it must have in order to reach you, to surprise you.

927: I know what it is in which you still put your confidence: in the hopes of being able to slow it down on its way, so that it will reach you only later. You think of robust health, vigor in your limbs as the strongest opposition to death. But, how many strong people, with ruddy complexions, healthy of appearance, even more so than you are,

die each day? You think of the comforts of life, of that refined living that your state affords you, or that your self-love provides for you. You could even imagine that all these are sufficient defense against the assaults of death. But, how many persons, even endowed with such contentment, in a superabundant fashion, have to surrender to death, immediately as it approaches?

928: You may even trust in the secret and most precious discoveries of art. But how many have there not been who have committed all their substance into procuring these, right when they thought they were more endowed than ever before, found themselves defenseless and disarmed between death's clutches? Ladies and gentlemen, there just is no medication against death. There is no remedy, no obstacle, that might be set up to slow it down at all. If you have convinced yourselves that at this present age, death will not come to you, then you are trying to make the Gospel itself a liar. You would be making a liar out of Christ Himself, for it is He who denies you openly the security of even a single day, or of but a single hour: ... *you know not the day, nor the hour...* [Mt 25:13.] - rather precisely in that hour when you least fear death, in that instant when you are least thinking about it, that will be the one in which most probably it will come: .. *for at what hour you think not, the Son of Man will come...* [Mt 25:13].

929: ...*Watch, therefore...* [Mt 25:13]. Do not lose time thinking of your own affairs. Stay on the alert. Do not trust in your age, have no confidence in your robust health; pay no attention to your complexion, as though you could ever slow down death in its course. It is bearing in its hand decrees already signed by the Omnipotent. Death cannot be slowed down a single day, hour or minute. It is of no help to close oneself in an unassailable fortress. For when it does arrive, it would have to open well locked doors. It can be said that these doors even open of themselves, even if made of the strongest bronze, and the most solid jasper. there is nothing that can resist the immutable decrees of God.

930: You do not have any means of escape to flee from her. Is it not true that in whatever place we might feel safety, she also reigns here with absolute dominion, universal sovereignty. Job [18:14] describes this as a king who tramples under foot his fearful subjects, without their even daring to move at all, or to revolt: ...*let destruction tread upon him like a king...* Death can come upon us on land, on the sea, at home, along the street, in one's room, in the square, in the city, in the country, on the plains, on the mountains, in the garden, in the woods. And not only in any place - but also at any time. It can come by day, or by night, in the morning, in the evening, at first vigil, or the last vigil.

931: And not only in any place, or at any time, but also in any manner. Death may come through an illness, with fever, with catarrh, with pain, with stagnation, with convulsions, with stones, by apoplexy, with cancer, and under an infinite number of causes of sickness, or accidents. It can make use of all kinds of creatures as external agents, to take us away at any instant, and quite unexpectedly. For the earth is every ready with its earthquakes, the sea with its storms, the rivers with their floods, the

heavens with their bolts, the air with its death-bearing breath, fire with its conflagrations.

932: Among the animals, some of them are ferocious and come out of their dens to slash us with their claws, or teeth; others are poisonous and hide among the flowers and the vegetation even in cultivated gardens, or in a flowery meadow, like the viper. Or, they might be brought up in your own homes, as a dog which by a single bite communicates to you the poison of rabies and kills you. Among other human beings some may run you through with weapons, others by betrayals. At times by assassins, or by thieves in the night. Death can come by meeting a rival along the way, an unfaithful servant.

933: It is quite true that death does not need either iron, or fire, or poisons, to take one way from life even in an instant. Even already within us, there are sufficient means to kill us. Like clothing may generate its own moths, similarly our own bodies can give rise to putrefaction from which they could then be consumed: ... *Who am to be consumed as rottenness, and as a garment that is moth eaten...* [Jb 13:28]. And this is a property of the moths: to consume the cloth noiselessly, so much so that before one notices that it is consumed, it is known that it is underway.

934: And who is to know whether within you, unnoticed, your life is slowly wasting away, and might even be nearly consumed? How far this thought is from thinking that death is a long way off! This is quite different from imagining it still on its way! This is even different from thinking that it might be close! It might even have already taken hold of you! It could very well be that for a good period of time it has already been at work within you, leading to an unexpected ending of your life. It could already be imminent that hour in which you will see that your entire body consumed, without your ever having noticed the atrocious teeth that day and night is wearing out your life.

935: And should it be this way, does it seem to you, beloved ladies and gentlemen, that there is any time to lose? What kind of prudence is yours, o sinner, whoever you may be to trust in time to undertake your conversion? Might not immediately be the best time to save your souls, now that you can? Now that you are running such a serious risk of not being able to do it later, and of losing yourself forever? This is all the more pressing when you think that death for you might not come in the common course of events and by the ordinary way, but might be anticipated, and might even be altogether sudden.

936: And so that you might not judge my proposition to be just guess work, I can provide it in all its parts. As for the first point, that you might die before your time, this proposition in express terms is that of God Himself. These are his words in Ecclesiasticus [no citation offered]: ... *Do not act impiously often, so that you might not die out of your time...* And in Job: ...*Before his days are full, [the wicked] shall perish: and his hands wither way...* [Jb 15:32]. And again: ... *[the wicked] were taken away before their time, and a flood has overthrown their foundation...* [Jb 22:16]. And again in Ecclesiasticus: *he that hates chastisement, shall have less life...* [Si 19:5]. And in

Proverbs: ... *the years of the wicked shall be shortened...* [P 10:27]. And lastly: ... *now the sting of death is sin...* [1 Co 15:56].

937: Now as for the second point, that you should die unexpectedly, here are some proofs from Scripture:...*The man with a stiff neck... shall suddenly be destroyed...* [Pr 29:1]. In other words, that sinner who obstinately perseveres in his evil way of life before the many who correct him and admonish hi, shall be overtaken by an unexpected death. And St. Paul [1 Th 5:3] speaking also of the wicked, writes: ... *for when they shall say, peace and security, then shall sudden destruction come upon them...* And these are the ones upon whom death suddenly pounces, like a thief in the night, as we have it in the Gospel [Mt 24:43], since they live in the darkness, And in the Psalm, we read: ... *How are they brought to desolation? they have suddenly ceased to be...* [Ps 73:19]. They very unexpectedly died: ... *they have perished because of their iniquity...* [ib.].

938: These are facts. And they are verified even outside of sacred history. We will find that the wicked perish both unexpectedly and horribly. The Pharaoh died unexpectedly with all his army, drowned in the waters [Ex 14:23, ff.]. Those Hebrews dies very suddenly in the desert, those who wane to return to Egypt [Ex 32:25, ff.]. Those rebels also died very suddenly who rebelled against the priesthood of Aaron [Nb 16:1, ff.]. Those complainers in the promised land also died suddenly [Nb 14:36, ff.]. And there are so many others, almost without number, who were overtaken without warning for their sins.

939: You would also say that death also touches the just in unexpected fashion I respond first of all that in all of Scripture this happened only to the children of Job. For all the rest, all the other saints died comfortably and after having made provision for it, as we find this in the sacred books I respond in the second place that God does permit this at times, and still does, for the most sublime reasons of His Providence. In the same way, He also allows that the just undergo other pains proper to the wicked in this temporal life. It might very well be that He does this to instill a little terror to the evil, in the case of those who are too sure of themselves. This, however, does not take away the fact that the wicked, who ...*spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to hell...* [Jb 21:13].

940: I respond lastly that when in a nation the sins committed are already common, and the scandals are public, God generally castigates all equally in this life, and involves everyone in the same penalty. Thus, as two of the Fathers of the Church, St. Augustine ⁵ and St. Gregory the Great ⁶ and other Saints, all can be said to be morally guilty in some way: either because they actually commit the evil, or because they participate in it, either by consenting or approving, or because they do not impede it with all their power. This is what would be required of many in justice, and of

⁵St. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, 1, 9. t. 7, 8 F, ff.

⁶St. Gregory the Great, *In Ezech. Hom.*, 11. t. 2, 122?2 B; *Epist.*, 114. t. 2, 708/ 2 A.

all in charity. It is necessary to oppose the evil of others with fraternal correction, with good example, or at least, with the most fervent prayers raised to God.

941: St. John Chrysostom⁷ is of a like opinion. He points out that in a neighborhood where here are many houses close together, whenever one of them catches fire, if all the neighbors do not work together to extinguish it, it will not burn out by itself. But, rather, in one single fire that ignites, all will be consumed. And this is the source of the sudden deaths that occur not infrequently, but ordinarily and are common.

942: My dear ladies and gentlemen, I have come to the point where I should develop the thought and land on it with much force. I ought to conclude by bringing the utmost terror to myself and to you, as there is not much time that remains to us, if we wish to think of our souls. But, because I do not wish at any cost to transcend the limits that have been set for my sermon, and on the other hand, because I do confide in your wise reflections, I will end my consultation here. And I await impatiently, after a brief rest, for your prudent deliberations.

943: You can no longer doubt that you have no more time to waste in order to insure the eternal lot of your souls. The arguments have come to such evidence that I should not insult the docility of your intellects. There is no need for me further to reproduce them here again, or to reconfirm them. This would give the impression that are not yet fully convinced. No one wants to bring any harm to your hearts, by expressing the concern that they are obstinate. This would imply that you do not wish to follow the truth that has already been manifested and already perceived. Therefore, it is necessary that you should begin the undertaking right away.

944: It is necessary to convert immediately to God, to detest sin, to confess it at the feet of the priest, to weep over it, to leave it behind. The occasions must be abandoned, and each must take up those means that will be helpful to keep your resolution constant. And in a special manner, each should ask God by frequent prayer for the light and the strength to resist temptations. It is important to watch over yourselves with the exercise of the Christian virtues. And finally, all ought to be most solicitous to satisfy with voluntary mortifications and penances, for the sins committed up to now. In brief, it is most urgent to reform your way of life, and to institute a new one. You must put on the **nuptial garment** which alone constitutes one in the number of the elect.

945: We are speaking here of the soul, it is a question of eternity. It is necessary to give up love for earthly and base realities. What we are dealing with here is that in a short time, each must appear before a terrible, inexorable judge. It is necessary to surrender the conveniences, the regard of the world: ... *few are chosen...* [Mt 22:14]. That great multitude that follows the world, while it is included among the greater number of the called, it is not for that alone also included among the elect. Indeed, it may even be explicitly excluded, as we have it from the Gospel [Mt 6:24; 12:30]. Whoever wants to be saved with the few, must live with them.

⁷St. John Chrysostom, *In Eph.*, 4, 4. Hom. 10, 2. t. 2, 47/ 1 C, ff.

The grace of Jesus Christ that once again has called out to you by my ministry, will assist you to begin, and will comfort you to persevere. Amen.

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SOURCES

OT

Ex 14:23, ff.	# 938
32:25, ff.	# 938
Nb 14:36, ff.	# 938
16:1, ff.	# 938
2 K [2 S] 14:14	# 926
Jb 9:25	# 925
26	# 924
13:28	# 933
14:2	# 924
15:32	# 936
18:14	# 930
21:13	# 940
22:16	# 936
Ps 72:19	# 937
Pr 10:27	# 936
29:1	# 937
Si [no citation:early death	# 936
14:12	# 926
19:5	# 936

NT

Mt 6:24	# 945
12:30	# 945
22:14	## 919; 945
24:43	# 937
25:13	## 928; 929
1 Co 15:56	# 936
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Apoc 1:7	# 923
3:11	# 923 [2 x]
6: 8	# 924

Fathers and Doctors

St. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, l. 9. t. 7, p. 8 F, ff. # 940
St. Gregory the Great, *In Ezech.*, Hom. 11. t. 2, p. 122:2 B # 940
Epist. 114. t. 11, p 47/1 C, ff.# 941

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946:**SERMON 25****The Advent of Our Lord Jesus Christ****For the Second Sunday of Advent, preached in St. Paul's of Campo Marzio, on December 9, 1804. Verona.**

Christ is coming. The Savior is about to be born. The Holy Church in these days awaits Him, desires Him, yearns for Him. What does it mean, my beloved, that we are all here cold in our affections? We are passing through these days of Advent a season so joyful in its expectation, so sweet in such slothful indifference. There is no solicitude to unite ourselves in Spirit to the Holy Church. We content ourselves at the most with not being in disharmony, at least in externals, through a superficial and languid share in ceremony.

947: But, unfortunately, love for these earthly visible realities keeps our spirit occupied. The delights of the senses have so held back our hearts by a shameful kind of slavery. They confess externally, within there is no taste for it. What wonder, then if there is no desire, when interest is not taken in these realities? O God, my brothers and sisters, it is indeed time that we should shake off this deep freeze, that we raise up our spirits, as the Prophet invites us to do: to notice the joy that comes to us from our God: ... *Look about you, Jerusalem... and behold the joy that comes to you from God...* [Ba 4:36].

948: And this is the object to which I would like that you apply the attention of your spirit with me. I know that some of you by experience already know how sweet and joyful a reality it is to await the coming of the Savior, as those whose hearts are already warm with divine love. Such as these do not need my words. But I personally, I do need something, because my spirit is cold, as is that of others with me. I need their prayers so that I might succeed in persuading all of us beyond doubt that even the most wretched, desperate sinners can participate with the just and with the Saints to this expectancy of such a pure and sublime delight. what might at first sight seem very strange, I propose now to demonstrate.

949: If we would look at the first appearance of these two terms, that is, to the One Who is awaited, and who expects Him - then, there are indeed more reasons to generate in us a sense of desperate sadness, rather than comforting joy. The One who is awaited, in fact, is God. Those who are awaiting Him, are you and me. We are like most vile worm, who crawl along the ground, like the one most weighed down with vices. And what possible suitability can there be found between sin and holiness, between iniquity and justice, between supreme wretchedness and supreme beatitude?? Hence, it might seem that only the just, the saints, the innocent, are really disposed to experience joy at the coming of Christ. Sinners would seem to be excluded as those who have in themselves excessive deformity and dissimilarity.

950: But, this is not the way it is. I would even be able to say that in some way, sinners should rejoice more than the just. The reason is that the Son of Man has

descended from heaven to save what was lost: *...for the Son of Man is come to save what was lost...* [Mt 18:11]. From His own lips we hear Him say that He has come to seek sinners, not the just: *...For I am not come to call the just, but sinners...* [Mt 9:13]. The very Name that is given to Him of becoming man, announced by the angelic ministry and solemnly explained, is “Jesus”, that is, “Savior” of His People from their sins: *... For He shall save His people from their sins...* [Mt 1:21].

951: Think of an earthly king, an emperor, who would go out from his royal court, leaving behind his royal apartments - and were he to depart from his capital city and undertake a very long journey, to the most remote and miserable scrap of land of his dominion. Would he not take care to have with him other noble and honored emissaries, and send them as ambassadors to this most poor and wretched area? Would he not send the message on ahead that the sovereign was already along the way to honor this lowly populace with a personal visit? And would not all strive to put their homes in order, so that the royal person might come in and stay there for a while? And would not the one’s home that might be chosen, be considered to be more blessed than all others? Would not such a person have more reason to exult, as the one to whom more directly and immediately the honor had come?

952: And if this person were still in prison and condemned to death, and the king comes even into the jail to visit him in person and to pardon him, and to take the shackles from his hands, and to change his shame into glory, and his supreme misfortune into sublime benefits! How great would not his joy be in this very sweet expectation! Would you think that any noble, any great person, or any rich person in that city, present for the arrival of the Sovereign would have derived greater joy than that poor man in prison.

953: This is precisely our case at hand. We sinners, oppressed by the misery of our faults, and detained shamefully in the slavery of our vices - to us there has been announced and directed an imminent visit, of great fortune to us, of the supreme King of Heaven. He wishes to liberate us with His grace and enrich us with His precious gifts. Hence, we should feel with greater pleasure the closeness of that most fortunate day, of that moment that is so happy, and one that is above all the happy and festive imaginings that we could ever have.

954: Come on now, let each one of us say, come on, poor heart of mine. Rejoice in the mercy of your Lord, and He will realize all the desires of your hearts: *... Delight in the Lord, and He will give you the requests of your heart...* [Ps 36:4]. To You, o Lord, I have lifted up my hopes” *... in You, o Lord, I put my trust; let me not be ashamed ...* [Ps 24:1, 2]. In carrying out all that you wish that I would hope from You: *.... neither let my enemies laugh at me...* [v. 3]. Do not let them make fun of me, or deride my vows: *...for none of them that wait on You shall be confounded...* [ib.].

955: I have here touched on the deformity and the dissimilitude that appears more than ever between us and God. On the one hand, this cannot in any way be denied. Yet, on the other hand, the more carefully this discrepancy is considered, I would like to point out that this itself brings about the most intimate suitability to unite two

extremes that are so disparate, one from the other. In fact, a supreme good, such as God is, is almost excessively inclined to communicate Himself. For this reason, this Good cannot have a greater proportion to a creature that is needy to the extreme for all benefits. For an immense mercy, nothing is more appropriate than an immense misery. With a most rich liberality there could be no more pleasing encounter than a most abject and omnipotently desolate poverty.

956: A most perfect holiness orders all its operations to its own glory, as to the end of the most noble existence. Such holiness finds the most manifest suitability in operating in such as these, more than in all others. For the beings that are the most abject having nothing other in themselves than reasons for confusion and disdain. These lowly realities allow themselves, without holding back a point, to give all the glory to the source from which it has proceeded. This is in accord with that biblical phrase: *...all the rivers run into the sea... [Qo 1:7] ...unto the place from whence they come, they return to flow again...* What a sweet thought this is, and what comfort it should be to us! That very misery of ours, that brings such total confusion, that it almost leads us to desperation, now we see it changed into a reason for rich hopes.

957: And it is certain, o Lord, that if You choose graciously to enrich those who are Your favored ones and closer to You, and if you want to raise them up even to this, we would have no reason to glory in our own merits and in our good dispositions. All we would need to do would be to remember our dust and the dunghill of our past iniquities. If we wish to find reason to give glory, we do not, nor would we want to seek for this anywhere but in You. And all those who knew of our previous wretchedness, all will admire Your wisdom and power. Its effects in us would testify that You know how to call all that is not, as well as all that is, and to choose the most abject and disdained of this world to confound the most powerful.

958: And here I would like you to take careful note of one truth. We are accustomed ourselves to love only those things in which we can find some appearance of beauty, and some semblance of good. And so, seeing in ourselves nothing other than that which is evil and unsightly, it seems impossible to us that God could indeed love us. It seems an exaggeration that **the Divine Word, as a passionate Lover of Souls, could descend with the most tender and affectionate invitations, to call the lowliest of creatures to His chaste and spiritual nuptials.** But all difficulty in this regard is dissolved whenever there is recognized the difference that there is between us and that of God.

959: Our love is caused by the good that it finds in the object that it loves. Hence, we love only the good that exists in another. God's love is not caused by the good that there is in us, but rather It causes this in us. This is the reason why God loves even what does not exist, so that they come into being. He loves even brute souls and those all deformed with sin, in order to re-embellish them and decorate them with His grace.

960: But let us come now to the facts, which is an argument against which there is no response. Tell me: who were those great saints who received the initial pledges of the Spirit in the first age of **the nascent Church? Who indeed were those martyrs,**

so full of courage, those illustrious Confessors, those early fervent Christians - who were all these people? They were gentiles, that is, great sinners, most lowly slaves of infernal powers. They adored stones, metal and wood: their lives, their customs were full of confusion. The holy Apostle says of them :...*For you were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord...* [Ep 5:18]. “You were darkness” because of your vices and superstitions, and now you are the light of the Lord.

961: And how did all of these pass from the melancholy abysses of sin to such luminous heights of holiness? The Word of God came and made Himself a man, to make of that blind gentility so filthy in its vices, **a most beautiful spouse, adorned with virtue and without stains.** First being announced to them, and then there appeared the grace and gentleness of our savior, Christ. And then there followed such a prodigious change, worthy of the right hand of the Most High. And who is there among us whose life is so desperate, that he would not take hold of himself in hearing of these great and supreme hopes? Could not anyone rise even higher by the savior’s grace? Would it not also be possible for those who had fallen very low by their faults, as appears from **the fact of those early Christians?** Is it not so that among them abounded iniquity and then grace super-abounded?

962: And look, the acceptable time is approaching: there are the days of salvation that are drawing near. I can already note, beloved brothers and sisters, that a sweet and joyful hope has come to birth in your hearts. And the happy affections of your joy, love, desire are already moving your spirits. And so you make clear to me that I have already spoken sufficiently up to now. The greater part of you seem to approve this, and that you are waiting the joyful coming of the Savior, and that the time has come that I should descend into more specifics. And I will do this most willingly in a few more words. I do this to satisfy you and for your delight, making use of a symbol that sacred history affords me.

963: Abraham wanted to give a wife to his son, Isaac, and with this in mind, sent one of his servants into Mesopotamia. [Gn 24:1, ff.]. The servant noted that the divine good pleasure for this, through certain signs, in a matter that was so interesting for his master. He settled on the person of Rebecca, and immediately made her the gift of some presents. Then, after having ascertained her family, and having handed over the precious gifts of gold and silver, and won the happy permission of all. He led back the new spouse with him, and returned to his masters.

964: It was precisely at sunset that Isaac left the camp to go out to meditate. raising his eyes, he saw the camels coming on which Rebecca was seated [Gn 24:63, f.]. When she had seen Isaac, she got down off the camel and was informed by the servant that this was her intended spouse. She quickly took her cloak and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all he had done. He brought her into the tent and all was ratified. The marriage was celebrated, and he manifested toward her the most clear signs of his very tender love.

If it is pleasing to you, let us take this fact from the covering of the letter, that He does everything for us. But first, in order not to burden you excessively or protract your attention excessively, let us rest a moment. The unveiling of this mystery will serve also for our conclusion.

965: What then, is signified by Isaac, if not the Only-begotten Son of God, Who is the **Spouse of faithful Souls**. This means that the faithful servant sent to lead **the spouse** back, what were they, if not the preachers? Were they not sent to propose to human minds the preaching of God's Word, and thus they become procurers of these **happy nuptials**? At certain signs, they follow the eternal preordination, they recognize this or that soul, chosen by God and prefigured by Rebecca. To these, they suggest sweet desires to be converted to Christ, and to be joined with him through grace. And they give rich pledges in His Name of Mercy and love. This is done so that they might consent fully, following the preaching, to come to Christ. Then, they lead back with them **the spouse** joyfully to their Lord.

966: And what is meant by Isaac, who had gone out into the field to meditate toward evening, and there met Rebecca, if not the Son of God, who had come into this world? Had He not been spoken of by the Prophet: *... you went forth for the salvation of your people...* [Hab 3:1]. *... the lifting up of my hands as evening sacrifice...* [Ps 140:2]. As He was not content with having sent prophets and preachers, He came Himself to encounter those souls who would consent to be **united with Him through Grace**.

967: Now, all of this I hope - rather, I am sure, has today been fulfilled among us. For I do see that your souls are not only desirous, but resolved to follow the invitation of my preaching. I perceive that you are already accompanying me joyfully going toward the encounter with Christ. In these days, He is already on His way toward His encounter with you. All that remains is that there be achieved in you personally also the **ultimate particulars of this allegory**.

968: Just as soon as Rebecca sees Isaac, she slipped down off her camel. And this implies that the soul, with desire, hastens forward to meet Christ. As He approaches, their mutual recognition intensifies. Then, the efficacious act ought to be united to the proposal of abandoning and leaving behind the discomfort of past actions and the proud sense of superiority of worldly thoughts. This is implied in her coming down off the camel. And further, as Rebecca veiled her face in the presence of Isaac, so before the presence of Christ, one ought to feel confusion for past actions. One ought to know shame for the sins of the past, by humbly and sorrowfully confessing them

969: That which our Lord Jesus Christ gives is grace to you and to me in these days to carry out this in a perfect manner. Our souls have been introduced by this New Isaac into His home,. He has deigned to join our souls to Himself, and to unite them by grace in this life, and for glory in the next. Both here on earth, and up above in heaven, we can congratulate one another for our happiness. We can praise together His mercy, to Him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit be honor forever!

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SOURCES

OT

Gn 24:1, ff	## 963; 964
63, ff.	# 964
Ps 24:1	# 954
2	# 954
3	# 956
36:4	# 954
140:2	# 966
Qo 1:7	# 956
Ba 4:36	# 947
Hab 3”13	# 966

NT

Mt 1:21	# 950
9:13	# 950
18:11	# 950
Ep 5:8	# 960

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970:**SERMON 26****A Bad Death -****Inevitable to Sinners who await to be converted on this point**

Preached on St. Stephen's Feast Day, in the year 1804, in St. Paul's of Campo Marzio, on the left side of Verona.

A happy death is the precious death of the just! Stephen dies full of the Holy Spirit. He dies seeing the heavens opened and Jesus standing at God's right hand. Stephen dies, the first fruit of the Martyrs, swept away in a most bitter sea of calamitous persecution. He dies with the most serene joyfulness of spirit: ... *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit...* [Ac 7:58]. And he dies with the most tranquil constancy in his heart: ... *and falling to his knees, he cried out with a loud voice...* [Ac 7:59]. And he dies with the most sweet honey on his lips: ...*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge...* [v. 59]. He dies, or rather, falls asleep, and sleeps in the bosom of his Lord: ...*he fell asleep in the Lord...* [ib.].

971: ... *precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints...* [Ps 115:15]. Who is it who would not desire the death of the just? ... *Let my soul die the death of the just...* [Nb 23:10] - so says the one who died afterwards as a wicked person. And still every day those who want to continue to live their lives as evil people say and incessantly yearn that they might die as the just do. But, this desire of theirs is vain: ...*the desire of the wicked shall perish...* [Ps 111:10]. The one who does not live in a just manner will not die that way: the one who does not live as a saint will not die as a saint. Whoever lives wickedly, died badly: whoever lives in sin, dies in sin.

972: I know, I know all too well that you would like to object to me, o sinners: that you hope to die well even though now you still live badly, because you wish to be converted at death. These are vain hopes, that I would like to see vanish immediately under your very eyes. I would like to throw down to earth that false foundation on which they are focused. At death, you will not be converted. And I will prove this. You could die suddenly as in our times, so many die. But I would want that you would have much time: and nonetheless, I can prove to you that you will not convert. You might even have all the opportunity of expert priests who might help you, you will not be converted. I can prove this, as well.

973: And firstly, you will not convert because you do not want to convert. It will perhaps seem to you that here I will slip away from that beautiful principle, since I have the opportunity to speak with such sinners who wish to be converted at death. I know very well that you would like to be converted at that hour, but I also know that you do not wish to be converted now. And so, I deduce: you do not wish to use time well, even that last period.

974: And who does not know the prodigious power of habits, especially those deeply rooted, nurtured for a very long time. Do they have the power to incline and invincibly drag the will to those acts pleasing to them? Right now, you resist the invitations of

grace that are so frequent, even continuous. You train your hearts to a hardness, that is intensified each day, and is aggravated beyond all measure, by so many years. At death, this hardness will reach an indeed monstrous level. If your hearts are hard right now, at that moment, they will be supremely hardened... How, then, could you hope to break it down? How do you think you could bend it? How will you ever be able to soften it?

975: This is not simple guesswork, when the Holy Spirit has added His own sentence. It is an incontestable truth: *... a hard heart shall fear evil at the last...* [Si 3:27]. A heart that is hardened, uses time badly now, and so it will use time badly at that hour. It will continue in its obstinacy, in its hardness: it will remain in evil to the last. It will so despair at the news of approaching death, that it will not convert: it will remain in evil. Stricken by so many sorrows, by such anguish, by so many tribulations, it will curse, it will give way to wrath. Rather than being humbled, rather than grieving for sin, and being converted, it will still put it off, not yet: it will remain in evil. It will do evil even to the last.

976: How many, my brothers and sisters, have not died in our times like dogs? This is not just speculation, but facts. These are not realities about which one reads as having taken place only in the past. They are seen each day almost, as taking place in this, so depraved an age. The Scripture says: that sinners are struck, afflicted and overwhelmed by evils [Apoc 16:9]: *... and they were scorched with a great heat...* And far from doing penance in order to give glory to God, they cursed the Most High, who was scourging them with such power: *... and they blasphemed the name of God, Who has power over these plagues, neither did they do penance to give Him glory...* [ib.]. In their pain, they bit their tongues”...and they gnawed their tongues for pain... [Apoc 16:10]. And they continued to curse the God of heaven as they felt so wounded and in sin: *... and they blasphemed the God of heaven, because of their pains and wounds...* [Apoc 16:11]. And even in these ultimate extremes they are not led to do penance for so much iniquity on their part: *...and they did not do penance for their works...* [ib.].

977: But come on now, because in every way that I can I want to do well by you this evening. You not only have all the time and plenty of opportunity. And even more, you also have all the good will to be converted, as even right now you desire to have it. This will all be in vain at the last hour, because then you will not be able to accomplish these.

- How come? O God, does this mean that there is only despair for us?

- No for I even wish that you might take steps, make provisions now against despairing. You cannot put off to that extreme moment your conversion. You can do immediately what at that time you will be unable to do.

978: In fact, please tell me, when a headache, or a toothache that only gives way after some days, this so wears you down and occupies your mind, you can hardly think of anything else. You are almost unable to do anything other than think of your affliction and to suffer it. If this is so now, what will the pains and the spasms of death bring to you? With your strength exhausted, with your body crushed, will you not be unable to exercise even the least actions? And what about those supreme efforts,

those that are full of difficulties? Is it not impossible to think of being converted among these difficulties, to seek conversion after a life of evil? What happens when one has become accustomed for so many years to evil, if even those who are good, when sickness torments them, find themselves impeded? And in this situation they are already accustomed to pray, to make acts of contrition, of hope, of love. And nevertheless, at that last hour, they will experience great difficulties. How much the more, then, will not sinners, habituated in evil, and without any practice of good, feel difficulty in an even greater way, and find it unable to be overcome?

979: When the imagination is agitated, troubled and strangely altered, it will present to the intellect only images of terror, confusing thoughts, and fearsome visions of spoiled and distorted objects. The apprehension of the imminent judgment, and the nearness of eternity, will be coupled with the most atrocious feelings of remorse of conscience. All of this will contribute to making sin appear to be quite different from what was held in life. Here, sin is sometimes thought of like a playful puppy to be petted in one's lap. But, at the last moment, it will appear more like a terrible serpent, and like a dragon, with a very powerful poison. The demon who will flutter about with very great wrath, ready to devour whomsoever he will, as St. Peter warns us [1 P 5:8]. He will redouble his temptations, he will press in on all sides with his attacks, he will do all he can to force one to despair. He will bring to the highest mark fear and trepidation, consternation. Fear, when it is moderate, says St. Thomas⁸, leads human beings to be solicitous to consult and to work - but, when fear is excessive, it takes totally away not only action, but even the ability to think. Just imagine what fear will do, that which is brought to the most intense level, that is to agony!

980: Listen to the very words of the Great Pontiff, St. Gregory describing a terrible happening. This took place not only in his time, but in Rome, right under his very eyes. It seems that it happened in his own monastery, just a few years before he narrated it, to the Roman people in one of his homilies⁹. Then he wanted this fact known to the whole Christian world, by registering it in his Dialogues¹⁰.

This people is not surprised at anything, as they know to what extent the evil spirits can allude people. They can alter not only the external senses, but also those internal senses, that make use of bodily organs. They do this by disturbing one's humors and agitate the imagination. As good philosophy would teach them this much, good theology would taken them further. The people also know that God can give and has given on many occasions, such faculties to the demons. He does this always for other purposes, and very often for the just punishment of the wicked, or the merciful correction of others.

981: The Saint tells his story. There was a certain Theodorus, a very restless young man. More by necessity than by choice, he followed a brother of his into the

⁸St. Thomas Aquinas, I-II, q. 44, a. 4.

⁹St. Gregory, *In Evang.*, Hom. 15, t. 2, pp. 26/ 2 D, ff.

¹⁰St. Gregory, *Dialogues*, 4, 37. t. 1, p. 1053/ 2 A.

monastery. So that he would never be reduced to actually receive the habit of our community, he gave forth with oaths, angry statements and derision. Now, in the midst of the great pestilence that struck everywhere, it consumed a great part of the population of this city. The young man was also infected, and was on his deathbed. And as he was about to breathe his last, all the brothers congregated to protect his passing with their prayers. The extremities of his body were already dead; but only in his breast did there remain a slight flicker of vital warmth.

982: Then, the brothers intensified their prayers, when they saw that the moment for him to take his leave had arrived. When all of a sudden, he began to cry out to the brothers who were assisting him. His loud cries interrupted their prayers: Get out of here, go away! I have been given over to a dragon to be devoured. And as long as you are present, he cannot finish me off. He already has my head in his mouth, ready to consume it. Go away from here, so that he will not continue to torture me, but that he will finish off what he has begun. If my destiny is to be given over to him, why do you make me suffer such bitter delays?

Then, his confreres responded: But, what is this, brother, what are you saying? Make the sign of the cross.

983: But, he responded with a loud scream I do want to cross myself, but I cannot. The scales of this dragon oppress me. I cannot, I just cannot!

O God, my listeners, ladies and gentlemen, sinners, all of you listening to these events that happened to others. Take care, be careful that they do not also happen to you, and that any of you be forced to cry out in desperation: I cannot, I am not able! And it surely will come to pass that at that time you will not be able to, that whereas right now you could, and have not wanted to do so.

984: But even if it is granted to you to be able to respond at that last crisis, as if you do have all your senses free, then you will be able to make use of that assistance that God might grant in those extremes to be converted. The most terrible of possibilities is that you will not have those helps; or, if you do have these to sufficiency, they will not be efficacious, because God will not make them so: and then, you will not be converted. God Himself makes clear that He does not want to do so. I have called out to you, He says, so many times in this life; and you have not deigned to answer Me. I have sought you out, and I followed after you lovingly with My grace, and you always went further away. All right, the time will come, death will come: *...You shall seek Me, and shall not find Me... [Jn 7:34]... you shall die in your sins... [Jn 8:21].*

985: There may rise to give you help and to defend you, those friends who want to please you, and who would have no hesitancy to offend Me. Maybe those creatures will come to your protection, those in whom you place all your affection, your hopes, your heart, taking all from me who with such insistence has been asking these of you: *...let them arise and help you... [Dt. 32:38].* I will block my ears to your cries; I will not allow Myself to be found on that day. I will fill My Temple with smoke through the

majesty and the power of My justice. It will be such that no saint might enter to make intercession for you, until My vengeance be consumed: *...And the temple was filled with smoke from the majesty of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the ... plagues... were fulfilled...* [Apoc 15:8].

986: But, is not the Lord merciful?

Yes, He is, my brothers and sisters. But He is also just. As merciful, He seeks you, waits for you, promises you pardon right now. But, as just, He will avoid you, He will reject you, and He will vindicate at death for the long-standing abuse that you have heaped on His mercies. As merciful, He exhorts you now, because He does not rejoice in the perdition of the wicked. He does not want the sinner's death, but rather that he be converted and live [Ezk 33:11]. As just, He will then leave you, abandoned to your desperation, or hardened in your blindness. You will go into perdition and die eternally, because He delights in His justice: *...for the Lord is just and has loved His justice...* [Ps 10:8].

987: By His mercy, the Lord has rejoiced over you, and by multiplying over you His graces [Ps 35:8]. In like manner, by His justice, He will rejoice in dispersing you, in destroying you, precisely by taking from you the possession of that happy land of joy and eternal rest. Even though you may be standing on its threshold, you will trust in vain to place your foot inside.

I conclude with St. Augustine¹¹: this is a most just pain, that the one who chose not to do good when he could, will no longer find it possible to do when he might choose to.

988: The yearning to die well is empty for any sinner who does not wish to be converted right away, as long as he is healthy and has the opportune means. It only follows from this, then, that you should not let slip from your hands the favorable occasion of these very fortunate days of grace and reconciliation. This is the time to re-establish your souls in grace with God and to place your salvation in security. And so you will understand why I have chosen to sadden you on such joyful day, by speaking about death: the reason is that I have been more concerned with what is useful, indeed, with the needs of some, than to delight, albeit in a holy manner, of the many, and indeed, of my own personal inclination.

989: What does it serve, my most beloved brothers and sisters, that we say beautiful things to you, and yet many among you remain in mortal sin? What good would such thoughts be if you allow these feasts to pass by without going to confession? What use would all this be if some persevere in their sinful practices, in their loose manner of life, in their iniquities? Sinners may come into the Church, listen to the sermon, and then go out, still sinners. They might come to the holy solemnities with sin on their souls, and they remain with this even afterwards. O God! And then, they expect to have a good death? This is deceit, presumption, and detestable boldness!

¹¹St. Augustine, *De lib. arb.*, 3, 18, 52. t. 1, p. 631/D.

990: O, my brothers and sisters, “through the bowels of the mercy of God,” in which He from on high has visited us, by being born this day [Lk 1:78]. Accept that light that my words may have given to you, and for which I have prayed with all the insistence of my heart from our Father, Who is in heaven. [Mt 6:9]. Get up out of the darkness. “Rise from sleep. For now your salvation is nearer...” [Rm 13:11]. Do not lose time. Weep, and break open your hardened hearts with contrition leading to salvation. resolve to change your life in a stable manner, but do it now. It is at this very instant that I make this suggestion to you

991: Confess your sins, and as quickly as possible - even tomorrow, as these holy days fly so swiftly away from you. remove from yourselves, keep from your selves, and flee that it has already begun to cover you with its shadow. Do this before it comes up to you, and places its icy fingers upon you. When that happens, you will have no escape, but will perish eternally, together with all your good desires, that have never been effective through your own fault.

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SOURCES

OT

Nb 23:10	# 971	Ps 111:10	# 971
Dt 32:38	# 985	115:15	# 971
Ps 10:8	# 936	Si 3:27	# 975
35:8	# 987	Ezk 33:11	# 986

NT

<t 6:9	# 990	Rm 13:11	# 990
Lk 1:78	# 990	1 P 5:8	# 979
Jn 7:34	# 984	Apoc 15:8	# 985
8:21	# 984	16:9	# 976
Ac 7:58	# 970	10	# 976
59	# 970	11	#976

Fathers & Doctors

St.. Augustine, <i>De lib. arb.</i> , 3, 18, 52. t. 1, p. 631 D	# 987
St. Gregory the Great, <i>Dialogues</i> 4, 37. t. 1, p. 1053/2 A	# 980
<i>In Ev.</i> Hom. 19. t. 2, pp. 276/ 2 D, ff.	# 980
St. Thomas Aquinas, I-II, q. 44, a. 4	# 979

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