

#### IV. ST GREGORY NAZIANZEN, BISHOP AND DOCTOR

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On the Love of the Poor and Those Afflicted with Leprosy

I. Men Brethren and fellow poor for though measured by our small measures one may appear to be richer than another, yet are we all poor indeed and in need of God's grace; receive from me this sermon on the love of the poor, not in a meagre spirit, but lovingly, generously, so that you may receive the riches of a Kingdom. And at the same time pray that we may minister to you abundantly, and may nourish your souls by our words, and that we may break the Bread of the Spirit for those who hunger for it, as Moses long ago, raining food from heaven, and bestowing on man the bread of angels (Ex. xvi. 15; Ps. lxxvii. 25); or as feeding many thousands of men in the desert from a few loaves, so that all were filled as Jesus later did (Mt. xiv. 15); He Who is the True Bread and the Author of True Life.

It is not at all easy, Brethren, to discover among the virtues the one which surpasses all the rest, and to give to it the primacy and the palm; just as it is not easy in a meadow filled with many and sweet-smelling flowers to find the fairest and most fragrant; each one in turn alluring our senses with its perfume and beauty, and inviting us to gather it first. As far as I am able to see, we must distinguish between them in this manner.

II. Faith is a beautiful thing, and so is hope and charity; these three. And Abraham is a witness to faith, being held just through faith (Gen. xv. 6), and Enos to hope, who, the first inspired by hope, began to call upon the name of the Lord (Gen. iv. 26), and together with him all the just who because of hope suffered much. Of charity, the divine Apostle is witness, who did not hesitate to speak fearfully against himself out of love of Israel (Rom. ix. 3); and also God Himself, Who is called charity (I Jn. iv. 8). And hospitality is a beautiful thing, and a witness to this among the just is Lot of Sodom (Gen. xix. 3), and among sinners, Rahab, a harlot (Jos. ii. 1), though not a harlot by inclination; who because of her zeal in hospitality, was held worthy of praise and of salvation.

A beautiful thing is brotherly love. And a witness to this is Jesus, Who willed not alone to be called our brother, but suffered Himself to be fastened to torment for our sake. And a beautiful thing is love of humanity; and of this a witness is the same Jesus, Who not alone created man that he might do good works (Eph. ii. 10), but also for us became man, uniting His image to this earthly clay, our Guide to all perfection, and our heavenly Protector.

Longanimity is a beautiful thing, as the same Person bears testimony, Who not only refused the help of legions of angels against those who laid hands on Him, and used violence against Him (Mt. xxvi. 53), Who not only rebuked Peter for taking the sword, but also restored his ear to the man from whom Peter had struck it (Lk. xxii. 50). And to this virtue Stephen the Disciple of Christ, later, also gave testimony, when he prayed for those who were stoning him (Acts vii. 59).

And beautiful again is mildness, as Moses and David bear witness, to whom above others holy Scripture gives testimony (Num. xii. 3; Ps. cxxxii. 1); and also their Teacher, Who did not strive, Who did not cry out, neither was His voice heard in the streets, Who opened not His mouth against those who led Him to the slaughter (Is. xlii. 2; liii. 7).

III. Beautiful is zeal, as Phineas testifies, who with the sword slew the Madianite woman and the Israelite together (Num. cxv. 7), that he might deliver the children of Israel from infamy; and for this was he renowned, and with him those who said: With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of hosts. And He Who said: I am jealous of you with the jealousy of God; and: The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up (III Kings xix. 14; II Cor. xi. 2; Ps. lxxviii. 10). And they not alone said these things, but they were of this mind.

And good also is the discipline of the body, as the same Paul bears witness, who chastised his own body, bringing it into subjection (I Cor. ix. 27), and for the sake of Israel putting fear into those who, trusting in themselves, indulged their own bodies. And so does Jesus also, fasting, and submitting Himself to temptation, and defeating the tempter (Mt. iv. 1). And beautiful is watching and praying; and to this Jesus

Himself testifies: watching before His Passion, and giving Himself to prayer. And beautiful is chastity, and beautiful is virginity; and let Paul convince you of this, laying down the law regarding both, and discerning with justice between marrying and not marrying (I Cor. vii). And Jesus also, by being born of a Virgin: that He might honour birth, and honour virginity still more. Beautiful is abstinence. And here we must believe David, who tasted only, but would not drink the water brought to him from the well of Bethlehem; pouring it upon the earth to God, and would not appease his great thirst at the price of another's blood.

IV. Beautiful is solitude and peace, and this Carmel of Elias teaches us (III Kings xviii. 42), and the desert of John (Lk. i. 80); and then that mountain to which Jesus often withdrew, that He might be alone with Himself in the silence (Mt. xiv. 23).

And good also is frugality; and to this Elias bears testimony, who was given food and refreshed by the poor widow (III Kings xvii. 19); and John, who was clothed in camel's hair (Mt. iii. 4); and Peter, who fed himself on a farthing's worth of lupins.<sup>7</sup> And beautiful is humility, and manifold the examples of it; above all that of the Lord and Saviour of all mankind, Who not alone humbled Himself, taking the form of a servant (Phil. ii. 6), but suffered Himself to be spat upon, and was reputed with the wicked (Is. i. 6; liii. 12): He Who had cleansed the world of sin, and, clothed as a servant, washed the feet of His Disciples (Jn. xiii. 5).

Beautiful is poverty, and indifference to wealth, as Zacheus testifies; and Christ also: Zacheus when Christ entered his house gave to God almost all that he had; the Lord when He told the rich young man that in this the perfection of life consisted. And, that I may shorten this, beautiful is contemplation, as likewise beautiful is activity; the one because rising from the earth and striving towards the Holy of Holies, it leads our soul back to its beginning, the other receiving Christ as a Guest and ministering to Him, and making known the power of His love in good works.

V. Each one of these virtues is a path to salvation, leading us safely to one of those blessed and eternal mansions; since many are the callings of our lives, and so many are the mansions in God's house, which are allotted to each one according to his merit (Jn. xiv. 2). So one steadfastly follows this virtue, another that. One many virtues, another, if he is able, all of them; striving only for this: that he may go forward, eager to make progress, that he may follow in His footsteps Who has pointed out the way, and Who guides our steps by the narrow way and gate that leads to the place of perfect happiness.

But if we are to believe Paul as well as Christ we must hold that charity, as the end of the Law and the prophets, is the first and greatest of the Commandments, and I find that the most perfect part of this virtue consists in love of the poor, in sympathy and compassion for our fellow man. BY none of all these virtues is God better served than by mercy, for nothing is closer to Him than mercy; mercy and truth go before His Face (Ps. lxxxviii. 15); and we should offer Him mercy before justice. Nor shall He repay mercy by any other thing but mercy Who sets judgement in weight, and justice in measure (Is. xxviii. 17).

VI. And furthermore, in accord with the precept that bids us rejoice with the rejoicings and weep with those who weep, we should open our hearts to all who suffer affliction, whatever the cause. And since we are men, let us first give the offering of our compassion to men; to those in need through widowhood, to orphans, to the exile and the stranger, to those in need because of the cruelty of their own masters, or because of the harshness of judges, or through the inhumanity and rapacity of those who exact the tribute, or because of the cruel ferocity of robbers, or the greed of thieves or through the confiscation of their possessions, or through shipwreck. All these are equally unfortunate; and they look to our hands, as we in our need look to the hands of God. And of those again, they who have fallen from dignity and, unused to need, are more to be pitied than those long inured to want. But above all these must we be moved to pity for those who are being destroyed by the sacred disease <sup>8</sup> (leprosy), whose flesh is consumed even to the bones and marrow, betrayed by this weak, miserable and faithless body of ours to which, I know not how, I am yoked; nor how I am an image of God and at the same time commingled with this clay; which when healthy wars against me, yet grieves me when afflicted; which I love as a fellow servant, and hate as an enemy; which I fly from as a fellow-slave, and honour as a co-heir with myself If I weaken it by self-denial, I have

then no other fellow-worker to help me attain to the more perfect things: for which I know I was born, and through which I must ascend to God.

VII. I spare it as my helper, yet know not how I can be free of its unruliness, or how I shall not be cut off from God; weighed down as I am, my feet bound with fetters, and held fast to the earth. It is a beloved enemy, a treacherous friend. What harmony and what discord! What I fear, I must cherish; and what I love, I must fear. And before I attack it, I am reconciled to it; and before I can be at peace with it, I am again in conflict. What is this wisdom, this great mystery, that surrounds me? Is it that God, we being part of Him, and derived from above, wills that this should be (that we may not, becoming exultant and proud because of our dignity, despise our Creator), and that we should be held in continual warfare against our own body, so that we may never cease to look for help from Him, and that this conjoined weakness and discipline relates to the dignity of which we have been thought worthy, that we may know that we are at the same time the most abject and the highest of creatures, of earth and of heaven, fleeting yet immortal, heirs of light and fire or else of darkness, according to the way we incline? This is how we are commingled and, as it seems to me, for this reason: so that as often as we become exalted, because of this image, so often shall we be cast down again, because of this clay. Let him who will philosophize over these things, as we shall also, at a more suitable time.

VIII. Now to return again to what I had begun to speak of, turning aside to grieve over the infirmity of our bodies and over the sufferings that arise from its weakness, we must nevertheless, Brethren, have a care for this our natural body and fellow servant. For though I have called it an enemy, because of what I suffer, yet I cherish it as a friend, because of Him Who united me to it. And let us have a care for the bodies of others no less than the care each one has for his own body; whether it is sound and healthy, or consumed by this very disease.

For we are all one in the Lord, rich or poor, bond or free, sound or sick; and one is the Head of all, He from Whom are all things, namely, Christ. And what our members are to each other, this each one of us is to the other, and all to all. We must never neglect or fail those who have fallen into this public infirmity; nor should we rejoice more that our own bodies are healthy, than we should grieve because our brothers suffer. Rather we should fix in our minds the thought that the salvation of our own bodies and souls depend on this: that we should love and show humanity to these.

IX. There are those who are unhappy for this sole reason: because they are in want; which however time or labour or a friend or a neighbour or the change of the season will take away.<sup>9</sup> For such as these it is a grave thing, graver even than want, not only to be without the necessities of life, but also without the means to work to help themselves. And among these, greater always is the fear of illness than the hope of health. And because of this, hope, the one comfort of the unfortunate, is less kind to them than to others. To poverty is added sickness, another evil, the most grievous, the most dreaded of all, and by many the most readily invoked as a malediction. The third is the evil that most men can neither approach nor endure to look upon, holding it rather as something to be abhorred and shunned; and this attitude of their fellow men is more terrible to the afflicted than the disease itself: knowing that because of their affliction they have become an object of loathing to men. For my own part I cannot endure their affliction without tears; I am grief-stricken at the thought of it. May you too feel this; that you may wipe away their tears with your tears. And I do not doubt that of those who are assembled here, there are those who also feel this grief: lovers of Christ and of the poor, lovers of God, having within them God's own compassionating love. Of their suffering you are now witnesses.

X. Spread out before our eyes is a sight at once terrible and pitiful; unbelievable to all save those who look upon it. Men dead yet living; mutilated in many parts of their bodies; so afflicted they scarcely know who they are or who they were or where they came from. Rather are they the unhappy remains of men; crying out, so as to be recognized, the name of a father, of a mother, a brother, or some place. My father was so-and-so, one cries. So-and-so was my mother, says another. This is my name. You once knew

me; you were my friend! And they cry out in this fashion because they can no longer be known by the faces they once possessed. They are men wholly cut off. They are stripped of all they once had; of money, of family, of friends, even of their own bodies. Alone among mortals, they both hate and pity themselves; not knowing which to grieve for most: the parts of their bodies they no longer possess or those that still remain; those the disease has devoured, or those that remain to the disease: The one have perished miserably, the rest live on yet more miserably. The first have departed before burial; and as for the others, there is no one now to commit them to earth. Even the best and kindest of men will show himself hard and inhuman to these. Here only do we forget we also are flesh; that we too bear about with us the body of our lowliness (Phil. iii. 21). And so far have we failed in the care of these our fellow men, that we think only of the safety of our own bodies by flying from them. And though there are those of us who will not fear to come near a body long dead, and smelling of decay, and who are indifferent to the evil odours of living animals and who will put up with the presence of filth, but from such as these poor creatures we fly with all our might, scarcely enduring to breathe the same air with them.

XI. Who is closer to us than a father? Who has more feeling for us than a mother? Yet our very nature will separate us even from them. A father will grieve for the son he has begotten, whom he has reared, whom he regards as the sole light of his life for whom times without number he has prayed to God; yet he will drive him from him, partly of his own will, in part compelled. A mother will remember the pangs of childbirth, her heart will be in anguish, she will call his name most pitifully; yet lamenting she will grieve for the living as for the dead, crying out: Unhappy son of an unhappy mother whom disease has so bitterly separated from me! My unhappy son, son now unknown to me, now seen only amid the crags, the mountains, the wilderness, living with wild beasts, a cave your shelter, and among men they alone will look at you who are filled of pity. And she will cry out in the sorrowful words of Job: Why were you made in the womb of your mother; why did you come forth from her, and not at once perish, that death might meet your birth! (Job. iii. 11). Why were you not cut off before due time, before you had tasted this bitterness, seeing you were to live out your life in sorrow, a life more bitter than death? And crying out like this, tears streaming from her eyes, the unhappy soul longs to embrace him, but she fears as an enemy the body of her own child. He is banished and driven forth, not as unworthy, but as unfortunate. A man may forgive a murderer, admit an adulterer to his house and even to his table, receive a profaner of temples as a comrade, be a friend to those who injured him, but from the one who suffers this affliction he turns away as from some crime. Rather, wickedness is preferable to the disease. We accept inhumanity as worthy of the human spirit; but humanity and compassion as shameful.

XII. They are driven from the cities, shut out from the homes of men, from the market place, from the highways, from the gatherings of friends, from meetings. O the suffering! Even from water, from the streams which flow for the use of all men; even from the rivers, which are believed to be in some way tainted by them. And what is contrary to all belief, we drive them away as accursed, and so, since we do nothing for them, we recall them to us again. For we give them no shelter, no food, no remedies for their sores, no clothing to cover them. And so they wander through the days and the nights, impoverished, naked, shelterless, their wounds uncovered, recalling past times, calling upon their Creator, making use of one another's limbs in place of those they have lost. With their peculiar singing cry they invoke pity, pleading for a little bread, a morsel of some cooked food, a garment however ragged to clothe their nakedness; and for a little comfort. To them he is a kind person not the one who helps them in their need, but he who simply does not drive them from him with bitterness. Not even shame can keep many of them from public gatherings, and they will come there, driven by total necessity. I am speaking rather of the sacred public assemblies which have been established for the welfare of souls, or for the celebration of the Mysteries, or in commemoration of those who died in witness to the truth; that we may imitate their virtues, whom we honour because of their sufferings. And these poor afflicted, because they are men, are shamed before men, and would rather that the mountains, the crags, the forests, even darkness and night might cover them. Yet they appear amongst us, laden with misery, moving us to tears; and this not in vain, for they remind us of our own infirmity, and convince us that nothing of things present, nothing that meets the eye is stable or

enduring. They come among us; some longing to hear again the sound of a human voice, to see again the faces of men, others that they may receive some small help for their lives from those whose own lives are passed in luxury and comfort. But all come in the hope of receiving a little comfort; through speaking of their afflictions to those who have compassion for them.

XIII. Who is not touched to the heart by the groans, by the strange plaint of their singing? What ear can bear to hear it, what eye endure to see it? They huddle together, united by the common misery of their state; one with another adding to our pity. Each is to the other an added affliction: unhappy in their own suffering, yet more unhappy in their common suffering. Around them is a mingled assembly of people who grieve with them, but only for a while. They stumble about at the feet of men, in the dust and heat, struggling against the bitter cold, against the rain, against the violence of the wind; they would be trodden on by men's feet did not men fear even to touch them. Their laments disturb the singing inside the sacred temples: their sad crying in conflict with the murmur from the sacred mysteries.

But what need is there to bring before you who are celebrating this solemn festival each single one of their misfortunes? Should I enlarge tragically and in detail upon all of them, I should, I know, move you also to tears, and you would feel more sorrow over them, than joy over the festival. But I am telling you these things, because I am not yet able to convince you, that at times grief is better than gladness, sorrow more than joy, and tears more becoming than laughter (Eccles. vii. 3).

XIV. These then, and much more besides, are the afflictions of those who are our brothers in God, whether you wish it or not; born with the same nature, formed of that same clay from which we in the beginning were formed, compounded of nerves and bones as we are, clothed in flesh and skin like our own; as holy Job says in a certain place (Job x. 11), reflecting on his own miseries, and despising that part of us which is seen. More than this; they also, if I may speak of the higher things, have received the same divine image as we have, and have perhaps guarded it better; even though their bodies have dissolved in corruption. They have put on the same Christ, according to the inward man (Rom. vii. 22), and to them the same pledge of the Spirit (II Cor. v. 5) has been given. They have been made sharers with us of the same laws, of the same doctrine, of the same Testaments, of the same assemblies, of the same Mysteries, of the same hope. Christ Who takes away the sins of the whole world, died for them as He died for us (Jn. i. 29). And even though they are now deprived of all earthly happiness, yet they are heirs with us to eternal life. They are buried with Christ, and with Him they return to life (Col. ii. 12). With Him they suffer, that they may also be glorified with Him (Rom. viii. 17).

XV. And what of us? We who are called by a great new name, who are named after Christ, we who are a holy people, a royal priesthood, a chosen people, a purchased people (I Pet. ii. 9), a pursuer of good works (Tit. ii. 14), followers of the gentle loving Christ (Mt. xi. 29), Who bore our infirmities (Is. liii. 4), Who humbled Himself to come among us, Who for our sake took upon Him the poverty of this earthly tabernacle of our body and became acquainted with sorrow, that through His poverty you might be made rich (II Cor. viii. 9). What, I say, of us, who have received so great an example of pity and compassion? What are we to think of these things, and what shall we do? Shall we look the other way? Shall we pass by? Shall we abandon them as dead, as loathsome, worse than serpents, as wild beasts? No, Brethren! Such a thing is unfitting for us, the flock of Christ, the flock of that Good Shepherd, Who went looking for the sheep that had strayed and restored the weak to strength (Ezech. xxxiv). Let such a thought be far from the human nature which has made of compassion a law; taught mercy and compassion by our common weakness.

XVI. Are these unfortunate people to remain out under the sky, exposed, while we enjoy splendid homes and live in houses of choicest stone, adorned with gold and silver, covered with the finest mosaics, with pictures, with perspectives which hold and distract the eye? And of these dwellings, we live in some, and we are building others. For whom? Not always for our heirs; frequently for strangers, or for those who are perhaps not even our friends; they may even be for our enemies or, worst of all, for those who envy us.

And these poor creatures, are they to remain covered with rags? Would that they were even covered, while we take our delight in soft flowing garments, woven from silk and linen, that shame us rather than adorn us (and I say the same of all that is idle and superfluous)! Others that we possess we store away, without use or gain, to be consumed by moths, or by time that consumes all things. And these have not enough to eat! Alas for my abundance, and for their most grievous misery! Are they to lie before our doors, weak and hungry, their bodies wanting in the very members by which they might plead; without voices to grieve, without hands to stretch forth, without feet to go to those who are rich, without breath to give tone to their lamentations; believing themselves to be favoured only in their eyes, believing that what is their most grievous affliction is their least: that they can no longer see their own deformity!

XVII. This is the state of these poor people. And we, strong and active, lie comfortably on our fine raised beds, soft and yielding, with more coverings than we need, and annoyed should we even hear the sound of a voice in pleading. And we must also have our floor covered with flowers, even out of season, our table smelling of the richest and sweetest perfumes, that we may be even more delicate, and around us pages standing in rank and order, their hair long and effeminate, the locks in clusters round their faces, adorned more than is becoming even for our greedy comfort. Others hold cups on their finger tips, in the most secure and delicate manner. Others with a fan of peacock feathers make a slight breeze above your heads, and with hand-made puffs of wind they keep the mass of your bodies cool; seeing to it also that the table is well supplied with meats (all the elements thus ministering to us: earth, sea, air and water). And we match the skills of cooks and pastry makers, to see which of them will most flatter our greedy and thankless stomach: a heavy burden, truly the beginning of every evil, an insatiable beast, and a most treacherous one, that comes to nothing as soon as food has ended.

These poor creatures think themselves fortunate if they receive their fill of water while we drink cup upon cup of wine, drink even to drunkenness and beyond it: those at least who are given to intemperance. And from many wines we reject some, others we approve, because of their special taste and fragrance, discoursing gravely upon this; and we consider it a serious lack if, besides our local wines, we have not at least some one of the rarer wines of other countries is not present; as though this wine were some lordly creature. And of course it is demanded of us that we should be, or appear to be, most delicate as to food, more lavish than need be, ashamed if we are not thought wicked, slaves of our stomach, and of the parts below the stomach.

XVIII. What have we to say to these things, O friends and brothers? What disease is it that afflicts our souls; a disease more grave than those that afflict the body? For these come against our will, the other remains with our consent. The one end with life, the other goes with us when we go from here. To those of sound mind the one is unfortunate, the other hateful. Why do we not while there is yet time, give help to our own nature? Why do we not while we are still in the flesh, have some concern for this humiliation of our flesh? Why do we live in pleasure in the presence of our brothers' affliction? Far be it from me that I should abound in riches while they suffer in want; that I should be healthy, and not bring help to their wounds; that I should have food and clothing and rest beneath a roof, until, as far as my means permit, I bring food to them, clothe them, give them shelter!

In truth we must either leave all things for Christ, taking in all sincerity the Cross upon our shoulders, and light and as unburdened as possible and held back by no earthly tie follow Him, taking wing for that world above where, uplifted by humility, and enriched by poverty, we shall gain Christ in place of all things; or else we must share our possessions with Christ, so that our possession of them shall be sanctified by possessing them worthily and by sharing them with those who possess nothing. But if I shall sow for myself only, I shall sow indeed, but that others may eat; and, if I may use again the words of Job: Thistles will grow up to me instead of wheat, and thorns instead of barley (Job. xxxi. 40); and the burning south wind and the tempest carry away my labours, so that I labour in vain. And if I should also build barns, heaping up treasure from Mammon and for Mammon, perhaps in that very night I shall be asked for my soul and I must render an account of that which I have evilly gained.

XIX. Shall we not even now learn wisdom? Shall we not even now throw aside this want of feeling, that I may not call it meanness of soul? Shall we give no thought to human needs? Shall we not place the afflictions of others above our own needs? For in nature there is nothing fixed and stable in human affairs, nothing sufficient in itself, nothing that remains constant. The affairs of men revolve like a circle, bringing changes, now at one time, now at another; oftentimes in one and the same day, and even in the same hour. We should place greater trust in the stability of the inconstant winds, in the track of a ship passing across the sea (Wis. v. 10), in the vain dreams of the night that bring us a brief pleasure, in the sand castles of children playing by the sea, than in the happiness of men. Those who are wise will not place their trust in the things of this present life, but will lay up treasure for the time to come, and, because of the uncertainty, the inequality of human destiny let them give their love to that Goodness which does not fade, so that they may gain one of three things: either that they shall never do what is evil (for oftentimes God heaps the secondary things that belong to this life on pious men, inviting them to show kindness to those in need); or that they may have confidence in themselves before God that they suffer affliction, not because of sin, but because of His will; or lastly, that they may rightly ask of others, as due to them, that humanity which they once used towards the needy, when they themselves had riches and did good works.

XX. Let not the wise man, says the Scripture, glory in his wisdom, and let not the strong man glory in his strength, and let not the rich man glory in his riches (Jer. ix. 23): even should he attain to the summit of wisdom, another to that of strength, another to that of riches. And to this I add: let not the famous glory in their fame, nor the healthy in their health, nor the beautiful in their beauty, nor the young in their youth, nor, in a word, in any of the things that men praise and esteem. And if a man must glory, let him glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth God (Jer. ix. 24), that he grieved over the afflictions of others, and that he is laying up something good for himself for the life to come.

For all other things are fleeting and unstable and, as in a game of dice, pass from hand to hand, continually changing ownership, so that there is nothing a man holds as his own that will not pass from him with time, or that is not taken from him through man's ill will. But the higher things are real and enduring. They are never lost, never fade; neither is the hope of those that trust in them deceived: and to me this seems the reason why no good thing of this life is stable and enduring for men; and this also, that in any other thing, though beautifully wrought by the Designing Word or by that Wisdom which surpasses all understanding, we are always deluded by what the senses see, which changes and is changed, is carried here and there, up and down, which before we touch it escapes us, and this so that we, when we learn that there is nothing sure and enduring in earthly things, may turn steadfastly towards the gate of the life to come.

For what would we do were our prosperity to endure, seeing that fleeting and unstable though it is, it yet binds us to it by so many bonds, and makes of us such slaves to its pleasures and delusions, that we are unable to think of anything more perfect; and this though we hear and believe that we are made to the image of God's likeness; Which is above and Which is drawing us to Itself?

XXI. Who is wise, and will understand these things (Ps. cvi. 43)? Who will turn aside from the things that pass away? Who will give his soul to enduring things? Who will think of present things as though they were far away? Who will think of the things that rest on hope as certain and unchanging? Who will distinguish what is from what seems, and despising one pursue the other? Who will discern the figure from the reality, the earthly dwelling from the heavenly city, the place of sojourn from the true home, light from darkness, the slime of the abyss from holy earth; who will discern body from spirit? Who will distinguish between God and the prince of this world the shadow of death from life everlasting? Who will buy things to come with present things, riches that endure with those that are fleeting, with things visible things that are unseen?

Blessed therefore is he who understands these things and, separating them from inferior things by the sword of the Word (Heb. iv. 12), disposes his heart to ascend by steps, as David says in one place (Ps. lxxxiii. 6), and fleeing from this vale of tears, seeks for the things that are above (Col. iii. 1), and with Christ is crucified to the world, with Christ rises again, and with Christ ascends to heaven, heir to a life that shall be neither vain nor fleeting, where the serpent no longer bites in the way (Gen. xli. 17), nor lies in wait for the

heel (Gen. iii. 15); since his head is now well guarded. And to us whom he has left behind, David, like a herald with a mighty voice, speaking from some lofty place, rightly cries out that we are dull of heart and that we seek after lying (Ps. iv. 3), and warning us not to attach our minds seriously to the things we see, that all delight we reap from this life is but as the fulness of corn and wine, which soon ends.

And the blessed Micheas, as I believe, observing this, and scorning the things we see upon this earth, which have only the appearance of good, exclaims: Draw near to the eternal mountains; arise, and depart, for here there is no rest for you (ii. 9, 10 Sept.); using almost the same words our Lord and Saviour used to exhort us when He said: Arise, let us go hence; meaning, not those only who were then His Disciples, nor as going simply from one place to another, as some are inclined to think, but that all of us and forever should turn from earth and the things of earth, and go hence to heaven and the things of heaven.

XXII. Let us therefore without delay give ear to the Word, and let us seek the peace of that other resting place, and throw away from us the abundance of this life, enriching ourselves only with that which is good in it; namely, let us through almsgiving become owners of our own souls; let us give of what is ours to the poor, that we may be rich in heaven. Do not give to the body only; give the soul its share. Do not give to the world only; give a portion also to God. Withhold something from the stomach, and dedicate it to the spirit. Snatch something from the fire, and hide it far from the devouring flame. Snatch it from the tyrant, and give it to God. Give a portion to seven, that is, to this life; and also to eight (Ecclus. xi. 2); that is, to Him Who after this life shall receive us. Give a little to Him, from Whom you have received much. Give even all to Him, Who has given all to you. You will never outdo God's generosity, even should you give your all, even should you add yourself to what you give. For to be given to God, this is also to receive Him. And however much you bring to Him, still more shall remain to you. Nor will you give anything that is your own; for all things flow from God. And as no man can outstrip his own shadow: for wherever we walk, it will always follow us or go before us; nor can the body raise itself above the head, which ever remains above the body: so is it with our giving. We shall neither give God anything that is not His, nor surpass Him in giving.

XXIII. Consider from whence you have life, so that you breathe, so that you know and understand, and, greatest of all, so that you may know God, and may hope for the kingdom of heaven, and to be received among angels, and for the blessed vision of glory, now seen through a glass in a dark manner, but then in a purer, more perfect manner (I Cor. xiii. 12); also that you are a child of God, and an heir with Christ, and, I shall dare to say it, so that you may even become God Himself From where has all this come to you; and from Whom? And that I may speak of the lesser things, which our eyes see: Who has given to you to see the beauty of the heavens, the course of the sun, the moon's orb, the multitude of the stars, the order and concord in all things as in a lyre, the unfolding of the seasons and their changes, the revolving of the years, the divisions of night and day, the growing things of the earth, the pouring forth of air, the depth and vastness of the sea, ever flowing ever held in check, the deeps of rivers, the ceaseless flow of the winds?

Who gives you the rains, the tilling of the earth, the arts, homes, lands, government, our manner of life, and the love of our kindred? From where have you received the living creatures that serve you, and those given for your food? Who has made man the lord and ruler of all that is on the earth? And so that I need not speak of each single thing, who has bestowed all these things by which man is placed over all things? Is it not He Who now for all this, and in return for all this, asks you to love your fellow man? Let us not shame ourselves, receiving so much from Him, and hoping for more, by refusing God this one thing: kindness towards our fellow man.

And since He has set us apart from the beasts, and adorned us alone of all the creatures of the earth with reason, should we make beasts of ourselves, and allow ourselves to be corrupted by delicate living, either we are mad, or, I know not how to express it, we think that because of our barley and bran cakes, which we make so badly, we are of a nature superior to theirs. And as long ago, poets say there was a certain race of giants as well as other men: so we are above other creatures, as they were above men, as Nimrod was (Gen. x. 8), and the race of Enach (Num. xiii. 29), which long ago oppressed the Israelites, or those others

because of whose sin the earth was purified by the flood. And since He Who is our God and Lord is not ashamed to be called our Father, shall we turn a deaf ear to the cry of our destitute kindred?

XXIV. Far from it, my friends and my brothers! Let us not become unjust stewards of the things entrusted to us, so that we shall not hear Peter rebuking us and saying: 'Let you be ashamed, you who hold back another's possessions. Resolve rather to imitate the justice of God, and then no one will be poor (Const. Ap. Clementis)'. Let us not weary ourselves heaping up treasure and keeping guard over it, while others faint from want, lest the day come when we shall hear, first Amos, saying: Hear this, you that crush the poor and make the needy of the land to fail, saying: When will the month be over, and we shall sell our wares; and the sabbath, and we shall open the corn: that we may lessen the measure and increase the sicle and may convey in deceitful balances (viii. 5)? and so on in words that threaten the anger of God against those who use both a large and a small measure; or hear again Micheas censuring this same luxury for the reason that satiety begets lust, and those who lie wanton on ivory couches, anointing themselves with the best ointments, eating the lambs of the flock and calves from the herd (Amos vi. 4),<sup>10</sup> dancing and singing to the sound of music as though they believed that such things would last forever and regarding them as harmless, and given over to self-indulgence, they are not concerned for the affliction of Joseph (Gen. x. 8), and this he adds to their sin of satiety. Let us take care this does not happen to us; that we too shall be so given over to pleasure, that we shall despise the mercy of God, Who permits these things, and does not immediately loose His anger against the hard hearts of sinners.

XXV. Let us then imitate the first and supreme law of God, Who sends down His rain on the just and unjust alike, and makes His sun to shine equally upon all (Mt. v. 45), Who spreads across the wide earth His rivers and streams, the woods for all living things, the air to the birds, waters to the things that live in the waters, and on all bestows the first helps to life. And His gifts are not under the dominion of anyone, not ruled by law, nor marked by boundaries, but all are owned in common, and abounding, and because of this they never fail; upholding the dignity of our nature by the worthiness of His gifts, bringing to light the riches of His goodness.

But men, if they have gold or silver and soft and precious garments and shining gems and such things beyond their need, things that are the cause of war and strife and of the very beginning of tyranny, they bury them in the ground and, above themselves with folly, close their hearts to pity for the needs of their fellow men. Not even from what is superfluous will they help those in total want. Oh the immense folly! the fearful madness of it! They never think, if nothing else, that riches and poverty, slavery and what we call freedom, and such terms, came among men with sin, as weaknesses that rushed in together with wickedness, and were its invention. From the beginning, says the Lord, it was not so (Mt. xix. 8). He Who created man at the beginning, created him free, endowed him with free will, ruled by the sole law of His commandment, and rich in the joy of paradise. And He willed the same for the rest of the race of men, bestowing it on them through that first seed. Freedom then, and wealth, lay simply in the observance of His single commandment: True slavery and poverty in its transgression.

XXVI. From this came hatred and strife and the deceits of the serpent tyrant, tempting us at all times with the bait of unlawful pleasures, setting the strong against the weak; and from then our race was divided, and greed defeated the nobility of our nature, making use even of law as an aid to its domination. But I would have you look back to our primary equality of right, not to the later division; not to the law of the strongest, but to the law of the Creator. Help nature with all your might. Reverence the ancient freedom. Reverence yourself. Cover the shame of your own kindred. Help the afflicted. Comfort those in sorrow. You who are strong, help the weak. You who are rich, help the poor. You who stand upright, help the fallen and the crushed. You who are joyful, comfort those in sadness. You who enjoy all good fortune, help those who have met with disaster. Give something to God in thanksgiving that you are of those who can give help, not of those who stand and wait for it; that you have no need to look to another's hands, but that others must look to yours. Grow rich, not only in substance, but also in piety; not only in gold, but also in virtue; or rather,

only in virtue. Be more honoured than your neighbour, by showing more compassion. Be as God to the unfortunate, by imitating the mercy of God.

XXVII. For in nothing do we draw so close to God as in doing good to man. Though God does the greater things, and man the less; yet each, I believe, works according to his capacity. He made man; and when man is undone, He remakes him. Never despise fallen man. God has shown mercy to him in the highest degree; giving him, with other things, the Law and the Prophets, and before that, the natural unwritten law, the examiner of all our actions, which warns us, corrects us guides us. And lastly He gave us Himself for our redemption, and for the life of the world, and with this, Apostles, Evangelists, Teachers, Pastors (Eph. iv. 11), healings, wonders, return to life, the undoing of death, victory over him who had defeated us, a Testament foreshadowing Him, the Testament of the True Reality, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the mystery of the new salvation.

You however, if you also would do great things, and those by which your soul is helped (and in this also God has made you rich, if you so will), never refuse to do good to those who have need of you. First and before all things, give to him who asks of you, even before he asks; showing mercy all the day, and lending all the day long (Ps. xxxvi. 26), carefully seeking back both principal and interest; that is, increase (of God) in him you helped; for he always adds to his store of wisdom who prudently increases in himself the seeds of piety.

But if you cannot help in these greater things, then help in the second or lesser things, as far as you can. Give help. Help others to live. Give food, clothing, medicines, apply remedies to the afflicted, bind up their wounds, ask about their misfortunes, speak with them of patience and forbearance, come close to them, you will not be harmed, you will not contract their affliction; even though the timid believe this, misled by foolish talk. Or rather, with this pretext, they excuse their own timidity and lack of kindness, seeking safety in cowardice, as though it were something fine and prudent. And sound sense will tell you this, and physicians, and the example of those who take care of these sick, of whom not one has fallen into danger through visiting them. And even should this action be not without danger, or the well founded suspicion of it, you, O Servant of Christ, and lover of God and of men, do not because of this become mean and cowardly. Have confidence! Let compassion overcome your timidity; the fear of God your softness. Let the love of your fellow man rise above the promptings of self love. Do not despise your brother; do not pass him by! Do not turn away your face from him, as from something terrible, something fearful, to be shunned and disowned. He is your own member, though this calamity has deformed him. The poor man has been left to thee (Ps. x. 14, Sept.) as to God; though you should pass by over proud in spirit. Perhaps I have shamed you; saying these things to you. But I have set before you the rule of the love of your neighbour: even should those who are hostile turn you away from accepting it.

XXVIII. Whoever journeys on the sea is close to shipwreck; the nearer, the more boldly he navigates. Every man who has put on this body is brought close to the body's dangers, and the closer the more he goes about with his head in the air, not seeing who is in his path. While you sail with a fair wind, give a hand to the one who has suffered shipwreck. Do not wait to learn, in your own person, how great an evil is inhumanity, and how good it is to open your heart to those in need. Do not wish that the hand of God be stretched forth against those who walk with heads high, and pass by the poor. Learn of these things from the afflictions of others. Give something however small to the one in need; for it is not small to one who has nothing; neither is it small to God, if we have given what we could. Give promptly in the place of a large gift. And if you have nothing give of your tears. Great is the comfort to the afflicted of the sympathy that comes from the heart; and to suffer unfeigned for another's distress, will lighten the burden of their grief.

A man is not to be held in less honour than a beast, O Man; which should it fall into a ditch or stray, the Law bids you lift out or lead back (Deut. xxii. 1; Ex. xxiii. 4). Whether there is something profound and more mysterious hidden here - for many of the things of the Law are deep and mysterious - is not for me to know, but for the Spirit Which searcheth all and knoweth all things (I Cor. ii. 10). But as far as I can see, the Law laid this down, so that we might be led by the practise of humanity in lesser things, to a

charity which is greater and more perfect. For if we are obliged to be kind and merciful towards dumb beasts, how much more is this due to our equals and to our kindred?

XXIX. And this our reason as well as law teaches us, and some of the wisest of men, among whom it has always been held, that it is more worthy to give than to receive, and that mercy is more desirable than riches. Why do I speak of our wise men? For to those outside we pay no heed: those who invent gods out of their own imaginations, as patrons of their vices, and give the first place to Lucrus (Mercury); and what is worse, among some nations, offer human sacrifices to certain demons, and hold cruelty as part of their piety, and delight in such sacrifices; thinking by this to please their gods: the evil priests of evil and initiators of evil. And there are some even among our own people, a thing that makes one weep, who, far from helping or having compassion on these poor sick, will reproach them bitterly, insult them, make up empty, foolish speculations about them; and truly, out of the ground they mutter speech, and their voices are heard in the air (Is. xxix. 4); not in the ears that are used to and understand holy teaching. And they have the audacity to go further, and say: 'Their affliction is from God; and our good health comes from God. And who am I to undo the decree of God, and put myself forward as more kind than God? They are sick! Let them be sick! Let them be afflicted! Let them suffer misfortune! This is the will of God!'

And this is their sole manifestation of the love of God: You must take care of your money, and be insulting to the afflicted. From what such persons say it is very apparent that they are far from thinking that prosperity comes from God. For who would speak like this of the destitute, who confesses that God is the Giver of all blessings? For it is one and the same thing to receive something from God, and to possess it and use it as God wishes.

XXX. Whether it comes from God that these should be tormented is not yet manifest; just as it is not manifest whether this corruptible body of itself brings forth this irregularity, in its course as it were.<sup>11</sup> And who knows whether this man is being punished because of his wickedness, and this other uplifted as good and worthy of praise, and not the contrary: that this man is being uplifted because of his wickedness, and this other is being tested because of his virtue? The one uplifted, that he may fall the lower; and being first allowed his fill, all his wickedness bursts forth as some disease, so that he is the more fittingly punished in the end. The other, contrary to expectation, is tried hard so that, tested like gold in a furnace, he may be purified of even the least evil there may yet be in him. For no one, at least, no one born of human generation, is wholly free of stain, as we have heard (Job xxv. 4); even though one may appear more worthy than another. For I find a certain mystery of this kind in Sacred Scripture; but it would take too long to recount all the words of the Spirit on this subject. But who hath numbered the sand of the sea, and the drops of rain and who hath measured the depth of the abyss? And who has searched out the deeps of the divine wisdom in all things (Ecclus. i. 2), through which He has made all things, and rules them as He wills and knows? It is enough for us to pass over with the Apostle the difficulty of understanding and contemplating this wisdom, and simply cry out in wonder: O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgements, and how unsearchable his ways! And, Who hath known the mind of the Lord (Rom. xi. 33, 34)? And, who, that I may speak with Job, has come to the end of his wisdom (Job. xi. 7, Sept.)? Who is wise, and he shall understand these things (Os. xiv. 10); and will not measure what is above measure by that which cannot be perceived?

XXXI. Let another be rash and bold in these things; or rather, let no one be: I, for my part, shall not presume to say that someone's affliction is due wholly to wickedness, or their happiness to piety. For it will happen at times, and for our true profit, that the way of life of a wicked man is changed through affliction, and that a virtuous man is strengthened in his way by the comfort of the good things of this life. For it is not always and wholly the case that it is only at some future time that some receive the reward of their virtue, and others the punishment that is due to their misdeeds. And they that have done good things shall come forth unto the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgement (Jn. v. 29).

But the outward appearance of the things of this life is one thing, their ruling another; though all concur in this: that what is just before God, may appear to us contradictory. Just as in a body, there are

important members and others less so; some are large, some small, and again upon the earth the higher and the lower spheres balance one another, so that one thing taken with another, a creation of beauty and harmony is set before us, that we can see and admire. The same is seen in the work of an artist. The rough, crude form that first seemed without order or balance, is gradually seen to be wholly related to the method and purpose of his art, and has its place in the making of the work. And we perceive and confess this as soon as we have been allowed to see the perfected beauty of what he has made. And God is not ignorant of the rules of art, as we are; and neither are the things of this life ruled without order and design, merely because the reasons for what we see are yet unknown to us.

XXXII. To take an example from a certain natural infirmity from which men suffer: we are not very different from those who suffer from nausea and dizziness and who, when their head is spinning, see everything upside down. This is what happens to those we speak of. Such people cannot allow that God is wiser than themselves. As soon as something unexpected happens, they are taken with dizziness; when they ought rather to seek a reason for what they see and with a little care and diligence they might perhaps come to understand the reason. Or they could seek counsel with men who are wiser and more spiritual than themselves; for this is also among the gifts of the Spirit, and not at all possess this knowledge. Or lastly they should seek understanding by means of the purification of their lives, and pray for wisdom from Him Who is Wisdom.

But they prefer to turn (O the folly of man!), to the one nearest them, and maliciously declare that there is no order or purpose in any thing; for they themselves have discovered none, and so because of what they do not know, they are wise, or rather, if I may say so, in their excess of wisdom, they are ignorant and foolish. Then there are those who base their opinions on fortune and on chance; led astray through accidental as well as through contrived happenings. Others base their convictions on the unaccountable and inexorable rule of the stars, arranging their affairs by their necessary and inalterable decree and this rule in turn is related to certain inevitable influences of both the fixed and the wandering stars; and of all this motion is master. Others again will, each according to his own notion, preying on the unfortunate race of men, divide up into various theories and terminologies what they themselves are neither able to perceive nor grasp of the workings of Divine Providence. And then there are those who blame Providence for great poverty, holding that It is concerned only with the things that are above and indifferent to what we most need: as though fearful, should many receive help, that God may be seen as a true Benefactor; or striving to show that He does not trouble Himself to help people.

XXXIII. But we may disregard such persons as these we have spoken of; for Holy Scripture has fittingly chastised them, where it says: Their foolish heart was darkened. For, professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. And they changed the glory of the incorruptible God (Rom. i. 21), and with their myths and shadows they blaspheme the Providence of God, that reaches from end to end of all things. We however, who follow reason, and are followers of Him Who is the Supreme Reason, have nothing to do with such impostors; nor should we listen to them, or have anything to do with them: even though they have plenty to say for themselves, and are able to delude men's minds with their novelties. We believe that God is the Maker and Author of all things; for in what other way could the universe exist, unless someone made it and gave it order? And we include with this the Providence which unites and holds all things together in harmony. For it must be that He Who is the Maker of all things has also the care of them; unless we are prepared to say that the universe is borne along by chance, as a ship driven by a storm, and that through the collapse of order in matter it will then dissolve and return again to its primeval confusion and chaos.

And we believe also that our Maker, or our Modeller, if you prefer to call Him this, has a special care of our lives; even though our lives are under the rule of things that are contrary one to the other, and perhaps it is because of this we are mistaken with regard to them, so that, because of the difficulty of understanding them, we look upwards in wonder to the Mind that is above them all. For what is readily taken in, is readily despised. But that which is above us, the harder it is to attain to it, the more do we value it; and that but awakens our longing, which evades our desire to know.

XXXIV. So let us then neither admire all healthfulness, nor condemn all sickness, nor give our heart to fleeting riches, that turn it from its true course, devouring as it were a part of our soul. Neither should we revolt against poverty, as wholly detestable and hateful. And let us discern when to have little esteem for that foolish healthfulness whose fruit is sin, and to honour the sickness that is holy: holding in reverence those who have gained the victory through suffering, lest there may be some Job hidden among the sick, who, though he may scrape his festering body with a potsherd (Job ii. 8), is more to be revered than those that are sound in body; Lazarus gained salvation and found peace in Abraham's bosom.

XXXV. It seems to me we must show kindness and mercy to these poor afflicted for these reasons also: To curb the tongues of those so inhumanly disposed towards them, to give no justification for their foolish talk; justifying the same cruelty against ourselves; and also that we may show reverence to the greatest commandment of all, and towards its greatest Example. What a commandment this is? And how true and enduring? For not once or twice have the men who were filled with the Holy Spirit spoken of the poor and needy, nor have they spoken merely in words; nor have some spoken much, and others little, as though it were not something of great importance; but all without exception have spoken, and all with fervour. And they spoke of it as our first duty, or among the first; now exhorting us, now threatening us, now reproaching, at times praising those who did good, so that reminding us of it at all times they might lead us to the fulfilment of this commandment:

By reason of the misery of the needy and the groans of the poor, now will I arise saith the Lord (Ps. xi. 6). And who should not fear the Lord when He rises? Arise, O Lord God, let thy hand be exalted: forget not the poor (Ps. ix. 33). Grant that He may not rise against us; and that we may not see His hand upraised against those who disobey Him; nor, what is worse, against the hard of heart. And again: He hath not forgotten the cry of the poor (Ps. ix. 13). And, His eyes look upon the poor man (His eyes which are nobler than His eyelids, and more significant); his eyelids examine the sons of men (Ps. x. 5); that is, He bestows on them a briefer and secondary glance.

XXXVI. It may be that some one will say: 'But these words were said of the poor and needy who had suffered injustice.' It may be so. But let that also incite you to humanity. For if there is so much reason for humanity towards those who have suffered wrong, greater will be the reward for those who do good to them. For if he that despiseth the poor, reproacheth his maker (Prov. xvii. 5), he does honour to the Maker, who cares for what He has made. Again, when you hear the words of Scripture: The rich and poor have met one another: the Lord is the maker of them both (Prov. xxii. 2), do not then think He made this man poor, this other rich, that you may therefore war in safety against the poor. For it is not certain God made such a division. The psalmist tells us, He is equally the Maker of both, however unequal things may outwardly appear. But this should make you more loving and compassionate: so that where one thought may uplift you, the other will humble you and make you more modest. And what else does the Scripture say? He that hath mercy on the poor, lendeth to the Lord (Prov. xix. 17). Who would not have such a Debtor, Who in due time will repay both loan and interest? And again it tells us: By mercy and faith sins are purged away (Prov. xv. 27).

XXXVII. Let us therefore purify ourselves through works of mercy. Let us by means of this beautiful herb remove from our souls all stains and all defilement; making them, some white as wool, some white as snow (Is. i. 18) according to the measure of the fervour and goodness of our heart. But let me add something you must rather fear. It is this. If there is in you no wound, no bruise, no swelling sores (Is. i. 6), no leprosy of the soul, no touch or a symptom, as of something shining (Lev. xiii. 2), which however small is still to be submitted to the Law you still stand in need of the healing hand of Christ; and this at least out of reverence for Him Who was wounded for our iniquities, Who was bruised for our sins (Is. liii. 5). And you show reverence to Christ as often as you show yourself a kind and loving member of Christ.

And should the robber and oppressor of our soul find us on the way from Jerusalem to Jericho or elsewhere unarmed and unready, and wounds us, we may rightly say of ourselves: My sores are putrified and corrupted, because of my foolishness (Ps. xxxvii. 6). And if you are so stricken that you can neither seek

help nor cure yourself, alas for the wound you have received, and how deep is your affliction. But if you are not wholly despairing, and are not wholly incurable, go to the Physician. Beg Him to cure your wounds by His wounds. Become like Him by being like Him; or rather, by small remedies heal yourself of great evils. Say to thy soul: I am thy salvation (Ps. xxxiv. 3); and also Thy faith hath made thee whole (Jn. v. 14). It is He has spoken all these words of compassion to you. Let you now be kind and merciful to those who suffer.

XXXVIII. Blessed are the merciful, says the Lord, for they shall obtain mercy. And not the least among the blessings is mercy. And blessed is he that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor (Ps. xl. 1). And again: Acceptable is the man that sheweth mercy and lendeth (Ps. cxi. 5). And in another place: The just sheweth mercy, and lendeth all the day long (Ps. xxxvi. 26). Let us grasp this blessing and, knowing we are called, let us be generous. Let not the night put an end to your pity. Say not to thy friend: Go and come again, and tomorrow I will give to thee: when thou canst give now (Prov. iii. 28). Let nothing come between your good will and the deed. This alone must suffer no delay: Kindness to another in need. Deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the needy and harbourless into thy house (Is. lviii. 7); and do it with a joyful spirit. He that showeth mercy, says Paul, let him show it with cheerfulness (Rom. xii. 8). A kindness done promptly, is a kindness twice done. A favour done in a sour spirit, and because you must, is unlovely and without grace. We should be cheerful, not grieving, when we give mercy. If you break an evil bond or dissolve a contract that is oppressive (Is. lviii. 6), do it without pettiness and do it freely and without hesitation, and without muttering as to what will then happen?^12 What a great and wonderful thing to do! And deserving of such a reward! Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy health shall speedily arise (v. 8). Who now does not long for light and for healing?

XXXIX. I honour that purse of Christ (Jn. xii. 6) which encourages me to feed the poor, and also the agreement between Peter and Paul in which they divided between them the preaching of the Gospel, while sharing a common concern for the poor; and lastly that perfection in which it was laid down that he should give what he had to the poor (Mt. xix. 21). Is your kindness towards other freely given, or is it forced. Is it given because of the law or because of counsel? It is this latter I wholly desire and wish for you; for I am fearful of that left hand side and of the goats, and of the reproaches He shall make Who shall place them there (Mt. xxv. 33). Not because their hands have stolen what is another's, not because they have robbed and plundered, not because they have committed adultery or because they have done other forbidden things, but because they have not ministered to Christ in His poor.

XL. If therefore I have convinced you of anything, O Servants of Christ, who are my brothers and my fellow heirs, let us, while there is yet time, visit Christ in His sickness, let us have a care for Christ in His sickness, let us give to Christ to eat, let us clothe Christ in His nakedness, let us do honour to Christ, and not only at table, as some did (Lk. vii. 36), not only with precious ointments, as Mary did (Jn. xii. 3), not only in His tomb, as Joseph of Arimathea did, he who was a half-follower of Christ (Jn. xix. 38), not only doing him honour with gold, frankincense and myrrh, as the Magi did, and even before all these others we mention (Mt. ii. 11); but let us honour Him because the Lord of all will have mercy and not sacrifice (Mt. ix. 13), and goodness of heart above thousands of fat lambs (Dan. iii. 40). Let us give Him this honour in His poor, in those who lie on the ground here before us this day, so that when we leave this world they may receive us into eternal tabernacles, in Jesus Christ our Lord, to Whom be there glory for all ages. Amen.