

THE LAPSED

Chapter 1

BEHOLD, BELOVED BRETHREN, peace has been restored to the Church, and, what recently seemed difficult to the incredulous and impossible to the perfidious, our security has by divine aid and retribution been re-established. Our minds are returning to gladness, and with the passing of the cloud and storm of oppression tranquility and serenity have shone forth again. Praises must be given to God, and His blessings and gifts must be celebrated by the giving of thanks, although not even in the persecution did our voice cease to give thanks. For it is not possible even for an enemy to prevent us, who love God with our whole heart and soul and power, from proclaiming His blessings and praises always and everywhere with glory. The day longed for by the prayers of all of us has come, and after the horrible and loathsome darkness of a long night the world has shone forth illuminated by the light of the Lord.

Chapter 2

With happy countenances we look upon the confessors illustrious by the proclaiming of a good name and glorious

in the praise of virtue and the faith; clinging to them with holy kisses we embrace them whom we have desired with a divine and insatiable eagerness. The white-robed cohort of Christ's soldiers is at hand, who by a steadfast formation have broken the turbulent ferocity of an attacking persecution, prepared to suffer imprisonment, armed to endure death. Bravely have you opposed the world, a glorious spectacle have you furnished God, you have been an example to your brethren who will follow you. Your religious voice uttered the name of Christ, in whom it has once confessed that it believed; your illustrious hands, which had been accustomed only to divine works, have resisted the sacrilegious sacrifices; your mouths sanctified by heavenly food after (receiving) the body and blood of the Lord have rejected the profane contagion of the leavings of the idols; your head has remained free from the impious and wretched veil¹ with which the captive heads of those performing the sacrifices were there veiled; your brow pure with the sign of God could not endure the crown of the devil, it reserved itself for the crown of the Lord. With what a joyful bosom does the Mother Church receive you as you return from heaven! How happily, with what rejoicing does she open her gates that with united forces, you may enter bringing back trophies from a prostrate enemy! With the man in triumph women too come, who in their struggle with the world have also overcome their sex. Virgins come with the double glory of their warfare and boys surpassing their years in virtue. Furthermore, the rest of the multitude of those who stand follow your glory, accompany your footsteps with marks of praise very close and almost joined with your own. The same sincerity of heart is in these, the same integrity of a tenacious faith. Relying on the unshaken foundation of heavenly precepts, and strengthened by the evangelical traditions, no prescribed exiles, no destined

¹ The veiled head was the sign of Roman worship.

torments, no penalties as to property or body terrified them. The day for examining their faith was set, but he who is mindful that he has renounced the world knows no day in the world, nor does he now compute the earthly seasons who hopes for eternity from God.

Chapter 3

Let no one, brethren, let no one cut short this glory, let no one by malicious detraction weaken the uncorrupted firmness of those who stand. When the time appointed for the recanters had passed, whoever had not professed in that time to be a Christian confessed that he was. The first title to victory is for him who has fallen in the hands of the Gentiles to confess the Lord; the second step to glory is to make a cautious withdrawal and then to keep himself for God. The one is a public confession; the other private. The former conquers the judge of the world; the latter satisfied with God as his judge guards a conscience pure by integrity of heart. In the former case fortitude is quicker; in the latter solicitude is more secure. The one, as his hour approached, was then found ready; the other perhaps was delayed because he had left his estate and had withdrawn, for he would not deny; surely he would have confessed, had he also been seized.

Chapter 4

One grief saddens these heavenly crowns of the martyrs, these spiritual glories of the confessors, these very great and illustrious virtues of the brethren who stand—the violent enemy has torn away a part of our vitals and has thrown

it away in the ruin of his destruction. What shall I do in this situation, dearest brethren? As I waver in the varying tide of emotion, what or how shall I speak? There is need of tears rather than words to express the grief with which the blow to our body is to be mourned, with which the manifold loss of our once numerous people is to be lamented. For who is so hard and without feeling, who so forgetful of brotherly love that as he stands in the midst of the manifold destruction of his people and their sad remains deformed by great squalor he can keep his eyes dry and with a sudden burst of weeping not express his lamentations with tears rather than with words? I grieve, brethren, I grieve with you nor does my own integrity and sanity beguile me to soothe my own grief, since the shepherd is wounded more by the wound of his flock. I join my heart with each one; I share in the grievous burden of sorrow and death. I wail with those who wail; I weep with those who weep; I believe myself to be cast down with those who are cast down. At the same time my limbs were pierced by the darts of the raging enemy; their cruel swords have passed through my vitals. My mind was not able to remain immune and free from the attacks of persecution; among my prostrate brethren, my compassion has also prostrated me.

Chapter 5

Nevertheless, most beloved brethren, the cause of truth must be kept, and the gloomy darkness of the cruel persecution ought not have so blinded our senses that nothing of light and clarity has remained whereby the divine precepts can be perceived. If the cause of the disaster is known, the remedy for the wound also is found. The Lord wished his family to be proved, and, because a long peace had corrupted

the discipline divinely handed down to us, a heavenly rebuke has aroused a prostrate and, I might say, sleeping faith, and, although we deserved more on account of our sins, the most merciful Lord has so moderated all things, that all that has happened seemed an examination rather than a persecution.

Chapter 6

Everyone was eager to increase his estate, and, forgetful of what the believers in apostolic times either had done before or always should have done, with the insatiable ardor of covetousness they applied themselves to increasing their possessions. Among the priests there was no devout religion; in their ministries¹ no sound faith, in their works no mercy, in their morals no discipline. Among men the beard was defaced; faces were painted among women,² eyes were falsified after God's hands had completed them, hair was colored in deception. There were crafty frauds to deceive the hearts of the simple, subtle schemes for circumventing the brethren. They joined with infidels in the bond of matrimony; they prostituted the members of Christ to the Gentiles. They not only swore rashly, but committed perjury also; they looked down with haughty arrogance upon those placed over them; they maligned one another with an envenomed tongue; they quarreled with one another with stubborn hatred. Many bishops,³ who ought to be a source of encouragement and an example to the rest, contemning their divine charge came under the charge of secular kings; after abandoning their

¹ The manuscripts strongly support this translation, and not 'ministers' as this passage has been regularly rendered in the past.

² This section savors strongly of Tertullian.

³ A delicate reference to conditions in Rome under Pope Callistus and his predecessors.

thrones and deserting the people, they wandered through foreign provinces and sought the market places for gainful business; while their brethren in the Church were starving, they wished to possess money in abundance; they seized estates by crafty deceits; they increased their capital by multiplying usuries. What do not such as we deserve to suffer for such sins, when already long ago divine censure warned us and said: 'If they forsake my law and walk not in my precepts, if they violate my statutes, and keep not my commandments, I will punish their crimes with a rod, and their sins with stripes.'⁴

Chapter 7

These things were foreshadowed to us and predicted before. But we, unmindful of the law handed down and of its observation, have brought it about by our sins that while we condemn the mandates of the Lord we have come by severer remedies to the correction of our sins and a probation of our faith, and not indeed have we at last turned to the fear of the Lord so as to undergo this reproof and divine probation of ours patiently and bravely. Immediately at the first words of the threatening enemy a very large number of the brethren betrayed their faith, and were laid low not by the attack of persecution, rather they laid themselves low by their own voluntary lapse. What so unheard of, I ask, what so new had come, that, as if with the rise of unknown and unexpected circumstances, the pledge¹ to Christ should be dissolved with headlong rashness? Did not both the prophets first and the apostles afterwards announce these events? Have not they,

⁴ Ps. 88.31.33.

¹ *Christi sacramentum*, a reference to the *sacramentum* or pledge taken by soldiers in the army.

filled with Holy Spirit, predicted the oppressions of the just, and the injuries of the Gentiles always? Does not holy Scripture ever arming our faith and strengthening the servants of God with its heavenly voice say: 'The Lord thy God shalt thou worship and him only shalt thou serve'?² Does it not say again, pointing out the wrath of the divine indignation and forewarning of the fear of punishment: 'They have adored those whom their fingers have made, and man hath bowed himself down, and man hath been debased, and I shall not forgive them.'³ And again God speaks, saying: 'He that sacrificeth to gods shall be put to death, save only to the Lord.'⁴ Later in the gospel also did not the Lord, a teacher in words and a consummator in deeds, teaching what would be done and doing whatever He had taught, forewarn us first of what is now taking place and will take place? Did He not before establish eternal punishments for those who deny Him and salutary rewards for those who confess Him?

Chapter 8

For some, ah misery! all these things have fallen away and have receded from memory. They did not wait at least to ascend when apprehended, to deny when questioned. Many were conquered before the battle, were prostrated without a conflict, and they did not leave this for themselves—to seem to sacrifice to idols unwillingly. Moreover they ran to the market place, of their own accord they hastened to death, as if they formerly desired it, as if they were embracing an occasion granted to them, which they had cheerfully desired. How many on that occasion were put off by the

² Deut. 6.13.

³ Isa. 2.8,9.

⁴ Exod. 22.20.

magistrates as evening came on, how many also begged that their destruction be not put off! What violence can such a one plead as an excuse, with which to purge his crime, when he himself rather performed the violence that brought about his ruin? When of their own accord they came to the capitol, when they freely approached yielding to the dire crime, did not their footsteps falter, their sight darken, their vitals tremble, their limbs fail, their senses become dull, their tongues cleave, their speech fail? Could the servant of God, who had already renounced the devil and the world, stand there and speak and renounce Christ? Was that altar, which he had approached to die, not a funeral pyre for him? And as for the altar of the devil, which he had seen smoke and smell with a foul feter, ought he not to have shuddered at it as if the funeral and sepulchre of his own life and to have fled from it? Why, oh wretch, do you bring a sacrificial offering with you, why a victim for supplication? You yourself have come to the altars as a sacrificial offering, you yourself as a victim; you have immolated your salvation there, your hope; there you have cremated your faith in those fires.¹

Chapter 9

But for many their own destruction was not enough. By mutual exhortations people were driven to their destruction. Death was proposed for one and another in the lethal cup. And that nothing might be lacking to cap the crime, infants also, placed in the arms of parents or led by them, lost as little ones what they had gained at the very first beginning of their nativity.¹ When the day of judgment comes, will

¹ Cf. Mark 8.36.

¹ The baptism as well as the communion of infants seems to be general at this time.

they not say: 'We have done nothing; we have not abandoned the Lord's bread and cup and of our own accord hastened to profane contaminations. The perfidy of others has ruined us; we have found our parents parricides. They have denied us the Church as Mother, God as Father, so that, while we still small and improvident and unaware of so great a crime were joined through others into a sharing in the crimes, we were caught in the deceit of others?'

Chapter 10

There is not, alas, any just and serious reason which excuses so great a crime. The fatherland should have been abandoned, the loss of personal property suffered. For what man, who is born and dies, does not at some time have to abandon his fatherland and suffer the loss of personal property? Let not Christ be abandoned; let not the loss of one's salvation and one's eternal home be the object of fear. Behold, the Holy Spirit through the prophet cries out: 'Depart, depart, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing, go out of the midst of her, be ye apart, you that carry the vessels of the Lord.'¹ And do not those who are the vessels of the Lord and the temple of God, lest they be forced to touch the unclean thing and be polluted and corrupted by deadly foods, go out from the midst and withdraw? In another place also a voice from heaven is heard admonishing what the servants of God should do and saying: 'Go out from her, my people, that you may not share in her sins, and that you may not receive of her plagues.'² He who goes out and withdraws does not become a sharer in the sin but he indeed who is discovered as a companion in the crime

¹ Cf. Isa. 52.11.

² Apoc. 18.4.

is himself also seized by the plagues. And so the Lord commanded to withdraw and flee in time of persecution, and He both taught that it should be done and did it. For since the crown descends upon us according to the good pleasure of God, and cannot be received unless the hour for assuming it has come, whoever abiding in Christ withdraws for a time does not deny the faith, but awaits the time; but he who, when he did not withdraw, fell, remained to deny it.

Chapter 11

The truth, brethren, must not be concealed, nor must the matter and cause of our wound be kept silent. Blind love of one's personal property has deceived many; nor could they have been prepared or ready for departing, when their possessions bound them like fetters. Those fetters were for those who remained, those chains by which virtue was retarded, and faith hard pressed, and mind bound, and the soul imprisoned, so that they who clung to earthly things became as booty and food for the serpent who, according to the words of God, devours the earth. Therefore, the Lord, the teacher of good things, warning for the future, says: 'If thou wilt be perfect, sell all thy possessions and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.'¹ If the rich did this, they would not perish by their riches; laying up a treasure in heaven they would not now have an enemy and a domestic conqueror; their heart and mind and feeling would be in heaven, if their treasure were in heaven; nor could he be conquered by the world, who had nothing in the world with which to be conquered. He would follow the Lord, loosed and free, as the Apostles and many in apostolic times, and some others often did, who,

¹ Cf. Matt. 19.21.

abandoning their possessions and their parents, clung to the undivided ties of Christ.

Chapter 12

But how can they follow Christ who are held back by the chain of their personal property? Or, how can they seek heaven, and ascend to the sublime and lofty, who are weighed down by earthly desires? They think that they possess, who rather are possessed, slaves of their own property, not lords as regards their money but rather the bond-slaves of their money. The Apostle refers to this time, to these men, when he says: 'But those who seek to become rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many harmful desires which plunge men into destruction and damnation. For covetousness is the root of all evils, and some seeking riches have strayed from the faith and have involved themselves in many troubles.'¹ But with what rewards does the Lord invite us to contempt of personal wealth? With what wages does He compensate for these small and trifling losses of this present time? 'There is no one,' He says, 'who has left house, or land, or parents, or brothers, or wife, or sons for the kingdom of God's sake who does not receive a seven-fold² in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.'³ Since these things are known and have been ascertained from the truth of God who makes the promise, not only is a loss of this kind not to be feared but even to be desired, for the Lord Himself again proclaims and gives warning: 'Blessed shall you be when men persecute you, and separate you and

1 Cf. 1 Tim. 6.9,10.

2 The Cyprianic manuscript tradition definitely has 'seven-fold' here and not a 'hundred-fold.'

3 Cf. Mark 10.29-31.

shut you out and reject your name as evil because of the Son of man. Rejoice on that day and exult, for behold your reward is great in heaven.’⁴

Chapter 13

But later torments had come, and severe sufferings threatened those who resisted. He can complain about torments who was overcome by torments; he can offer the excuse of pain who has been overcome by pain. Such a one can ask and say: ‘Surely I wished to contend bravely, and mindful of my oath I took up the arms of devotion and faith; but as I found in the contest the various tortures and extended punishments overcome me. My mind stood firm and faith strong, and my soul struggled long and unshaken with the excruciating pains. But when, as the cruelty of a most severe judge broke forth afresh, fatigued as I was, the scourges now for the first time slashed me, the cudgels now bruised me, the rack now stretched me, the claw now dug into me, the flame now scorched me, my flesh deserted me in the struggle, the weakness of my vitals gave way, not my soul but my body yielded in the suffering.’ Such a plea can quickly advance to forgiveness; an excuse of this kind can be worthy of pity. Thus in these circumstances the Lord once forgave Cestus and Aemilius; thus, although conquered in the first encounter, he made them victorious in the second battle, so that they became stronger than the fires who previously had yielded to the fires, and in what they had been overcome, in this they overcame. They made their entreaties by pity not of tears but of wounds, not with a wailing voice alone, but with laceration and pain of body. Blood instead

⁴ Luke 6.22.23.

of lamentations came forth, and instead of tears gore poured out from their half burnt vitals.

Chapter 14

But now, what wounds can the conquered show, what injuries to gaping vitals, what tortures of the limbs, when faith did not fail in combat, but perfidy arrived before the combat? Nor does the necessity of the crime excuse him who was caught, where the crime is of the will. I do not say this to burden the cases of the brethren, but rather to stimulate the brethren to prayers of satisfaction. For since it is written: 'They that call you blessed, send you into error, and destroy the way of your steps,'¹ he who consoles the sinner with flattering blandishments furnishes the means for sinning, and does not check transgressions but nourishes them. But he who rebukes at the same time that he instructs with firmer counsels urges a brother on to salvation. 'Whom I love,' says the Lord, 'I rebuke and chastise.'² Thus also ought the priest of the Lord not to deceive by deceptive submissions but to provide with salutary remedies. A physician is unskilled who handles the swelling folds of wounds with a sparing hand, and increases the poison inclosed within the deep recesses of the vital organs as he cares for it. The wound must be opened and cut and treated by a sterner remedy, by cutting out the corrupting parts. Although the sick man, impatient by reason of his pain, cries out, shrieks, and complains, he will give thanks afterwards, when he has experienced good health.

¹ Cf. Isa. 3.12.

² Apoc. 3.19.

Chapter 15

For, very beloved brethren, a new kind of devastation has emerged and, as if the storm of persecution had raged too little, there has been added to the heap, under the title of mercy, a deceiving evil and an alluring destruction. Contrary to the rigor of the Gospel, contrary to the law of the Lord and God because of the temerity of certain persons communion with the rash is related, an empty and false peace, dangerous to those who grant it and of no benefit to those who receive it. They do not seek the patience important for health, nor the true medicine derived from satisfaction. Penance is excluded from their hearts; the memory of a most serious and extreme sin is removed. The wounds of the dying are concealed, and the deadly blow fixed in the deep and secret vitals is concealed by dissimulated pain. Returning from the altars of the devil they approach the holy place of the Lord with hands befouled and reeking with smell; still almost belching forth the death-bearing food of idols, even now with jaws breathing forth their crime and redolent with the fatal contagion they invade the body of the Lord, when the divine Scripture stands in their way, and cries out, saying: 'Everyone that is clean shall eat of the flesh, and whatever soul shall eat of the flesh of the saving sacrifice which is the Lord, and his uncleanness is upon him, that soul shall perish from his people.'¹ Let the Apostle likewise bear witness, saying: 'You cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; you cannot be partakers of the table of the Lord and of the table of devils.'² He likewise threatens the stubborn and the perverse, and denounces them, saying: 'Whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the

¹ Cf. Lev. 7.20.

¹ 1 Cor. 10.21.

Lord unworthily will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.'³

Chapter 16

Spurning and despising all these warnings, before their sins have been expiated, before confession of their crime has been made, before their conscience has been purged by the sacrifice and hand of the priest, before the offence of an angry and threatening Lord has been appeased, violence is done to His body and blood, and they sin more against the Lord with their hands and mouth than when they denied the Lord. They think that to be peace which some truck with deceiving words. That is not peace but war, nor is he joined with the Church who is separated from the Gospel. Why do they call an injury a kindness? Why do they refer to impiety by the term 'piety'? Why do they interrupt the lamentation of penance and pretend to communicate with those who ought to weep continually and to entreat their Lord? This is of the same nature to the lapsed as hail to the harvests, a violent storm to the trees, a destructive pestilence to cattle, a raging tempest to ships. They destroy the solace of hope, they pull up the roots, with their unwholesome words they creep on to deadly contagion, they dash the ship upon rocks lest it arrive within the harbor. That kind of facility does not grant peace but takes it away, nor does it bestow communion but stands in the way of salvation. This is another persecution and another temptation, by which a subtle enemy attacking the lapsed still further approaches with a concealed devastation, so that lamentation is hushed, grief is made silent, the memory of sin vanishes, the groaning of the heart is repressed, the weeping of the eyes is halted, nor is the Lord implored with a long and full penitence,

³ 1 Cor. 11.27.

although it is written: 'Remember whence thou hast fallen and do penance.'¹

Chapter 17

Let no man betray himself; let no man deceive himself. The Lord alone can have mercy. He alone can grant pardon for sins which were committed against Him, who bore our sins, who grieved for us, whom God delivered up for our sins. Man cannot be greater than God, nor can the servant by his own indulgence remit or forego what has been committed against the Lord by a more serious sin, lest to him still lapsed this too be added to his crime, if he does not know that it has been proclaimed: 'Cursed be the man that hath hope in man.'¹ The Lord must be implored; the Lord must be placated by our own satisfaction, who said that He denied him who denied [Him], who alone received every judgment from the Father. We believe indeed that the merits of the martyrs and the works of the righteous have very great power with the Judge, but [this will be] when the day of judgment shall come, when after the end of this age and of the world His people shall stand before the tribunal of Christ.

Chapter 18

But if anyone with precipitate haste rashly thinks that he can grant remission of sins to all or dares to rescind the precepts of the Lord, not only is this of no advantage to the lapsed but it is even a hindrance. Not to have observed the judgment of the Lord, and to think that His mercy is not

¹ Apoc. 2.5.

¹ Jer. 17.5.

first to be implored, but after contemning the Lord to presume on one's own power, is to have provoked His wrath. Under the altar of God the souls of the slain martyrs cry out with a loud voice saying: 'How long, O Lord holy and true, does Thou refrain from judging and from avenging our blood on those who dwell on earth.'¹ And they are ordered to be quiet and to continue to have patience. Does someone think that anyone can wish to become good by remitting and pardoning sins at random or that he can defend others before he himself is vindicated? The martyrs order something to be done;² if just, if lawful, if not contrary to the Lord Himself, they are to be done by the priest of God; let the agreement be ready and easy on the part of the one obeying, if there has been religious moderation on the part of him asking. The martyrs order something to be done. If what they order is not written in the law of the Lord, we must first know, that they have obtained from the Lord what they ask, then do what they order. For what has been assured by man's promise cannot be seen at once to have been granted by the divine majesty.

Chapter 19

For Moses also sought pardon for the sins of the people and yet did not receive it when he sought it for those sinning. 'I beseech Thee, O Lord,' he said, 'this people hath sinned a heinous sin, and now, if you forgive their sin, forgive; but if not, strike me out of the book that thou hast written. And the Lord said to Moses: If anyone hath sinned against me, him will I strike out of my book.'¹ That friend of God, that

¹ Apoc. 6.10.

² The martyrs or witnesses or confessors awaiting martyrdom.

¹ Cf. Exod. 32.31-33.

one who had often spoken face to face with the Lord was unable to obtain what he sought, nor did he placate the displeasure of an indignant God by his intercession. God praises Jeremias, and proclaims, saying: 'Before I formed thee in the womb, I knew thee; and before thou comest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and made thee a prophet unto the nations,'² and He said to him as he frequently interceded and prayed for the sins of the people: 'Do not pray for this people and do not take up praise and prayer for them, for I will not hear them in the time of their cry to me, in the time of their affliction.'³ Who was more righteous than Noe, who, when the earth was replete with sins was alone found righteous upon the earth? Who more glorious than Daniel? Who stronger in firmness of faith for enduring martyrdom, happier in God's favors, who when he fought so often conquered and when he conquered survived? Who was more diligent in good works than Job, stronger in temptations, more patient in suffering, more submissive in fear, more true in faith? And yet God said that, if they should ask, He would not grant. When the prophet Ezechiel interceded for the sins of the people, God said: 'Whatever land shall sin against me, so as to transgress grievously, I will stretch forth my hand upon it, and will break the staff of bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will destroy man and beast out of it. And if these three men, Noe, Daniel, and Job, shall be in it, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only shall be delivered.'⁴ Therefore, not all that is sought is in the prejudgment of the seeker, but in the decision of the giver, and human opinion takes or assumes nothing to itself unless the divine pleasure also assents.

² Jer. 1.5.

³ Jer. 11.14; Cf. 7.16.

⁴ Ezech. 14.13,14,16.

Chapter 20

In the Gospel the Lord speaks saying: 'Everyone who acknowledges me before men, him will I also acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me, even I shall deny him.'¹ If he does not deny him who denies, neither does he acknowledge him who acknowledges. The Gospel cannot be firm in part and waver in part. Either both must be strong or both must lose the force of truth. If those who deny will not be guilty of a crime, neither do those who acknowledge receive the reward of virtue. Furthermore, if the faith which has conquered is crowned, the perfidy also which has been conquered must be punished. Thus the martyrs either can be of no avail, if the Gospel can be broken, or if the Gospel cannot be broken, they who become martyrs according to the Gospel cannot act contrary to the Gospel. Let no one, most beloved brethren, no one defame the dignity of the martyrs; let no one destroy their glories and crowns. The strength of an uncorrupted faith remains sound, and no one can say or do anything against Christ whose hope and faith and virtue and glory is entirely in Christ, so that they who have performed the mandates of God Himself cannot be the authors of anything being done by the bishops contrary to the mandate of God. Is anyone greater than God or more merciful than divine goodness, who either wishes that undone which God suffered to be done, or, as if He had too little power to protect His Church, thinks that we can be saved by his own help?

1 Cf. Luke 12.8,9,

Chapter 21

But if these things have been accomplished with God's knowledge or all these have come to pass without His permission, let divine Scripture teach the unteachable and admonish the forgetful as it speaks in these words: 'Who hath given Jacob for a spoil and Israel to those who plundered him? Hath not God against whom they have sinned and were unwilling to walk in His ways and to hear His law? And He hath poured out upon them the indignation of fury.'¹ And elsewhere it testifies saying: 'Indeed does not the hand of God prevail to save, or, has He burdened His ear that He does not hear? But your sins make a division between you and your God, and because of your sins he hath turned away His face from you lest He have pity.'² Let us consider our sins, and reviewing the secrets of our action and mind let us weigh the merits of our conscience. Let it return to our hearts that we have not walked in the ways of the Lord, have rejected the law of God, have never been willing to keep His precepts and saving counsels.

Chapter 22

What good do you feel with respect to him, what fear, what faith do you believe there was in him whom fear was unable to correct, whom persecution itself has not reformed. His high and erect neck has not been bent because he has fallen; his puffed up and proud mind has not been broken because he has been conquered. On his back and wounded he threatens those who stand and are sound, and because he does not immediately receive the Lord's body in his sullied

¹ Cf. Isa. 42.24,25.

² Isa. 59.1,2.

hands or drink of the Lord's blood with a polluted mouth, he rages sacrilegiously against the priests. And, oh that excessive madness of yours, frenzied one, you rage at him who struggles to avert God's anger from you; you threaten him who beseeches the Lord's mercy for you, who feels your wound which you yourself do not feel, who pours forth tears for you which you yourself perhaps do not pour forth. You pile up and increase your crime still more, and, when you yourself are implacable towards the bishops and priests of God, do you think that the Lord can be placated about you?

Chapter 23

Accept and admit what we say. Why do your deaf ears not hear the salutary precepts which we advise? Why do your blind eyes not see the way of penitence which we place before you? Why does your closed and insane mind not perceive the vital remedies which we both learn and teach from the heavenly Scriptures? If certain incredulous ones have less faith in the future events, let them at least have fear for the present. Behold, what punishments we perceive of those who have denied, what sad deaths of those do we mourn! Not even here can they be without punishment, although the day of punishment has not yet come. Meanwhile certain ones are punished, that the rest may be guided aright. The torments of a few are examples for all.

Chapter 24

One of these who of his own accord went up to the capital to deny became mute after he had denied Christ. The punishment began there where the crime also began, so that he

could no longer ask who did not have words for prayers of mercy. Another was stationed in the baths—for this was lacking to her crime and evils, so that she proceeded at once even to the baths, who had lost the grace of the lifegiving laver—but there she who was unclean being seized by an unclean spirit lacerated with her teeth the tongue which had either fed or spoken impiously. After the polluted food had been consumed, the madness of the mouth worked its own destruction. She herself was her own executioner and was not able to survive long thereafter; being tortured by the pain of her belly and vitals she died.

Chapter 25

Hear what took place in my very presence and with me as a witness. Some parents in hasty flight, with little consideration because of their fear, left their little daughter in the care of a nurse. The nurse handed the abandoned girl over to the magistrates. There before the idol where the people were gathering, because she was unable as yet to eat meat because of her age, they gave her bread mixed with wine, which itself had been left over from the immolation of those who were being destroyed. Afterwards the mother recovered her daughter. But the girl was unable to mention and point out the crime that had been committed as she was unable previously to understand and prevent it. Through ignorance, therefore, it came about that the mother brought the child with her to us as we were offering the Sacrifice. Moreover, the girl having mingled with the holy people, being impatient of our supplication and prayer, was now shaken with weeping and was now tossed about by the vacillating motion of her mind; as if under the compulsion of a torturer the soul of the girl still of tender years was trying

to confess with such signs as she was able a consciousness of the deed. But when the solemnities were completed and the deacon began to offer the cup to those present, and when, as the rest were receiving, her turn came, the little girl with an instinct of divine majesty turned her face away, compressed her mouth with tightening lips, and refused the cup.¹ The deacon, however, persisted and poured into the mouth of the child, although resisting, of the sacrament of the cup. Then there followed sobbing and vomiting. In the body and mouth which had been violated the Eucharist could not remain; the draught consecrated in the blood of the Lord burst forth from the polluted vitals. So great is the power of the Lord, so great His majesty. The secrets of the shades are detected under His light, nor did hidden crimes deceive the priest of God.

Chapter 26

So much about the infant who as yet did not have the years of speaking of a crime committed by others against herself. But that lady of advanced age and settled in more advanced years, who crept stealthily upon us as we sacrificed, taking food and a sword for herself, and admitting, as it were, a kind of deadly poison, within her jaws and body, began presently to be tormented by frenzy of soul, and suffering the misery no longer of presecution but of her sin, fell quivering and trembling. The crime of her hidden conscience was not long unpunished and concealed. She who had deceived man felt God as an avenger. And when a certain woman tried with unclean hands to open her box, in which was the holy [body] of the Lord, thereupon she was deterred by rising fire from daring to touch it. And another man who, himself defiled, after the celebration of

¹ Infant communion.

the sacrifice dared secretly to take a part with the rest, was unable to eat or handle the holy of the Lord, and found when he opened his hands that he was carrying a cinder. By the evidence of one it was shone that the Lord withdraws when He is denied, and that what is received is of no benefit to the undeserving, when the grace of salvation is changed as the holy escapes into a cinder. How many are daily filled with unclean spirits; how many are shaken out of their minds by the fury of madness even to insanity! It is not necessary to go over the death of each one, when over the varied ruins of the world the punishment of sins is as varied as the multitude of sinners is numerous. Let everyone consider not what another has suffered but what he himself deserves to suffer, and let him not believe that he has escaped, if in the meantime punishment has put him off, since he should fear the more whom the wrath of God the Judge has reserved for Himself.

Chapter 27

Let them not persuade themselves that they should not do penance, who, although they have not contaminated their hands by impious sacrifices, yet have defiled their consciences with certificates. That profession is of one who denies; the testimony is of a Christian who rejects what he had been. He said that he had done what another actually did, and, although it is written: 'You cannot serve two masters,'¹ he served a secular master, he submitted to his edict, he obeyed human authority rather than God. He should have seen whether he published what he committed with less scandal or less guilt among men; however, he will not be able to escape and avoid God as his judge, for the Holy Spirit says in the Psalms: 'Thine eyes have seen my imperfection and

¹ Matt. 6.24.

all will be written in thy book,'² and again: 'Man looks upon the face, but God upon the heart.'³ Let the Lord Himself also forewarn and instruct you with these words: 'And all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the desires and hearts.'⁴ He perceives the concealed and the secret, and considers the hidden, nor can anyone evade the eyes of God who says: 'Am I a God at hand, and not a God afar off? Shall a man be hid in secret places and I not see him?'⁵ He sees the hearts and breasts of each one, and, when about to pass judgment not only on our deeds but also on our words and thoughts, He looks into the minds and the wills conceived in the very recess of a still closed heart.

Chapter 28

Finally, of how much greater faith and better fear are they who, although bound by no crime of sacrifice or of certificate, since however they have even thought of this, confessing this very thing with grief and simply before the priests of God, make a conscientious avowal, remove the weight of their souls, seek the saving remedy for their wounds however small and slight knowing that it is written: 'God is not mocked.'¹ God cannot be mocked and deceived, nor can He be deluded by any treacherous cunning. Rather does he sin more who, thinking of God as if human, believes that he is escaping the punishment of his crime, if he has not admitted the crime openly. Christ in His precepts says: 'Whoever is ashamed of me, of him shall the Son of man

² Cf. Ps. 138.16.

³ Cf. 1 Kings 16.7.

⁴ Cf. Apoc. 2.23.

⁵ Jer. 23.23,24.

¹ Gal. 6.7.

be ashamed.² Does he think himself a Christian who is either ashamed or fears to be a Christian? How can he be with Christ, who either blushes or fears to belong to Christ? Clearly he might have sinned less by not looking upon idols, and by not profaning the sanctity of the faith under the eyes of a populace that stood about and cast insults, by not polluting his hands with the deadly sacrifices, and by not defiling his mouth with the wretched food. This is of benefit to this extent, that the fault is less, not that the conscience is without guilt. He can more easily arrive at a forgiveness of his crime, but he is not free from crime. Let him not cease doing penance and beseeching the mercy of the Lord, lest what seems less in the quality of his sin be increased by his failure to give satisfaction to it.

Chapter 29

Let each one confess his sin, I beseech you, brethren, while he who has sinned is still in this world, while his confession can be admitted, while the satisfaction and remission effected through the priest is pleasing with the Lord. Let us turn to the Lord with our whole mind, and, expressing repentance for our sin with true grief, let us implore God's mercy. Let the soul prostrate itself before Him; let sorrow give satisfaction to Him; let our every hope rest upon Him. He Himself tells how we ought to ask. He says: 'Be converted to me with all your hearts, in fasting and in weeping, and in mourning, and rend your hearts and not your garments.'¹ Let us return to the Lord with a whole heart; let us placate His wrath and displeasure by fastings, weepings, and mournings, as He Himself admonishes.

² Mark 8.38.

¹ Joel 2.12,13.

Chapter 30

Do we think that he laments with a whole heart, implores the Lord with fastings, weepings, and mournings, who from the first day of his crime daily frequents the baths, who, feeding on rich banquets and distended by fuller dainties, belches forth the undigested food on the next day, and does not share his food and drink with the needy poor? How does he, who goes forth joyous and happy, weep over his death, and, although it is written: 'You shall not change the form of your beard,'¹ plucks his beard and adorns his face? And is he eager to please anyone who displeases his God? Or does she groan and moan who has time to put on the elegance of princely garments but not to think of the robe of Christ which she has lost; to receive precious ornaments and costly necklaces, but not to weep over the loss of the divine and heavenly ornament? Although you put on foreign robes and silken dresses, you are naked. Although you decorate yourself with gold and pearls and gems, without the adornment of Christ you are unsightly. And you who dye your hair, now at least cease in the midst of your sorrows, and you who paint the edges of your eyes by lines of black powder, now at least wash your eyes with tears. If you had lost any dear one of yours by his passing away in death, you would grieve and mourn sorrowfully; with a disordered countenance, changed dress, unkempt hair, gloomy countenance, dejected face you would show the signs of sorrow. Wretched woman, you have lost your soul; spiritually dead you have begun to live on here, and although yourself walking about you have begun to carry your own death. And do you not groan bitterly; do you not mourn continually; do you not go in hiding either because of the shame of your crime or for the continuing of your lamentation? Behold still worse

¹ Lev. 19.27.

are the wounds of sinning, behold, greater the transgressions—to have sinned and not to give satisfaction, to have transgressed and not to bemoan transgressions.

Chapter 31

Ananias, Azarias, and Misahel, illustrious and noble youths, did not refrain from making confession to God not even midst the flames and fires of a raging furnace. Although possessed of a good conscience and often well deserving of the Lord by obedience of faith and fear, they did not cease to retain their humility and to give satisfaction to God not even midst the glorious martyrdoms themselves of their virtues. Divine Scripture speaks in these words: 'Azarias standing prayed and opened his mouth and made confession to God together with his companions in the midst of fire.'¹ Daniel also after the manifold grace of his faith and innocence, after the esteem of the Lord often repeated with regard to his virtues and praises, strives still further by fastings to merit God; wraps himself in sackcloth and ashes as he sorrowfully makes confession, saying: 'Lord God, great and strong and terrible who keepest the covenant and mercy to them that love thee and keep thy commandments, we have sinned, we have committed iniquity, we have been ungodly, we have transgressed and gone aside from thy precepts and thy judgments, we have not hearkened to thy servants in what they have spoken in thy name to our kings and to all the nations and to the whole world. To thee, O Lord, to thee is justice, but to us confusion.'²

¹ Dan. 3.25.

² Cf. Dan. 9.4-7.

Chapter 32

These things the meek, these the simple, this the innocent have done in meriting well of the majesty of God; and those who have denied the Lord refuse to satisfy the Lord and to entreat Him! I beseech you, brethren, acquiesce in the remedies of salvation, obey the better counsels, join your tears with our tears, write your groans with ours. We implore you that we may be able to implore the Lord for you; we turn our very prayers to you first, with which we pray to God for you, that He may be merciful. Do full penance, prove the sorrow of a soul that sorrows and laments.

Chapter 33

Let neither the imprudent error nor the vain stupidity of some move you, who, although they were involved in so grave a crime were struck by such blindness of soul that they neither realized their sins nor lamented them. This is the greater plague of an angry God, as it is written: 'And God gave them a spirit of rebellion,'¹ and again: 'For they have not received the love of truth that they might be saved. Therefore, God sends them a misleading influence that they may believe falsehood, that all may be judged who have not believed truth, but have taken pleasure in injustice.'² Taking pleasure unjustly and mad by the alienation of a damaged mind, they condemn the precepts of the Lord, neglect the medicine of their wound, are unwilling to do penance. Improvident before their sin was committed, obstinate after their sin, neither steadfast before nor suppliant afterwards, when they ought to have stood fast, they fell, when they ought

1 Cf. Isa. 29.10.

2 Cf. 2 Thess. 2.10-12.

to fall down and prostrate themselves before God, they think that they stand. Of their own accord they assumed peace for themselves, although no one granted it, seduced by false promises and linked with apostates and infidels they accept error for truth; they regard communion with those who are not communicants as valid; they believe men against God, who have not believed God against men.

Chapter 34

Flee from such men with all your power; and with wholesome caution those who cling to pernicious contacts. Their speech spreads like a cancer;¹ their speech leaps over barriers like a pestilence; their harmful and poisoned persuasion kills worse than persecution itself. Repentance remains there for giving satisfaction. Those who do away with repentance for crime, close the way to satisfaction. So it happens that, when by the rashness of some a false salvation is either promised or believed, the hope of true salvation is taken away.

Chapter 35

But do you, brethren, who are inclined toward fear of the Lord and whose minds, although set in destruction, are mindful of their evils, repenting and grieving view your sins, recognize the very serious crime of your conscience, open the eyes of your hearts to an understanding of your shortcomings, neither despairing of the mercy of the Lord nor yet already laying claim to pardon. As God by reason of His affection as father is always indulgent and good, so by reason of His majesty as judge He is to be feared. Let us weep as greatly as the

¹ Cf. 2 Tim. 2.17.

extent of our sinning. For a deep wound let there not be lacking a careful and long cure; let the repentance be no less than the crime. Do you think that God can be easily placated, whom you denied with perfidious words, above whom you set your property, whose temple you violated with sacrilegious contamination? Do you think that He easily has mercy on you, whom you have said was not yours? You ought to pray and beseech more intently, to pass the day grieving, to spend your nights in wakefulness and weeping, to spend all your time in mournful lamentation, to cling to ashes prone on the ground, to wallow in sackcloth and squalor, to wish for no garment now after losing the cloak of Christ, to prefer fasting after the food of the devil, to devote yourself to just works by which sins are purged, to enter frequently upon alms—giving, by which souls are liberated from death. What the adversary tried to take away, let Christ receive; your property ought not to be retained now or to be cherished, by which one has been both deceived and conquered. Wealth is to be avoided as an enemy, as a thief to be fled, as a sword to be feared by those who possess it, and as a poison. To this extent only might that which has remained be of benefit, that by means of it crime and sin may be redeemed. Let your works be done without delay and in abundance; let every means be evoked for the healing of the wound; let the Lord, who is to be our judge, be put in our debt by our resources and faculties. Thus did faith flourish under the Apostles; thus did the first people of the believers keep the mandates of Christ—they were ready; they were generous. They gave all to be distributed by the Apostles and they were not redeeming such sins.

Chapter 36

If anyone performs prayer with his whole heart, if he groans with genuine lamentations and tears of repentance, if by continuous just works he turns the Lord to the forgiveness of his sin, such can receive His mercy, who has offered His mercy with these words: 'When you turn and lament, then you shall be saved and shall know where you have been';¹ and again: I desire not the death of the dying, says the Lord in the Lord's own words: 'Turn,' he says, 'to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy and who turns his thought toward the evil that has been done.'³ He can grant mercy; He can turn aside His judgment. He can with indulgence pardon him who is repentant, who performs good works, who beseeches; He can regard as acceptable whatever the martyrs have sought and the priests have done for such. Or, if anyone has moved Him more by his own atonements, has placated His wrath, His rightful indignation by just supplication. He gives arms again with which the vanquished may be armed. He repairs and invigorates his strength so that his restored faith may flourish. The soldier will seek his contest again; he will repeat its fight; he will provoke the enemy; he has become indeed stronger for the battle through suffering. He who has thus satisfied God, who by repentance for his deed, who by shame for his sin has conceived more of both virtue and faith from the very sorrow for his lapsing, after being heard and aided by the Lord, will cause the Church to rejoice, which he recently had saddened, and will merit not alone the pardon of God but a crown.

¹ Cf. Isa. 30.15.

² Cf. Ezech. 33.11.

³ Cf. Joel 2.13.