

Homily I.

Against those who say that demons govern human affairs, and who are displeased at the chastisement of God, and are offended at the prosperity of the wicked and the hardships of the just.

1.

I indeed was hoping, that from the continuance of my discourse, you would have had a surfeit of my words: but I see that the contrary is happening: that no surfeit is taking place from this continuance, but that your desire is increased, that an addition is made not to your satiety but to your pleasure, that the same thing is happening which the winebibbers at heathen drinking-bouts experience; for they, the more they pour down unmixed wine, so much the rather they kindle their thirst, and in your case the more teaching we inculcate, so much the rather do we kindle your desire, we make your longing greater, your love for it the stronger. On this account, although I am conscious of extreme poverty, I do not cease to imitate the ostentatious among entertainers, both setting before you my table continuously, and placing on it the cup of my teaching, filled full: for I see that after having drunk it all, you retire again thirsting. And this indeed has become evident during the whole time, but especially since the last Lord's Day: For that ye partake of the divine oracles insatiably, that day particularly shewed: whereon I discoursed about the unlawfulness of speaking ill one of another, when I furnished you with a sure subject for self accusation, suggesting that you should speak ill of your own sins, but should not busy yourselves about those of other people: when I brought forward the Saints as accusing themselves indeed, but sparing others: Paul saying I am the chief of sinners, and that God had compassion on him who was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, [1](#) and calling himself one born out of due time, and not even thinking himself worthy of the title of Apostle: [2](#) Peter saying "Depart from me because I am a sinful man:" [3](#) Matthew styling himself a publican even in the days of his Apostleship: [4](#) David crying out and saying "My iniquities have gone over my head, and as a heavy burden have been burdensome to me:" [5](#) and Isaiah lamenting and bewailing "I am unclean, and have unclean lips:" [6](#) The three children in the furnace of fire, confessing and saying that they have sinned and transgressed, and have not kept the commandments of God. Daniel again makes the same lamentation. When after the enumeration of these Saints, I called their accusers flies, and introduced the right reason for the comparison, saying, that just as they fasten themselves upon the wounds of others, so also the accusers bite at other people's sins, collecting disease therefrom for their acquaintance, and those who do the opposite, I designated bees, not gathering together diseases, but building honeycombs with the greatest devotion, and so flying to the meadow of the virtue of the Saint: Then accordingly--then ye shewed your insatiable longing. For when my discourse was extended to some length, yea to an interminable length, such as never was, many indeed expected that your eagerness would be quenched by the abundance of what was said. But the contrary happened. For your heart was the rather warmed, your desire was the rather kindled: and whence was this evident? The acclamations at least which took place at the end were greater, and the shouts more clear, and the same thing took place as at the forge. For as there at the beginning indeed the light of the fire is not very clear, but when the flame has caught the whole of the wood that is laid upon it, it is raised to a great height; so

also accordingly this happened on the occasion of that day. At the beginning indeed, this assembly was not vehemently stirred by me. But when the discourse was extended to some length, and gradually took hold of all the subjects and the teaching spread more widely, then accordingly, then the desire of listening was kindled in you, and the applause broke forth, more vehemently. On this account, although I had been prepared to say less than was spoken, I then exceeded the measure, nay rather I never exceeded the measure. For I am wont to measure the amount of the teaching not by the multitude of the words spoken, but by the disposition of the audience. For he who meets with a disgusted audience, even if he abridge his teaching, seems to be vexatious, but he who meets with eager, and wide-awake, and attentive hearers, though he extend his discourse to some length, not even thus fulfils their desire.

But since it happens that there are in so great a congregation, certain weak ones, unable to follow the length of the discourse, I wish to suggest this to them, that they should hear and receive, as much as they can, and having received enough should retire: There is no one who forbids, or compels them to remain beyond their natural strength. Let them not however necessitate the abridgement of the discourse before the time and the proper hours. Thou art replete, but thy brother still hungers. Thou art drunk with the multitude of the things spoken, but thy brother is still thirsty. Let him then not distress thy weakness, compelling thee to receive more than thine own power allows: nor do thou vex his zeal by preventing him from receiving all that he can take in.

1. 1 Tim. i. 13, 15. ___

2. 1 Cor. xv. 8, 9. ___

3. Luke v. 8. ___

4. Matt. x. 3. ___

5. Ps. xxxvii. 5. ___

6. Isa. vi. 5. ___

2.

This also happens at secular feasts. Some indeed are more quickly satisfied, some more tardily, and neither do these blame those, nor do they condemn these. But there indeed to withdraw more quickly is praiseworthy, but here to withdraw more quickly is not praiseworthy, but excusable. There to leave off more slowly, is culpable and faulty, here to withdraw more tardily, brings the greatest commendation, and good report. Pray why is this? Because there indeed the tardiness arises from greediness, but here the endurance, and patience are made up of spiritual desire and divine longing.

But enough of preamble. And we will proceed hereupon to that business which remained over to us from that day. What then was that which was then spoken? that all men had one speech, just as also they had one nature, and no one was different in speech, or in tongue. Whence then comes so great a distinction in speech? From the carelessness of those who received the gift--of both of which matters we then spoke, shewing both the lovingkindness of the Master through this unity of speech, and the senselessness of the servants through their distinction of speech. For he indeed foreseeing that we should waste the gift nevertheless gave it: and they to whom it was entrusted, waxed evil over their charge. This is then one way of explanation, not that God wrested the gift from us but that we wasted what had been given. Then next after that, that we received afterwards gifts greater than those lost. In place of temporal toil he honoured us with eternal life. In place of thorns and thistles he prepared the fruit of the Spirit to grow in our souls. Nothing was more insignificant than man, and nothing became more honoured than man. He was the last item of the reasonable creation. But the feet became the head, and by means of the first-fruits, were raised to the royal throne. For just as some generous and opulent man who has seen some one escape from shipwreck and only able to save his bare body from the waves, cradles him in his hands, and casts about him a bright garment, and conducts him to the highest honours; so also God has done in the case of our nature. Man cast aside all that he had, his right to speak freely, his communion with God, his sojourn in Paradise, his unclouded life, and as from a shipwreck, went forth bare. But God received him and straightway clothed him, and taking him by the hand gradually conducted him to heaven. And yet the shipwreck was quite unpardonable. For this tempest was due entirely not to the force of the winds, but to the carelessness of the sailor.

And yet God did not look at this, but had compassion for the magnitude of the calamity, and him who had suffered shipwreck in harbour, he received as lovingly as if he had undergone this in the midst of the open sea. For to fall in Paradise is to undergo shipwreck in harbour. Why so? Because when no sadness, or care, or labours, or toil, or countless waves of desire assaulted our nature, it was upset and it fell. And as the miscreants who sail the sea, often bore through the ship with a small iron tool, and let in the whole sea to the ship from below; so accordingly then, when the Devil saw the ship of Adam, that is his soul, full of many good things, he came and bored it through with his mere voice, as with some small iron tool, and emptied him of all his wealth and sank the ship itself. But God made the gain greater than the loss, and brought our nature to the royal throne. Wherefore Paul cries out and says, "He raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him, on his right hand in the heavenly places, that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness towards us." [1](#) What dost thou say? the thing has already happened and has an end, and dost thou say "in order that he might shew to the ages to come?" Has he not shewn? He has already shewn, but not to all men, but to me who am faithful, but the unbelieving has not yet seen the wonder. But then, in that day the whole nature of man will come forward, and will wonder at

that which has been done, but especially will it be more manifest to us. For we believe even now; but hearing and sight do not put a wonder before us in the same way, but just as in the case of kings when we hear of the purple robe, and the diadem, and the golden raiment, and the royal throne, we wonder indeed, but experience this in greater degree when the curtains are drawn aside and we see him seated on the lofty judgment seat. So also in the case of the Only-Begotten, when we see the curtains of heaven drawn aside, and the King of angels descending thence, and with his body-guard of the heavenly hosts, then we perceive the wonder to be greater from our sight of it. For consider with me what it is to see our nature borne upon the Cherubim, and the whole angelic force surrounding it.

1. Eph. ii. 6, 7. ___

3.

But look, with me, too, at the wisdom of Paul, how many expressions he seeks for, so as to present to us the lovingkindness of God. For he did not speak merely the word grace, nor riches, but what did he say? "The exceeding riches of his grace in kindness." ¹ But notwithstanding even so, he is below the mark; and even as the slippery bodies when grasped by countless hands, escape our hold, and slip through easily; so also are we unable to get hold of the lovingkindness of God in whatever expressions we may try to grasp it, but the exceeding magnitude of it baffles the feebleness of our utterances. And Paul therefore experiencing this, and seeing the force of words defeated by its magnitude, desists after saying one word: and what is this? "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift." ² For neither speech, nor any mind is able to set forth the tender care of God. On this account he then says that it is past finding out, and elsewhere "The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts." ³

But, as I was saying, these two ways of explanation are found in the meantime: one indeed that God has not wrested the gift that we have lost; and next, that the good things which have been given to us are even greater than those which we have lost. And I wish also to mention a third too. What then is the third? That even if he had not given the things after these, which were greater than those we had lost, but had only taken away what had been given to us, as we furnished the reason why, (for let this be added); even this is enough of itself to shew his tender care towards us. For not only to give, but also to take away what was given, is a mark of the greatest lovingkindness, and, if you will, let us lay bare the matter, in the case of Paradise. He gave Paradise. This of his own tender care. We were seen to be unworthy of the gift. This of our own senselessness. He took away the gift from those who became unworthy of it. This came of his own goodness. And what kind of goodness is it, says one, to take away the gift? Wait, and thou shalt fully hear. For think, what Cain would have been, dwelling in Paradise after his bloodguiltiness. For if, when he was expelled from that abode, if when condemned to toil and labour, and beholding the threat of death hanging over his head, if seeing the calamity of his father before his eyes, and holding the traces of the wrath of God still in his hands, and encompassed with so great horrors, he lashed out into such great wickedness, as to ignore nature, and to forget one born from the same birth pangs, and to slay him who had done him no wrong, to lay hold on his brother's person, and to dye his right hand with blood, and when God wanted him to be still, to refuse submission and to affront his maker, to dishonour his parents; if this man had continued to dwell in Paradise--look, into how great evil he would have rushed. For if when so many restraints were laid upon him, he leapt with fatal leaps; and if these walls were set at nought, whither would he not have precipitated himself?

Wouldest thou learn too from the mother of this man, what a good result the expulsion from the life of Paradise had, compare what Eve was before this, and what she became afterwards. Before this indeed, she considered that deceiving Devil, that wicked Demon to be more worth believing than the commandments of God, and at the mere sight of the tree, she trampled under foot the law which had been laid down by Him. But when the expulsion from Paradise came, consider how much better and wiser she grew. For when she bare a son, she says "I have gotten a man through the Lord." ⁴ She straightway flew to the master, who before this had despised the master, and she neither ascribes the matter to nature, nor puts the birth down to the laws of marriage, but she recognizes the Lord of Nature, and acknowledges thanks to Him for the birth of the little child. And she who before this deceived her husband, afterwards even trained the little child, and gave him a name which of itself was able to bring the gift of God to her remembrance: and again when she bare another, she says "God hath raised up seed to me in place of Abel whom Cain slew." ⁵ The woman remembers her calamity, and does not become impatient but she gives thanks to God, and calls the little child after his gift, furnishing it with constant material for instruction. Thus even in his very deprivation God conferred greater benefit. The woman suffered expulsion from Paradise, but by means of her ejection she was led to a knowledge of God, so that she found a greater thing than she lost. And if it were profitable, says one, to suffer expulsion from Paradise, for what cause did God give Paradise at the

beginning? This turned out profitably to man, on account of our carelessness, since, if at least, they had taken heed to themselves, and had acknowledged their master, and had known how to be self-restrained, and to keep within bounds, they would have remained in honour. But when they treated the gifts which had been given them with insolence, then it became profitable, that they should be ejected. For what cause then did God give at first? In order that he might shew forth his own lovingkindness, and because He himself was prepared to bring us even to greater honour. But we were the cause of chastisement and punishment on all sides, ejecting ourselves through our indifference to goods which were given to us. Just as therefore an affectionate father, at first indeed, suffers his own son to dwell in his home, and to enjoy all his father's goods, but when he sees that he has become worthless of the honour, he leads him away from his table, and puts him far from his own sight, and often casts him forth from his paternal home, in order that he, suffering expulsion, and becoming better by this slight and this dishonour, may again shew himself worthy of restoration, and may succeed to his father's inheritance: So has God done. He gave Paradise to man. He cast him out when he appeared unworthy, in order that by his dwelling outside, and through his dishonour, he might become better, and more self-restrained, and might appear worthy again of restoration. Since after those things he did become better, he brings him back again and says "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." ⁶ Dost thou see that not the gift of Paradise but even the ejection from Paradise was a token of the greatest tender care? For had he not suffered expulsion from Paradise, he would not again have appeared worthy of Paradise.

1. Eph. ii. 7. ↩
2. 2 Cor. ix. 15. ↩
3. Phil. iv. 7. ↩
4. Gen. iv. 1. ↩
5. Gen. iv. 25. ↩
6. Luke xxiii. 43. ↩

4.

This argument therefore let us maintain throughout, and let us apply it to the case of the subject lying before us. God gave a speech common to all. This is part of his loving kindness to men. They did not use the gift rightly, but they lapsed to utter folly. He took away again that which had been given. For if when they had one speech, they fell into so great folly, as to wish to build a tower to heaven: had they not immediately been chastised would they not have desired to lay hold on the height of heaven itself? For why? If indeed that were impossible for them, yet notwithstanding their impious thoughts are made out from their plan. All which things God foresaw, and since they did not use their oneness of speech rightly, he rightly divided them by difference of speech. And see with me, his lovingkindness. "Behold," saith he "they all have one speech, and this they have begun to do." [1](#)

For what reason did he not at once proceed to the division of tongues, but first of all defend himself, as if about to be judged in a lawcourt? And yet at least no one can say to him why hast thou thus done? yea he is at liberty to do all things as he wills. But still as one about to give account, he thus sets up a defence, teaching us to be gentle and loving. For if the master defends himself to his servants, even when they have done him this wrong; much more ought we to defend ourselves to one another, even if we are wronged to the highest degree. See at least how he defends himself. "Behold they have all one mouth and one speech" saith he, "and this they have begun to do," as if he said let no one accuse me of this when he sees the division of tongues. Let no one consider that this difference of speech was made over to men from the beginning. "Behold they all have one mouth, and one speech." But they did not use the gift aright. And in order that thou mayest understand that he does not chastise for what has taken place so much as he provides for improvement in the future, hear the sequel "and now none of all the things will fail them, which they set on foot to do." [2](#) Now what he says, is of such a kind as this. If they do not pay the penalty now, and be restrained from the very root of their sins, they will never cease from wickedness. For this is what "none of the things will fail them which they set on foot to do" means, as if he said, and they will add other deeds yet more monstrous. For such a thing is wickedness; if when it has taken a start it be not hindered, as fire catching wood, so it rises to an unspeakable height. Dost thou see that the deprivation of oneness of speech was a work of much lovingkindness? He inflicted difference of speech upon them, in order that they might not fall into greater wickedness. Hold fast this argument then with me, and let it ever be fixed and immoveable in your minds, that not only when he confers benefits but even when he chastises God is good and loving. For even his

chastisements and his punishments are the greatest part of his beneficence, the greatest form of his providence. Whenever therefore thou seest that famines have taken place, and pestilences, and drought and immoderate rains, and irregularities in the atmosphere, or any other of the things which chasten human nature, be not distressed, nor be despondent, but worship Him who caused them, marvel at Him for His tender care. For He who does these things is such that He even chastens the body that the soul may become sound. Then does God these things saith one? God does these things, and even if the whole city, nay even if the whole universe were here I will not shrink from saying this. Would that my voice were clearer than a trumpet, and that it were possible to stand in a lofty place, and to cry aloud to all men, and to testify that God does these things. I do not say these things in arrogance but I have the prophet standing at my side, crying and saying, "There is no evil in the city which the Lord hath not done" [3](#) --now evil is an ambiguous term; and I wish that you shall learn the exact meaning of each expression, in order that on account of ambiguity you may not confound the nature of the things, and fall into blasphemy.

1. Gen. xi. 6. ___
2. Gen. xi. 6. ___
3. Amos iii. 6. ___

<https://bkv.unifr.ch/de/works/cpg-4332/versions/three-homilies-concerning-the-power-of-demon/divisions>