

0329-0390 – Gregorius Nazianzenus – In sanctum baptisma

Oration XL

The Oration on Holy Baptism

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Which even now you are receiving in a measure the One Ray from the One Godhead in Christ Jesus our Lord; to Whom be the glory and the might for ever and ever. Amen.



Oration XL.

The Oration on Holy Baptism.

Preached at Constantinople Jan. 6, 381, being the day following the delivery of that on the Holy Lights.

I. YESTERDAY we kept high Festival on the illustrious Day of the Holy Lights; for it was fitting that rejoicings should be kept for our Salvation, and that far more than for weddings and birthdays, and namedays, and house-warmings, and registrations of children, and anniversaries, and all the other festivities that men observe for their earthly friends. And now to-day let us discourse briefly concerning Baptism, and the benefits which accrue to us therefrom, even though our discourse yesterday spoke of it cursorily; partly because the time pressed us hard, and partly because the sermon had to avoid tediousness. For too great length in a sermon is as much an enemy to people's ears, as too much food is to their bodies....It will be worth your while to apply your minds to what we say, and to receive our discourse on so important a subject not perfunctorily, but with ready mind, since to know the power of this Sacrament is itself Enlightenment.⁴⁰⁰⁹

II. The Word recognizes three Births for us; namely, the natural birth, that of Baptism, and that of the Resurrection. Of these the first is by night, and is servile, and involves passion; but the second is by day, and is destructive of passion, cutting off all the veil⁴⁰¹⁰ that is derived from birth, and leading on to the higher life; and the third is more terrible and shorter, bringing together in a moment all mankind,⁴⁰¹¹ to stand before its Creator, and to give an account of its service and conversation here; whether it has followed the flesh, or whether it has mounted up with the spirit, and worshipped the grace of its new creation. My Lord Jesus Christ has showed that He honoured all these births in His own Person; the first, by that first and quickening Inbreathing;⁴⁰¹² the second

⁴⁰⁰⁹ Enlightenment (φωτισμός) is one of the most ancient names for Holy Baptism; the name, in fact, which S. Gregory uses throughout this Oration, and which his Latin translator almost invariably renders by Baptismus.

⁴⁰¹⁰ This Veil is Original Sin, by which the soul is darkened and as it were covered.

⁴⁰¹¹ All Mankind (πᾶν τὸ πλάσμα). πλάσμα would not be correctly rendered by Creation. It is a word belonging solely to Man, who was formed by the Hand of God, and who, alone among creatures, has to give an account of his past life to his Creator at the Last Day. (Edd. Bened.)

⁴⁰¹² Gen. ii. 7.

by His Incarnation and the Baptism wherewith He Himself was baptized; and the third by the Resurrection of which He was the Firstfruits; condescending, as He became the Firstborn⁴⁰¹³ among many brethren, so also to become the Firstborn from the dead.⁴⁰¹⁴

III. Concerning two of these births, the first and the last, we have not to speak on the present occasion. Let us discourse upon the second, which is now necessary for us, and which gives its name to the Feast of the Lights. Illumination is the splendour of souls, the conversion of the life, the question put to the Godward conscience.⁴⁰¹⁵ It is the aid to our weakness, the renunciation of the flesh, the following of the Spirit, the fellowship of the Word, the improvement of the creature, the overwhelming of sin, the participation of light, the dissolution of darkness. It is the carriage to God, the dying with Christ, the perfecting of the mind, the bulwark of Faith, the key of the Kingdom of heaven, the change of life, the removal of slavery, the loosing of chains, the remodelling of the whole man. Why should I go into further detail? Illumination is the greatest and most magnificent of the Gifts of God. For just as we speak of the Holy of Holies, and the Song of Songs, as more comprehensive and more excellent than others, so is this called Illumination, as being more holy than any other illumination which we possess.

IV. And as Christ the Giver of it is called by many various names, so too is this Gift, whether it is from the exceeding gladness of its nature (as those who are very fond of a thing take pleasure in using its name), or that the great variety of its benefits has reacted for us upon its names. We call it, the Gift, the Grace, Baptism, Unction, Illumination, the Clothing of Immortality, the Laver of Regeneration, the Seal, and everything that is honourable. We call it the Gift, because it is given to us in return for nothing on our part; Grace, because it is conferred even on debtors; Baptism, because sin is buried with it in the water; Unction, as Priestly and Royal, for such were they who were anointed; Illumination, because of its splendour; Clothing, because it hides our shame; the Laver, because it washes us; the Seal because it preserves us, and is moreover the indication of Dominion. In it the heavens rejoice; it is glorified by Angels, because of its kindred splendour. It is the image of the heavenly bliss. We long indeed to sing out its praises, but we cannot worthily do so.

V. God is Light:⁴⁰¹⁶ the highest, the unapproachable, the ineffable, That can neither be conceived in the mind nor uttered with the lips,⁴⁰¹⁷ That giveth life to every reasoning creature.⁴⁰¹⁸ He is in

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⁴⁰¹³ Rom. viii. 29.

⁴⁰¹⁴ Col. i. 18.

⁴⁰¹⁵ This is the literal version of the passage, which is somewhat loosely quoted from 1 S. Peter iii. 21, where the A.V. renders "the answer of a good conscience towards God," and the R.V., "The interrogation (Marg. inquiry) of a good conscience, etc." The passage is usually explained as referring to the Interrogatories in Holy Baptism, answered by the threefold Vow which enlists us "under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the Devil," professes the Faith, and promises obedience.

⁴⁰¹⁶ 1 John i. 5.

⁴⁰¹⁷ 1 Tim. vi. 16.

⁴⁰¹⁸ John i. 9.

the world of thought, what the sun is in the world of sense; presenting Himself to our minds in proportion as we are cleansed; and loved in proportion as He is presented to our mind; and again, conceived in proportion as we love Him; Himself contemplating and comprehending Himself, and pouring Himself out upon what is external to Him. That Light, I mean, which is contemplated in the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, Whose riches is Their unity of nature, and the one outleaping of Their brightness. A second Light is the Angel, a kind of outflow or communication of that first Light, drawing its illumination from its inclination and obedience thereto; and I know not whether its illumination is distributed according to the order of its state, or whether its order is due to the respective measures of its illumination.⁴⁰¹⁹ A third Light is man; a light which is visible to external objects. For they call man light⁴⁰²⁰ because of the faculty of speech in us. And the name is applied again to those of us who are more like God, and who approach God more nearly than others. I also acknowledge another Light, by which the primeval darkness was driven away or pierced. It was the first of all the visible creation to be called into existence; and it irradiates the whole universe, the circling orbit of the stars, and all the heavenly beacon fires.

VI. Light was also the firstborn commandment given to the firstborn man (for the commandment of the Law is a lamp and a light;⁴⁰²¹ and again, Because Thy judgments are a light upon the earth);⁴⁰²² although the envious darkness crept in and wrought wickedness. And a Light typical and proportionate to those who were its subjects was the written law, adumbrating the truth and the sacrament of the great Light, for Moses' face was made glorious by it.⁴⁰²³ And, to mention more Lights—it was Light that appeared out of Fire to Moses, when it burned the bush indeed, but did not consume it,⁴⁰²⁴ to shew its nature and to declare the power that was in it. And it was Light that was in the pillar of fire that led Israel and tamed the wilderness.⁴⁰²⁵ It was Light that carried up Elias in the car of fire,⁴⁰²⁶ and yet did not burn him as it carried him. It was Light that shone round the Shepherds⁴⁰²⁷ when the Eternal Light was mingled with the temporal. It was Light that was the beauty of the Star that went before to Bethlehem to guide the Wise Men's way,⁴⁰²⁸ and to be the escort of the Light That is above us, when He came amongst us. Light was That Godhead Which

⁴⁰¹⁹ S. Thomas Aquinas (Summa I qu. 108) seems to solve this question in accordance with the second of these alternatives.

⁴⁰²⁰ φῶς (masc) is a common poetical word for Man. It is probably derived from the root (Indo-Eur. Bha) of φάω, which also appears in φημί and modified in φαίνω.

⁴⁰²¹ Prov. vi. 23.

⁴⁰²² Ps. cxix. 105.

⁴⁰²³ Exod. xxxiv. 30.

⁴⁰²⁴ Ib. iii. 2.

⁴⁰²⁵ Ex. xiii. 21.

⁴⁰²⁶ 2 Kings ii. 11.

⁴⁰²⁷ Luke ii. 9.

⁴⁰²⁸ Matt. ii. 9.

was shewn upon the Mount to the disciples—and a little too strong for their eyes.⁴⁰²⁹ Light was That Vision which blazed out upon Paul,⁴⁰³⁰ and by wounding his eyes healed the darkness of his soul. Light is also the brilliancy of heaven to those who have been purified here, when the righteous shall shine forth as the Sun,⁴⁰³¹ and God shall stand in the midst of them,⁴⁰³² gods and kings, deciding and distinguishing the ranks of the Blessedness of heaven. Light beside these in a special sense is the illumination of Baptism of which we are now speaking; for it contains a great and marvellous sacrament of our salvation.

VII. For since to be utterly sinless belongs to God, and to the first and uncompounded nature (for simplicity is peaceful, and not subject to dissension), and I venture to say also that it belongs to the Angelic nature too; or at least, I would affirm that nature to be very nearly sinless, because of its nearness to God; but to sin is human and belongs to the Compound on earth (for composition is the beginning of separation); therefore the master did not think it right to leave His creature unaided, or to neglect its danger of separation from Himself; but on the contrary, just as He gave existence to that which did not exist, so He gave new creation to that which did exist, a diviner creation and a loftier than the first, which is to those who are beginning life a Seal, and to those who are more mature in age both a gift and a restoration of the image which had fallen through sin, that we may not, by becoming worse through despair, and ever being borne downward to that which is more evil, fall altogether from good and from virtue, through despondency; and having fallen into a depth of evil (as it is said) despise Him;⁴⁰³³ but that like those who in the course of a long journey make a brief rest from labour at an inn, we should be enabled to accomplish the rest of the road fresh and full of courage. Such is the grace and power of baptism; not an overwhelming of the world as of old, but a purification of the sins of each individual, and a complete cleansing from all the bruises and stains of sin.

VIII. And since we are double-made, I mean of body and soul, and the one part is visible, the other invisible, so the cleansing also is twofold, by water and the spirit; the one received visibly in the body, the other concurring with it invisibly and apart from the body; the one typical, the other real and cleansing the depths. And this which comes to the aid of our first birth, makes us new instead of old, and like God instead of what we now are; recasting us without fire, and creating us anew without breaking us up. For, to say it all in one word, the virtue of Baptism is to be understood as a covenant with God for a second life and a purer conversation. And indeed all need to fear this very much, and to watch our own souls, each one of us, with all care, that we do not become liars in respect of this profession. For if God is called upon as a Mediator to ratify human professions, how great is the danger if we be found transgressors of the covenant which we have made with

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⁴⁰²⁹ Luke ix. 32, 34.

⁴⁰³⁰ Acts ix. 3.

⁴⁰³¹ Matt. xiii. 43.

⁴⁰³² Wisd. iii. 7.

⁴⁰³³ Prov. xviii. 3 (LXX.).

God Himself; and if we be found guilty before the Truth Himself of that lie, besides our other transgressions...and that when there is no second regeneration, or recreation, or restoration to our former state, even though we seek it with all our might, and with many sighs and tears, by which it is cicatrized over (with great difficulty in my opinion, though we all believe that it may be cicatrized). Yet if we might wipe away even the scars I should be glad, since I too have need of mercy. But it is better not to stand in need of a second cleansing, but to stop at the first, which is, I know, common to all, and involves no labour, and is of equal price to slaves, to masters, to poor, to rich, to humble, to exalted, to gentle, to simple, to debtors, to those who are free from debt; like the breathing of the air, and the pouring forth of the light, and the changes of the seasons, and the sight of creation, that great delight which we all share alike, and the equal distribution of the faith.

IX. For it is a strange thing to substitute for a painless remedy one which is more painful; to cast away the grace of mercy, and owe a debt of punishment; and to measure our amendment against sin. For how many tears must we contribute before they can equal the fount of baptism; and who will be surety for us that death shall wait for our cure, and that the judgment seat shall not summon us while still debtors, and needing the fire of the other world? You perhaps, as a good and pitiful husbandman, will entreat the Master still to spare the figtree,⁴⁰³⁴ and not yet to cut it down, though accused of unfruitfulness; but to allow you to put dung about it in the shape of tears, sighs, invocations, sleepings on the ground, vigils, mortifications of soul and body, and correction by confession and a life of humiliation. But it is uncertain if the Master will spare it, inasmuch as it cumpers the ground of another asking for mercy, and becoming deteriorated by the longsuffering shewn to this one. Let us then be buried with Christ by Baptism,⁴⁰³⁵ that we may also rise with Him; let us descend with Him, that we may also be exalted with Him; let us ascend with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

X. If after baptism the persecutor and tempter of the light assail you (for he assailed even the Word my God through the veil,⁴⁰³⁶ the hidden Light through that which was manifested), you have the means to conquer him. Fear not the conflict; defend yourself with the Water; defend yourself with the Spirit, by Which all the fiery darts of the wicked shall be quenched.⁴⁰³⁷ It is Spirit, but That Spirit which rent the Mountains.⁴⁰³⁸ It is Water, but that which quenches fire. If he assail you by your want (as he dared to assail Christ), and asks that stones should be made bread, do not be ignorant of his devices.⁴⁰³⁹ Teach him what he has not learnt. Defend yourself with the Word of life, Who is the Bread sent down from heaven, and giving life to the world.⁴⁰⁴⁰ If he plot against

⁴⁰³⁴ Luke xiii. 8.

⁴⁰³⁵ Rom. vi. 4; Col. ii. 12.

⁴⁰³⁶ i.e., the Sacred Manhood.

⁴⁰³⁷ Ephes. vi. 16.

⁴⁰³⁸ 1 Kings xix. 11.

⁴⁰³⁹ 2 Cor. ii. 11.

⁴⁰⁴⁰ John vi. 33.

you with vain glory (as he did against Christ when he led Him up to the pinnacle of the temple and said to Him, Cast Thyself down⁴⁰⁴¹ as a proof of Thy Godhead), be not overborne by elation. If you be taken by this he will not stop here. For he is insatiable, he grasps at every thing. He fawns upon you with fair pretences, but he ends in evil; this is the manner of his fighting. Yes, and the robber is skilled in Scripture. On the one side was that It is written about the Bread, and on the other that it Is written about the Angels. It is written, quoth he, He shall give His Angels charge concerning thee, and they shall bear thee in their hands.⁴⁰⁴² O vile sophist! how was it that thou didst suppress the words that follow, for I know it well, even if thou passest it by in silence? I will make thee to go upon the asp and basilisk, and I will tread upon serpents and scorpions, being fenced by the Trinity. If he wrestle against thee to a fall through avarice, shewing thee all the Kingdoms at one instant and in the twinkling of an eye, as belonging to himself, and demand thy worship, despise him as a beggar. Say to him relying on the Seal, "I am myself the Image of God; I have not yet been cast down from the heavenly Glory, as thou wast through thy pride; I have put on Christ; I have been transformed into Christ by Baptism; worship thou me." Well do I know that he will depart, defeated and put to shame by this; as he did from Christ the first Light, so he will from those who are illumined by Christ. Such blessings does the laver bestow on those who apprehend it; such is the rich feast which it provides for those who hunger aright.

XI. Let us then be baptized that we may win the victory; let us partake of the cleansing waters, more purifying than hyssop, purer than the legal blood, more sacred than the ashes of the heifer sprinkling the unclean,⁴⁰⁴³ and providing a temporary cleansing of the body, but not a complete taking away of sin; for if once purged, why should they need further purification? Let us be baptized today, that we suffer not violence⁴⁰⁴⁴ to-morrow; and let us not put off the blessing as if it were an injury, nor wait till we get more wicked that more may be forgiven us; and let us not become sellers and traffickers of Christ, lest we become more heavily burdened than we are able to bear, that we be not sunk with all hands⁴⁰⁴⁵ and make shipwreck of the Gift, and lose all because we expected

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⁴⁰⁴¹ Matt. iv. 6.

⁴⁰⁴² Ps. xci. 14.

⁴⁰⁴³ Heb. x. 4.

⁴⁰⁴⁴ There is here an untranslatable play upon words.

⁴⁰⁴⁵ Again a play upon words. βαπτίζεσθαι is sometimes used in the sense of to be drowned. The word primarily means to Immerse, and this of course, when applied to a ship, is to sink her. The practice of immersion in Holy Baptism was undoubtedly universal in the primitive ages, except where in cases of necessity persons were baptized in sickness, or in prison under sentence of death; and in such cases this "Clinic" Baptism, though recognized as valid, and therefore not to be repeated, was viewed as irregular, and disqualified its recipient from subsequently receiving Holy Orders. Affusion was gradually allowed, probably for climatic reasons, to become the prevailing practice of the West, though immersion predominated as late as the Twelfth Century. It is, however, a remarkable fact that the Didache, a Manual of instruction which some date within the lifetime of the Apostles, and nearly all are agreed in placing not later than the early years of the Second Century, expressly permits affusion, without any hint of irregularity, or mention of any circumstance of necessity except scarcity of water.

too much. While thou art still master of thy thoughts run to the Gift. While thou art not yet sick in body or in mind, nor seemest so to those who are with thee (though thou art really of sound mind); while thy good is not yet in the power of others, but thou thyself art still master of it; while thy tongue is not stammering or parched, or (to say no more) deprived of the power of pronouncing the sacramental words; while thou canst still be made one of the faithful, not conjecturally but confessedly; and canst still receive not pity but congratulation; while the Gift is still clear to thee, and there is no doubt about it; while the grace can reach the depth of thy soul, and it is not merely thy body that is washed for burial; and before tears surround thee announcing thy decease—and even these restrained perhaps for thy sake—and thy wife and children would delay thy departure, and are listening for thy dying words; before the physician is powerless to help thee, and is giving thee but hours to live—hours which are not his to give—and is balancing thy salvation with the nod of his head, and discoursing learnedly on thy disease after thou art dead, or making his charges heavier by withdrawals, or hinting at despair; before there is a struggle between the man who would baptize thee and the man who seeks thy money, the one striving that thou mayest receive thy Viaticum, the other that he may be inscribed in thy Will as heir—and there is no time for both.

XII. Why wait for a fever to bring you this blessing, and refuse it from God? Why will you have it through lapse of time, and not through reason? Why will you owe it to a plotting friend, and not to a saving desire? Why will you receive it of force and not of free will; of necessity rather than of liberty? Why must you hear of your death from another, rather than think of it as even now present? Why do you seek for drugs which will do no good, or the sweat of the crisis, when the sweat of death is perhaps upon you? Heal yourself before your extremity; have pity upon yourself the only true healer of your disease; apply to yourself the really saving medicine; while you are still sailing with a favouring breeze fear shipwreck, and you will be in less danger of it, if you make use of your terror as a helper. Give yourself occasion to celebrate the Gift with feasting, not with mourning; let the talent be cultivated, not buried in the ground; let some time intervene between the grace and death, that not only may the account of sins be wiped out, but something better may be written in its place; that you may have not only the Gift, but also the Reward; that you may not only escape the fire, but may also inherit the glory, which is bestowed by cultivation of the Gift. For to men of little soul it is a great thing to escape torment; but men of great soul aim also at attaining reward.

XIII. I know of three classes among the saved; the slaves, the hired servants, the sons. If you are a slave, be afraid of the whip; if you are a hired servant, look only to receive your hire; if you are more than this, a son, revere Him as a Father, and work that which is good, because it is good to obey a Father; and even though no reward should come of it for you, this is itself a reward, that you please your Father. Let us then take care not to despise these things. How absurd it would be to grasp at money and throw away health; and to be lavish of the cleansing of the body, but economical over the cleansing of the soul; and to seek for freedom from earthly slavery, but not to care about heavenly freedom; and to make every effort to be splendidly housed and dressed, but to have never a thought how you yourself may become really very precious; and to be zealous to

do good to others, without any desire to do good to yourself. And if good could be bought, you would spare no money; but if mercy is freely at your feet, you despise it for its cheapness. Every time is suitable for your ablution, since any time may be your death. With Paul I shout to you with that loud voice, “Behold now is the accepted time; behold Now is the day of salvation;”⁴⁰⁴⁶ and that Now does not point to any one time, but is every present moment. And again “Awake, thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light,”⁴⁰⁴⁷ dispelling the darkness of sin. For as Isaiah says,⁴⁰⁴⁸ In the night hope is evil, and it is more profitable to be received in the morning.

XIV. Sow in good season, and gather together, and open thy barns when it is the time to do so; and plant in season, and let the clusters be cut when they are ripe, and launch boldly in spring, and draw thy ship on shore again at the beginning of winter, when the sea begins to rage. And let there be to thee also a time for war and a time for peace; a time to marry, and a time to abstain from marrying; a time for friendship, and a time for discord, if this be needed; and in short a time for everything, if you will follow Solomon’s advice.⁴⁰⁴⁹ And it is best to do so, for the advice is profitable. But the work of your salvation is one upon which you should be engaged at all times; and let every time be to you the definite one for Baptism. If you are always passing over to-day and waiting for to-morrow, by your little procrastinations you will be cheated without knowing it by the Evil One, as his manner is. Give to me, he says, the present, and to God the future; to me your youth, and to God old age; to me your pleasures, and to Him your uselessness. How great is the danger that surrounds you. How many the unexpected mischances. War has expended you; or an earthquake overwhelmed you; or the sea swallowed you up; or a wild beast carried you off; or a sickness killed you; or a crumb going the wrong way (a most insignificant thing, but what is easier than for a man to die, though you are so proud of the divine image); or a too freely indulged drinking bout;⁴⁰⁵⁰ or a wind knocked you down; or a horse ran away with you; or a drug maliciously scheming against you, or perhaps found to be deleterious when meant to be wholesome; or an inhuman judge; or an inexorable executioner; or any of the things which make the change swiftest and beyond the power of human aid.

XV. But if you would fortify yourself beforehand with the Seal, and secure yourself for the future with the best and strongest of all aids, being signed both in body and in soul with the unction, as Israel was of old with that blood and unction of the firstborn at night that guarded him,⁴⁰⁵¹ what then can happen to you, and what has been wrought out for you? Listen to the Proverbs. “If thou sittest, he says, thou shalt be without fear; and if thou sleepest, thy sleep shall be sweet.”⁴⁰⁵² And

⁴⁰⁴⁶ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

⁴⁰⁴⁷ Ephes. v. 14.

⁴⁰⁴⁸ Isa. xxviii. 19, LXX.

⁴⁰⁴⁹ Eccl. iii. 1. sq.

⁴⁰⁵⁰ Some MSS. read “A flooded river.”

⁴⁰⁵¹ Exod. xii. 22.

⁴⁰⁵² Prov. iii. 24.

listen to David giving thee the good news, “Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, for mischance or noontday demon.”⁴⁰⁵³ This, even while you live, will greatly contribute to your sense of safety (for a sheep that is sealed is not easily snared, but that which is unmarked is an easy prey to thieves), and at your death a fortunate shroud, more precious than gold, more magnificent than a sepulchre, more reverent than fruitless libations,⁴⁰⁵⁴ more seasonable than ripe firstfruits, which the dead bestow on the dead, making a law out of custom. Nay, if all things forsake thee,⁴⁰⁵⁵ or be taken violently away from thee; money, possessions, thrones, distinctions, and everything that belongs to this early turmoil, yet you will be able to lay down your life in safety, having suffered no loss of the helps which God gave you unto salvation.

XVI. But are you afraid lest you should destroy the Gift, and do you therefore put off your cleansing, because you cannot have it a second time? What? Would you not be afraid of danger in time of persecution, and of losing the most precious Thing you have—Christ? Would you then on this account avoid becoming a Christian? Perish the thought. Such a fear is not for a sane man; such an argument argues insanity. O incautious caution, if I may so. O trick of the Evil One! Truly he is darkness and pretends to be light; and when he can no longer prevail in open war, he lays snares in secret, and gives advice, apparently good, really evil, if by some trick at least he may prevail, and we find no escape from his plotting. And this is clearly what he is aiming at in this instance. For, being unable to persuade you to despise Baptism, he inflicts loss upon you through a fictitious security; that in consequence of your fear you may suffer unconsciously the very thing you are afraid of; and because you fear to destroy the Gift, you may for this very reason fail of the Gift altogether. This is his character; and he will never cease his duplicity as long as he sees us pressing onwards towards heaven from which he has fallen. Wherefore, O man of God, do thou recognize the plots of thine adversary; for the battle is against him that hath, and it is concerned with the most important interests. Take not thine enemy to be thy counsellor; despise not to be and to be called Faithful. As long as you are a Catechumen you are but in the porch of Religion; you must come inside, and cross the court, and observe the Holy Things, and look into the Holy of Holies, and be in company with the Trinity. Great are the interests for which you are fighting, great too the stability which you need. Protect yourself with the shield of faith. He fears you, if you fight armed with this weapon, and therefore he would strip you of the Gift, that he may the more easily overcome you unarmed and defenceless. He assails every age, and every form of life; he must be repelled by all.

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⁴⁰⁵³ Ps. xci. 5.

⁴⁰⁵⁴ Billius suggests, though without adopting it in his text, a slight conjectural alteration, which would read “Than funeral games and libations;” but this, though it gives a very good sense, is a needless departure from the MSS.

⁴⁰⁵⁵ Luke ix. 60.

XVII. Art thou young? stand against thy passions; be numbered with the alliance in the army of God:⁴⁰⁵⁶ do valiantly against Goliath.⁴⁰⁵⁷ Take your thousands or your myriads;⁴⁰⁵⁸ thus enjoy your manhood; but do not allow your youth to be withered, being killed by the imperfection of your faith. Are you old and near the predestined necessity? Aid your few remaining days. Entrust the purification to your old age. Why do you fear youthful passion in deep old age and at your last breath? Or will you wait to be washed till you are dead, and not so much the object of pity as of dislike? Are you regretting the dregs of pleasure, being yourself in the dregs of life? It is a shameful thing to be past indeed the flower of your age, but not past your wickedness; but either to be involved in it still, or at least to seem so by delaying your purification. Have you an infant child? Do not let sin get any opportunity, but let him be sanctified from his childhood; from his very tenderest age let him be consecrated by the Spirit. Fearest thou the Seal on account of the weakness of nature? O what a small-souled mother, and of how little faith! Why, Anna even before Samuel was born⁴⁰⁵⁹ promised him to God, and after his birth consecrated him at once, and brought him up in the priestly habit, not fearing anything in human nature, but trusting in God. You have no need of amulets or incantations, with which the Devil also comes in, stealing worship from God for himself in the minds of vainer men. Give your child the Trinity, that great and noble Guard.

XVIII. What more? Are you living in Virginity? Be sealed by this purification; make this the sharer and companion of your life. Let this direct your life, your words, every member, every movement, every sense. Honour it, that it may honour you; that it may give to your head a crown of graces, and with a crown of delights may shield you.⁴⁰⁶⁰ Art thou bound by wedlock? Be bound also by the Seal; make it dwell with you as a guardian of your continence, safer than any number of eunuchs or of doorkeepers. Art thou not yet wedded to flesh? Fear not this consecration; thou art pure even after marriage. I will take the risk of that. I will join you in wedlock. I will dress the bride. We do not dishonour marriage because we give a higher honour to virginity. I will imitate Christ, the pure Grooms-man and Bridegroom, as He both wrought a miracle at a wedding, and honours wedlock with His Presence.⁴⁰⁶¹ Only let marriage be pure and unmingled with filthy lusts. This only I ask; receive safety from the Gift, and give to the Gift the oblation of chastity in its due season, when the fixed time of prayer comes round, and that which is more precious than business. And do this by common consent and approval. For we do not command, we exhort; and we would receive something of you for your own profit, and the common security of you both.

⁴⁰⁵⁶ The Benedictine Editors punctuate differently, and render "Stand against passions with the assistance (of Baptism), be numbered in the army of God." remarking that David fought Goliath without allies, leaning on God's assistance; and that S. Gregory here certainly means that a Christian who relies on the aid of his Baptism is to stand firm in the battle against the Devil.

⁴⁰⁵⁷ 1 Sam. xvii. 32.

⁴⁰⁵⁸ Ib. xviii. 7.

⁴⁰⁵⁹ 1 Sam. i. 10.

⁴⁰⁶⁰ Eccclus. xxxii. 3.

⁴⁰⁶¹ John ii. 1-11.



And in one word, there is no state of life and no occupation to which Baptism is not profitable. You who are a free man,⁴⁰⁶² be curbed by it; you who are in slavery, be made of equal rank; you who are in grief, receive comfort; let the gladsome be disciplined; the poor receive riches that cannot be taken away; the rich be made capable of being good stewards of their possessions. Do not play tricks or lay plots against your own salvation. For even if we can delude others we cannot delude ourselves. And so to play against oneself is very dangerous and foolish.

XIX. But you have to live in the midst of public affairs, and are stained by them; and it would be a terrible thing to waste this mercy. The answer is simple. Flee, if you can, even from the forum, along with the good company, making yourself the wings of an eagle, or, to speak more suitably, of a dove...for what have you to do with Cæsar or the things of Cæsar?...until you can rest where there is no sin, and no blackening, and no biting snake in the way to hinder your godly steps. Snatch your soul away from the world; flee from Sodom; flee from the burning; travel on without turning back, lest you should be fixed as a pillar of salt.⁴⁰⁶³ Escape to the Mountain lest you be destroyed with the plain. But if you are already bound and constrained by the chain of necessity, reason thus with yourself; or rather let me reason thus with you. It is better both to attain the good and to keep the purification. But if it be impossible to do both it is surely better to be a little stained with your public affairs than to fall altogether short of grace; just as I think it better to undergo a slight punishment from father or master than to be put out of doors; and to be a little beamed upon than to be left in total darkness. And it is the part of wise men to choose, as in good things the greater and more perfect, so in evils the lesser and lighter. Wherefore do not overmuch dread the purification. For our success is always judged by comparison with our place in life by our just and merciful Judge; and often one who is in public life and has had small success has had a greater reward than one who in the enjoyment of liberty has not completely succeeded; as I think it more marvellous for a man to advance a little in fetters, than for one to run who is not carrying any weight; or to be only a little spattered in walking through mud, than to be perfectly clean when the road is clean. To give you a proof of what I have said:—Rahab the harlot was justified by one thing alone, her hospitality,⁴⁰⁶⁴ though she receives no praise for the rest of her conduct; and the Publican was exalted by one thing, his humility,⁴⁰⁶⁵ though he received no testimony for anything else; so that you may learn not easily to despair concerning yourself.

XX. But some will say, What shall I gain, if, when I am preoccupied by baptism, and have cut off myself by my haste from the pleasures of life, when it was in my power to give the reins to pleasure, and then to obtain grace? For the labourers in the vineyard who had worked the longest time gained nothing thereby, for equal wages were given to the very last.⁴⁰⁶⁶ You have delivered

⁴⁰⁶² ἐν ἑξουσίᾳ evidently means *Tui juris*—your own master.

⁴⁰⁶³ Gen. xix. 26.

⁴⁰⁶⁴ Josh. vi. 25; James ii. 25.

⁴⁰⁶⁵ Luke xviii. 14.

⁴⁰⁶⁶ Matt. xx. 1 sq.

me from some trouble, whoever you are who say this, because you have at last with much difficulty told the secret of your delay; and though I cannot applaud your shiftiness, I do applaud your confession. But come hither and listen to the interpretation of the parable, that you may not be injured by Scripture for want of information. First of all, there is no question here of baptism, but of those who believe at different times and enter the good vineyard of the Church. For from the day and hour at which each believed, from that day and hour he is required to work. And then, although they who entered first contributed more to the measure of the labour yet they did not contribute more to the measure of the purpose; nay perhaps even more was due to the last in respect of this, though the statement may seem paradoxical. For the cause of their later entrance was their later call to the work of the vineyard. In all other respects let us see how different they are. The first did not believe or enter till they had agreed on their hire; but the others came forward to do the work without an agreement, which is a proof of greater faith. And the first were found to be of an envious and murmuring nature, but no such charge is brought against the others. And to the first, that which was given was wages, though they were worthless fellows; to the last it was the free gift. So that the first were convicted of folly, and with reason deprived of the greater reward. Let us see what would have happened to them if they had been late. Why, the equal pay, evidently. How then can they blame the employer as unjust because of their equality? For all these things take away the merit of their labour from the first, although they were at work first; and therefore it turns out that the distribution of equal pay was just, if you measure the good will against the labour.


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XXI. But supposing that the Parable does sketch the power of the font according to your interpretation, what would prevent you, if you entered first, and bore the heat, from avoiding envy of the last, that by this very lovingkindness you might obtain more, and receive the reward, not as of grace but as of debt? And next, the workmen who receive the wages are those who have entered, not those who have missed, the vineyard; which last is like to be your case. So that if it were certain that you would obtain the Gift, though you are of such a mind, and maliciously keep back some of the labour, you might be forgiven for taking refuge in such arguments, and desiring to make unlawful gain out of the kindness of the master; though I might assure you that the very fact of being able to labour is a greater reward to any who is not altogether of a huckstering mind. But since there is a risk of your being altogether shut out of the vineyard through your bargaining, and losing the capital through stopping to pick up little gains, do let yourselves be persuaded by my words to forsake the false interpretations and contradictions, and to come forward without arguing to receive the Gift, lest you should be snatched away before you realize your hopes, and should find out that it was to your own loss that you devised these sophistries.

XXII. But then, you say, is not God merciful, and since He knows our thoughts and searches out our desires, will He not take the desire of Baptism instead of Baptism? You are speaking in riddles, if what you mean is that because of God's mercy the unenlightened is enlightened in His sight; and he is within the kingdom of heaven who merely desires to attain to it, but refrains from doing that which pertains to the kingdom. I will, however, speak out boldly my opinion on these

matters; and I think that all other sensible men will range themselves on my side. Of those who have received the gift, some were altogether alien from God and from salvation, both addicted to all manner of sin, and desirous to be bad; others were semivicious, and in a kind of mean state between good and bad; others again, while they did that which was evil, yet did not approve their own action, just as men in a fever are not pleased with their own sickness. And others even before they were illuminated were worthy of praise; partly by nature, and partly by the care with which they prepared themselves for Baptism. These after their initiation became evidently better, and less liable to fall; in the one case with a view to procuring good, and in the other in order to preserve it. And amongst these, those who gave in to *some* evil are better than those who were altogether bad; and better still than those who yielded a little, are those who were more zealous, and broke up their fallow ground before Baptism; they have the advantage over the others of having already laboured; for the font does not do away with good deeds as it does with sins. But better even than these are they who are also cultivating the Gift, and are polishing themselves to the utmost possible beauty.

XXIII. And so also in those who fail to receive the Gift, some are altogether animal or bestial, according as they are either foolish or wicked; and this, I think, has to be added to their other sins, that they have no reverence at all for this Gift, but look upon it as a mere gift—to be acquiesced in if given them, and if not given them, then to be neglected. Others know and honour the Gift, but put it off; some through laziness, some through greediness. Others are not in a position to receive it, perhaps on account of infancy,⁴⁰⁶⁷ or some perfectly involuntary circumstance through which they are prevented from receiving it, even if they wish. As then in the former case we found much difference, so too in this. They who altogether despise it are worse than they who neglect it through greed or carelessness. These are worse than they who have lost the Gift through ignorance or tyranny, for tyranny is nothing but an involuntary error.⁴⁰⁶⁸ And I think that the first will have to suffer punishment, as for all their sins, so for their contempt of baptism; and that the second will also have to suffer, but less, because it was not so much through wickedness as through folly that they wrought their failure; and that the third will be neither glorified nor punished by the righteous Judge, as unsealed and yet not wicked, but persons who have suffered rather than done wrong. For not every one who is not bad enough to be punished is good enough to be honoured; just as not every one who is not good enough to be honoured is bad enough to be punished. And I look upon it as well from another point of view. If you judge the murderously disposed man by his will alone,

⁴⁰⁶⁷ That S. Gregory did not reject infant Baptism is clear, from the directions given later on in this Oration (c. xxviii; and cf. c. xvii. s. fin.). He is here referring simply to the inability of infants to bring themselves to the font whereby through the mistaken scruples of parents many must have died unbaptized.

⁴⁰⁶⁸ i.e., The sins which are due altogether to external tyranny do not involve guilt, inasmuch as they are involuntary, whereas the guilt of sin is in the will.



apart from the act of murder, then you may reckon as baptized him who desired baptism apart from the reception of baptism. But if you cannot do the one how can you do the other? I cannot see it. Or, if you like, we will put it thus:—If desire in your opinion has equal power with actual baptism, then judge in the same way in regard to glory, and you may be content with longing for it, as if that were itself glory. And what harm is done you by your not attaining the actual glory, as long as you have the desire for it?

XXIV. Therefore since you have heard these words, come forward to it, and be enlightened, and your faces shall not be ashamed⁴⁰⁶⁹ through missing the Grace. Receive then the Enlightenment in due season, that darkness pursue you not, and catch you, and sever you from the Illumining. The night cometh when no man can work⁴⁰⁷⁰ after our departure hence. The one is the voice of David, the other of the True Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.⁴⁰⁷¹ And consider how Solomon reproves you who are too idle or lethargic, saying, How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard,⁴⁰⁷² and when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? You rely upon this or that, and “pretend pretences in sins;”⁴⁰⁷³ am waiting for Epiphany; I prefer Easter; I will wait for Pentecost.⁴⁰⁷⁴ It is better to be baptized with Christ, to rise with Christ on the Day of His Resurrection,⁴⁰⁷⁵ to honour the Manifestation of the Spirit. And what then? The end will come suddenly in a day for which thou lookest not, and in an hour that thou art not aware of; and then you will have for a companion lack of grace; and you will be famished in the midst of all those riches of goodness, though you ought to reap the opposite fruit from the opposite course, a harvest by diligence, and refreshment from the font, like the thirsty hart⁴⁰⁷⁶ that runs in haste to the spring, and quenches the

⁴⁰⁶⁹ Ps. xxxiv. 5.

⁴⁰⁷⁰ John xii. 35.

⁴⁰⁷¹ Ib. i. 4.

⁴⁰⁷² Prov. vi. 9.

⁴⁰⁷³ Ps. cxli. 4.

⁴⁰⁷⁴ The Festivals of Easter and Pentecost were set apart as early as the Second Century for the solemn administration of Holy Baptism; and S. Siricius Bishop of Rome about the time of S. Gregory of Nazianzus, states that all the Churches agreed in keeping these exclusively. But this is a mistake (though Van Espen says (II., c. i., tit. 2, c. 4) that S. Siricius acknowledges the existence of the different custom, but condemns it, and gives reference to ad. Himerum Tarraconensem, c. 2), for there is evidence that in many Churches the Epiphany also was thus observed, and in some Christmas also. But Tertullian (De Bapt.) says that no time is unsuitable. In the Western Church, however, Papal decrees, Conciliar Canons, and Imperial Capitularies from the VIth to the XIIIth. Centuries abound, limiting the administration, except in cases of sickness, to the two seasons of Easter and Pentecost, on the Vigils of which it is still provided for in the Missals. No doubt it was felt to be a very useful limitation, when most persons who were presented for Baptism were adults, and required preparation. When this ceased to be the case the rule gradually became obsolete, and has long ceased to be observed.

⁴⁰⁷⁵ Matt. xxiv. 50.

⁴⁰⁷⁶ Ps. xlii. 1.

labour of his race by water; and not to be in Ishmael's case, dried up for want of water,⁴⁰⁷⁷ or as the fable has it, punished by thirst in the midst of a spring.⁴⁰⁷⁸ It is a sad thing to let the market day go by and then to seek for work. It is a sad thing to let the Manna pass and then to long for food. It is a sad thing to take a counsel too late, and to become sensible of the loss only when it is impossible to repair it; that is, after our departure hence, and the bitter closing of the acts of each man's life, and the punishment of sinners, and the glory of the purified. Therefore do not delay in coming to grace, but hasten, lest the robber outstrip you, lest the adulterer pass you by, lest the insatiate be satisfied before you, lest the murderer seize the blessing first, or the publican or the fornicator, or any of these violent ones who take the Kingdom of heaven by force.⁴⁰⁷⁹ For it suffers violence willingly, and is tyrannized over through goodness.

XXV. Take my advice, my friend, and be slow to do evil, but swift to your salvation; for readiness to evil and tardiness to good are equally bad. If you are invited to a revel, be not swift to go; if to apostasy, leap away; if a company of evildoers say to you, "Come with us, share our bloodguiltiness, let us hide in the earth a righteous man unjustly,"⁴⁰⁸⁰ do not lend them even your ears. Thus you will make two very great gains; you will make known to the other his sin, and you will deliver yourself from evil company. But if David the Great say unto you, Come and let us rejoice in the Lord;⁴⁰⁸¹ or another Prophet, Come and let us ascend into the Mountain of the Lord;⁴⁰⁸² or our Saviour Himself, Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;⁴⁰⁸³ or, Arise, let us go hence, shining brightly, glittering above snow, whiter than milk,⁴⁰⁸⁴ shining above the sapphire stone; let us not resist or delay. Let us be like Peter and John, and let us hasten;⁴⁰⁸⁵ as they did to the Sepulchre and the Resurrection, so we to the Font; running together, racing against each other, striving to be first to obtain this Blessing. And say not, "Go away, and come again, and tomorrow I will be baptized,"⁴⁰⁸⁶ when you may have the blessing today. "I will have with me father, mother, brothers, wife, children, friends, and all whom I value, and then I will be saved; but it is not yet the fitting time for me to be made bright;" for if you say so, there is reason

⁴⁰⁷⁷ Gen. xix. 15. sqq.

⁴⁰⁷⁸ The allusion is to the well known story of Tantalus, whose punishment in hell was said to be that, being tormented with hunger and thirst, he was condemned to stand for ever in water up to his lips, but to be unable to drink, and to have a tree laden with luscious fruit within easy reach, but to be unable to gather of it.

⁴⁰⁷⁹ Matt. xi. 12.

⁴⁰⁸⁰ Prov. i. 11.

⁴⁰⁸¹ Ps. xcvi. 1.

⁴⁰⁸² Mic. iv. 2.

⁴⁰⁸³ Matt. xi. 28.

⁴⁰⁸⁴ The A.V. is here used, as more accurate than the LXX. The passage is quoted freely from Lam. iv. 7.

⁴⁰⁸⁵ John xx. 3.

⁴⁰⁸⁶ Prov. iii. 28.

to fear lest you should have as sharers of your sorrow those whom you hoped to have as sharers of your joy. If they will be with you, well;—but do not wait for them. For it is base to say, “But where is my offering for my baptism, and where is my baptismal robe, in which I shall be made bright, and where is what is wanted for the entertainment of my baptizers, that in these too I may become worthy of notice? For, as you see, all these things are necessary, and on account of this the Grace will be lessened.” Do not thus trifle with great things, or allow yourself to think so basely. The Sacrament is greater than the visible environment. Offer *yourself*; clothe yourself with Christ, feast me with your conduct; I rejoice to be thus affectionately treated, and God Who gives these great gifts rejoices thus. Nothing is great in the sight of God, but what the poor may give, so that the poor may not here also be outrun, for they cannot contend with the rich. In other matters there is a distinction between poor and rich, but here the more willing is the richer.

XXVI. Let nothing hinder you from going on, nor draw you away from your readiness. While your desire is still vehement, seize upon that which you desire. While the iron is hot, let it be tempered by the cold water, lest anything should happen in the interval, and put an end to your desire. I am Philip; do you be Candace’s Eunuch.⁴⁰⁸⁷ Do you also say, “See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?” Seize the opportunity; rejoice greatly in the blessing; and having spoken be baptized; and having been baptized be saved; and though you be an Ethiopian body, be made white in soul. Do not say, “A Bishop shall baptize me,—and he a Metropolitan,—and he of Jerusalem (for the Grace does not come of a place, but of the Spirit),—and he of noble birth, for it would be a sad thing for my nobility to be insulted by being baptized by a man of no family.” Do not say, “I do not mind a mere Priest, if he is a celibate, and a religious, and of angelic life; for it would be a sad thing for me to be defiled even in the moment of my cleansing.” Do not ask for credentials of the preacher or the baptizer. For another is his judge,⁴⁰⁸⁸ and the examiner of what thou canst not see. For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. But to thee let every one be trustworthy for purification, so only he is one of those who have been approved, not of those who are openly condemned, and not a stranger to the Church. Do not judge your judges, you who need healing; and do not make nice distinctions about the rank of those who shall cleanse you, or be critical about your spiritual fathers. One may be higher or lower than another, but all are higher than you. Look at it this way. One may be golden, another iron, but both are rings and have engraved on them the same royal image; and thus when they impress the wax, what difference is there between the seal of the one and that of the other? None. Detect the material in the wax, if you are so very clever. Tell me which is the impression of the iron ring, and which of the golden. And how do they come to be one? The difference is in the material and not in the seal. And so anyone can be your baptizer; for though one may excel another in his life, yet the grace of baptism is the same, and any one may be your consecrator who is formed in the same faith.

⁴⁰⁸⁷ Acts viii. 36.

⁴⁰⁸⁸ 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

XXVII. Do not disdain to be baptized with a poor man, if you are rich; or if you are noble, with one who is lowborn; or if you are a master, with one who is up to the present time your slave. Not even so will you be humbling yourself as Christ, unto Whom you are baptized today, Who for your sake took upon Himself even the form of a slave. From the day of your new birth all the old marks were effaced, and Christ was put upon all in one form. Do not disdain to confess your sins, knowing how John baptized, that by present shame you may escape from future shame (for this too is a part of the future punishment); and prove that you really hate sin by making a shew of it openly, and triumphing over it as worthy of contempt. Do not reject the medicine of exorcism, nor refuse it because of its length. This too is a touchstone of your right disposition for grace. What labour have you to do compared with that of the Queen of Ethiopia,⁴⁰⁸⁹ who arose and came from the utmost part of the earth to see the wisdom of Solomon? And behold a Greater than Solomon is here⁴⁰⁹⁰ in the judgment of those who reason maturely. Do not hesitate either at length of journey, or distance by sea; or fire, if this too lies before you; or of any other, small or great, of the hindrances that you may attain to the gift. But if without any labour and trouble at all you may obtain that which you desire, what folly it is to put off the gift: “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,”⁴⁰⁹¹ Esaias invites you, “and he that hath no money, come buy wine and milk, without money and without price.” O swiftness of His mercy: O easiness of the Covenant: This blessing may be bought by you merely for willing it; He accepts the very desire as a great price; He thirsts to be thirsted for; He gives to drink to all who desire to drink; He takes it as a kindness to be asked for the kindness; He is ready and liberal; He gives with more pleasure than others receive.⁴⁰⁹² Only let us not be condemned for frivolity by asking for little, and for what is unworthy of the Giver. Blessed is he from whom Jesus asks drink, as He did from that Samaritan woman, and gives a well of water springing up unto eternal life.⁴⁰⁹³ Blessed is he that soweth beside all waters, and upon every soul, tomorrow to be ploughed and watered, which today the ox and the ass tread, while it is dry and without water,⁴⁰⁹⁴ and oppressed with unreason. And blessed is he who, though he be a “valley of rushes,”⁴⁰⁹⁵ is watered out of the House of the Lord; for he is made fruitbearing instead of rushbearing, and produces that which is for the food of man, not that which is rough and unprofitable. And for the sake of this we must be very careful not to miss the Grace.

XXVIII. Be it so, some will say, in the case of those who ask for Baptism; what have you to say about those who are still children, and conscious neither of the loss nor of the grace? Are we

⁴⁰⁸⁹ 1 Kings x. 1.

⁴⁰⁹⁰ Matt. xii. 42.

⁴⁰⁹¹ Isa. lv. 1.

⁴⁰⁹² Acts xx. 35.

⁴⁰⁹³ John iv. 7.

⁴⁰⁹⁴ Isa. xxxii. 20.

⁴⁰⁹⁵ Joel iii. 18; The Hebrew word rendered “rushes” by the LXX is in our Hebrew text Shittim—acacia trees.

to baptize them too? Certainly, if any danger presses. For it is better that they should be unconsciously sanctified than that they should depart unsealed and uninitiated.

A proof of this is found in the Circumcision on the eighth day, which was a sort of typical seal, and was conferred on children before they had the use of reason. And so is the anointing of the doorposts,⁴⁰⁹⁶ which preserved the firstborn, though applied to things which had no consciousness. But in respect of others⁴⁰⁹⁷ I give my advice to wait till the end of the third year, or a little more or less, when they may be able to listen and to answer something about the Sacrament; that, even though they do not perfectly understand it, yet at any rate they may know the outlines; and then to sanctify them in soul and body with the great sacrament of our consecration. For this is how the matter stands; at that time they begin to be responsible for their lives, when reason is matured, and they learn the mystery of life (for of sins of ignorance owing to their tender years they have no account to give), and it is far more profitable on all accounts to be fortified by the Font, because of the sudden assaults of danger that befall us, stronger than our helpers.

XXIX. But, one says, Christ was thirty years old when He was baptized,⁴⁰⁹⁸ and that although He was God; and do you bid us hurry our Baptism?—You have solved the difficulty when you say He was God. For He was absolute cleansing; He had no need of cleansing; but it was for you that He was purified, just as it was for you that, though He had not flesh, yet He is clothed with flesh. Nor was there any danger to Him from putting off Baptism, for He had the ordering of His own Passion as of His own Birth. But in your case the danger is to no small interests, if you were to depart after a birth to corruption alone, and without being clothed with incorruption. And there is this further point for me to consider, that that particular time of baptism was a necessity for Him, but your case is not the same. He manifested Himself in the thirtieth year after His birth and not before; first, in order that He might not appear ostentatious, which is a condition belonging to vulgar minds; and next, because that age tests virtue thoroughly, and is the right time to teach. And since it was needful for Him to undergo the passion which saves the world, it was needful also that all things which belong to the passion should fit into the passion; the Manifestation, the Baptism, the Witness from Heaven, the Proclamation, the concourse of the multitude, the Miracles; and that they should be as it were one body, not torn asunder, nor broken apart by intervals. For out of the Baptism and Proclamation arose that earthquake of people coming together,⁴⁰⁹⁹ for so Scripture calls that time;⁴¹⁰⁰ and out of the multitude arose the shewing of the signs and the miracles that lead up to the Gospel. And out of these came the jealousy, and from this the hatred, and out of the hatred the circumstance of the plot against Him, and the betrayal; and out of these the Cross, and the other

⁴⁰⁹⁶ Exod. xii. 22.

⁴⁰⁹⁷ i.e. when there is no danger.

⁴⁰⁹⁸ Luke iii. 23.

⁴⁰⁹⁹ "All the City was moved." A.V., lit. "shaken as by earthquake."

⁴¹⁰⁰ Matt. xxi. 10.



events by which our Salvation has been effected. Such are the reasons in the case of Christ⁴¹⁰¹ so far as we can attain to them. And perhaps another more secret reason might be found.

XXX. But for you, what necessity is there that by following the examples which are far above you, you should do a thing so ill-advised for yourself? For there are many other details of the Gospel History which are quite different to what happens nowadays, and the seasons of which do not correspond. For instance Christ fasted a little before His temptation, we before Easter. As far as the fasting days are concerned it is the same,⁴¹⁰² but the difference in the seasons is no little one. He armed Himself with them against temptation; but to us this fast is symbolical of dying with Christ, and it is a purification in preparation for the festival. And He fasted absolutely for forty days, for He was God; but we measure our fasting by our power, even though some are led by zeal to rush beyond their strength. Again, He gave the Sacrament of the Passover to His Disciples in an upper chamber, and after supper, and one day before He suffered; but we celebrate it in Houses of Prayer, and before food,⁴¹⁰³ and after His resurrection. He rose again the third day; our resurrection is not till after a long time. But matters which have to do with Him are neither abruptly separated from us, nor yet yoked together with those which concern us in point of time; but they were handed down to us just so far as to be patterns of what we should do, and then they carefully avoided an entire and exact resemblance.

XXXI. If then you will listen to me, you will bid a long farewell to all such arguments, and you will jump at this Blessing, and begin to struggle in a twofold conflict; first, to prepare yourself for baptism by purifying yourself; and next, to preserve the baptismal gift; for it is a matter of equal difficulty to obtain a blessing which we have not, and to keep it when we have gained it. For often what zeal has acquired sloth has destroyed; and what hesitation has lost diligence has regained. A great assistance to the attainment of what you desire are vigils, fasts, sleeping on the ground, prayers, tears, pity of and almsgiving to those who are in need. And let these be your thanksgiving for what you have received, and at the same time your safeguard of them. You have the benefit to remind you of many commandments; so do not transgress them. Does a poor man approach you? Remember how poor you once were, and how rich you were made. One in want of bread or of drink, perhaps another Lazarus,⁴¹⁰⁴ is cast at your gate; respect the Sacramental Table to which you have approached, the Bread of Which you have partaken, the Cup in Which you have communicated,⁴¹⁰⁵ being consecrated by the Sufferings of Christ. If a stranger fall at your feet, homeless and a foreigner,

⁴¹⁰¹ i.e., the reasons why He was not baptized till He was thirty.

⁴¹⁰² Here is an indication that the Forty Days of Lent were a well known observance in S. Gregory's time. At the Council of Nicæa this period was taken for granted. The Great Fast of the Eastern Church begins on the Monday after the Sunday corresponding to our Quinquagesima, and the Fast is kept to some extent even on Sunday.

⁴¹⁰³ Note the rule of Fasting Communion here recognized as universal.

⁴¹⁰⁴ Luke xvi. 19 sq.

⁴¹⁰⁵ Note that this allusion implies that Communion in both Kinds was given separately, as in the Anglican Church, not by intinction, as in the present Orthodox Eastern Church.

welcome in him Him who for your sake was a stranger, and that among His own,⁴¹⁰⁶ and who came to dwell in you by His grace, and who drew you towards the heavenly dwelling place. Be a Zaccheus,⁴¹⁰⁷ who yesterday was a Publican, and is to-day of liberal soul; offer all to the coming in of Christ, that though small in bodily stature you may show yourself great, nobly contemplating Christ. A sick or a wounded man lies before you; respect your own health, and the wounds from which Christ delivered you. If you see one naked clothe him, in honour of your own garment of incorruption, which is Christ, for as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.⁴¹⁰⁸ If you find a debtor falling at your feet,⁴¹⁰⁹ tear up every document, whether just or unjust. Remember the ten thousand talents which Christ forgave you, and be not a harsh exactor of a smaller debt—and that from whom? From your fellow servant, you who were forgiven so much more by the Master. Otherwise you will have to give satisfaction to His mercy, which you would not imitate and take as your copy.

XXXII. Let the laver be not for your body only, but also for the image of God in you; not merely a washing away of sins in you, but also a correction of your temper; let it not only wash away the old filth, but let it purify the fountainhead. Let it not only move you to honourable acquisition, but let it teach you also honourably to lose possession; or, which is more easy, to make restitution of what you have wrongfully acquired. For what profit is it that your sin should have been forgiven you, but the loss which you have inflicted should not be repaired to him whom you have injured? Two sins are on your conscience, the one that you made a dishonest gain, the other that you retained the gains; you received forgiveness for the one, but in respect of the other you are still in sin, for you have still possession of what belongs to another; and your sin has not been put to an end, but only divided by the time which has elapsed. Part of it was perpetrated before your Baptism, but part remains after your Baptism; for Baptism carries forgiveness of Past, not of Present sins; and its purification must not be played with, but be genuinely impressed upon you; you must be made perfectly bright, and not be merely coloured; you must receive the gift, not of a mere covering of your sins, but of a taking them clean away. Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven⁴¹¹⁰...this is done by the complete cleansing...and whose sins are hidden...this belongs to those who are not yet healed in their deepest soul. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin...This is a third class of sinners, whose actions are not praiseworthy, but who are innocent of intention.

XXXIII. What say I then, and what is my argument? Yesterday you were a Canaanite soul bent together⁴¹¹¹ by sin; today you have been made straight by the Word. Do not be bent gain, and


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⁴¹⁰⁶ John i. 11.

⁴¹⁰⁷ Luke xix. 1 sq.

⁴¹⁰⁸ Galat. iii. 27.

⁴¹⁰⁹ Matt. xviii. 23, &c.

⁴¹¹⁰ Ps. xxxii. 1.

⁴¹¹¹ Luke xiii. 11, which S. Gregory has apparently mixed with a recollection of Matt. xv. 21.

condemned to the earth, as if weighed down by the Devil with a wooden collar, nor get an incurable curvature. Yesterday you were being dried up⁴¹¹² by an abundant hæmorrhage, for you were pouring out crimson sin; today stanchèd and flourishing again, for you have touched the hem of Christ and your issue has been stayed. Guard, I pray you, the cleansing lest you should again have a hæmorrhage, and not be able to lay hold of Christ to steal salvation; for Christ does not like to be stolen from often, though He is very merciful. Yesterday you were flung upon a bed, exhausted and paralyzed, and you had no one when the water should be troubled to put you into the pool.⁴¹¹³ Today you have Him Who is in one Person Man and God, or rather God and Man. You were raised up from your bed, or rather you took up your bed, and publicly acknowledged the benefit. Do not again be thrown upon your bed by sinning, in the evil rest of a body paralyzed by its pleasures. But as you now are, so walk, mindful of the command,⁴¹¹⁴ Behold thou art made whole; sin no more lest a worse thing happen unto thee if thou prove thyself bad after the blessing thou hast received. You have heard the loud voice, Lazarus, come forth,⁴¹¹⁵ as you lay in the tomb; not, however, after four days, but after many days; and you were loosed from the bonds of your graveclothes. Do not again become dead, nor live with those who dwell in the tombs;⁴¹¹⁶ nor bind yourself with the bonds of your own sins;⁴¹¹⁷ for it is uncertain whether you will rise again from the tomb till the last and universal resurrection, which will bring every work into judgment,⁴¹¹⁸ not to be healed, but to be judged, and to give account of all which for good or evil it has treasured up.

XXXIV. If you were full of leprosy, that shapeless evil, yet you scraped off the evil matter, and received again the Image whole. Shew your cleansing to me your Priest, that I may recognize how much more precious it is than the legal one. Do not range yourself with the nine unthankful men, but imitate the tenth.⁴¹¹⁹ For although he was a Samaritan, yet he was of better mind than the others. Make certain that you will not break out again with evil ulcers, and find the indisposition of your body hard to heal. Yesterday meanness and avarice were withering your hand; to-day let liberality and kindness stretch it out.⁴¹²⁰ It is a noble cure for a weak hand to disperse abroad, to give to the poor,⁴¹²¹ to pour out the things which we possess abundantly, till we reach the very

4112 Matt. ix. 20.

4113 John v. 1, &c.

4114 Ib. v. 14.

4115 John xi. 43.

4116 Mark v. 3.

4117 Ps. lxxviii. 9.

4118 Eccles. xii. 14.

4119 Luke xvii. 12, &c.

4120 Ib. vi. 6.

4121 Ps. cxii. 9.

bottom; and perhaps this will gush forth food for you, as for the woman of Sarepta,⁴¹²² and especially if you happen to be feeding an Elias, to recognize that it is a good abundance to be needy for the sake of Christ, Who for our sakes became poor. If you were deaf and dumb, let the Word sound⁴¹²³ in your ears, or rather keep there Him Who hath sounded. Do not shut your ears to the Instruction of the Lord, and to His Counsel, like the adder to charms.⁴¹²⁴ If you are blind and unenlightened, lighten your eyes that you sleep not in death.⁴¹²⁵ In God's Light see light,⁴¹²⁶ and in the Spirit of God be enlightened by the Son, That Threefold and Undivided Light. If you receive all the Word, you will bring therewith upon your own soul all the healing powers of Christ, with which separately these individuals were healed. Only be not ignorant of the measure of grace; only let not the enemy, while you sleep, maliciously sow tares.⁴¹²⁷ Only take care that as by your cleansing you have become an object of enmity to the Evil One, you do not again make yourself an object of pity by sin. Only be careful lest, while rejoicing and lifted up above measure by the blessing, you fall again through pride. Only be diligent as to your cleansing, "setting ascensions in your heart,"⁴¹²⁸ and keep with all diligence the remission which you have received as a gift, in order that, while the remission comes from God, the preservation of it may come from yourself also.

XXXV. How shall this be? Remember always the parable,⁴¹²⁹ and so will you best and most perfectly help yourself. The unclean and malignant spirit is gone out of you, being chased by baptism. He will not submit to the expulsion, he will not resign himself to be houseless and homeless: He goes through waterless places, dry of the Divine Stream, and there he desires to abide. He wanders, seeking rest; he finds none. He lights on baptized souls, whose sins the font has washed away. He fears the water; he is choked with the cleansing, as the Legion were in the sea.⁴¹³⁰ Again he returns to the house whence he came out. He is shameless, he is contentious, he makes a fresh assault upon it, he makes a new attempt. If he finds that Christ has taken up His abode there, and has filled the place which he had vacated, he is driven back again, and goes off without success and is become an object of pity in his wandering state. But if he finds in you a

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4122 1 Kings xvii. 8, &c.

4123 Mark vii. 32.

4124 Ps. lviii. 4, 5.

4125 Ib. xiii. 3.

4126 Ib. xxxvi. 9.

4127 Matt. xiii. 25.

4128 Ps. lxxxiv. 6. So LXX. and Vulgate. Various interpretations are given of these Steps, but they differ only by indicating different virtues and good works as especially intended, and may well be summed up under the three heads of the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways of salvation. A man can set in his heart such a "going up" by the co-operation of grace and free will.—NEALE & LITTLEDALE in PSS.

4129 Luke xi. 24.

4130 Mark v. 13.

place, swept and garnished indeed, but empty and idle, equally ready to take in this or that which shall first occupy it, he makes a leap into it, he takes up his abode there with a larger train; and the last state is worse than the first, inasmuch as then there was a hope of amendment and safety, but now the evil is rampant, and drags in sin by its flight from good, and therefore the possession is more secure to him who dwells there.

XXXVI. I will remind you again about Illuminations, and that often, and will reckon them up from Holy Scripture. For I myself shall be happier for remembering them (for what is sweeter than light to those who have tasted light?) and I will dazzle you with my words. There is sprung up a light for the righteous, and its partner joyful gladness.⁴¹³¹ And, The light of the righteous is everlasting;⁴¹³² and Thou art shining wondrously from the everlasting mountains, is said to God, I think of the Angelic powers which aid our efforts after good. And you have heard David's words; The Lord is my Light and my Salvation, whom then shall I fear?⁴¹³³ And now he asks that the Light and the Truth may be sent forth for him,⁴¹³⁴ now giving thanks that he has a share in it, in that the Light of God is marked upon him;⁴¹³⁵ that is, that the signs of the illumination given are impressed upon him and recognized. One light alone let us shun—that which is the offspring of the baleful fire; let us not walk in the light of our fire,⁴¹³⁶ and in the flame which we have kindled. For I know a cleansing fire which Christ came to send upon the earth,⁴¹³⁷ and He Himself is anagogically⁴¹³⁸ called a Fire. This Fire takes away whatsoever is material and of evil habit; and this He desires to kindle with all speed, for He longs for speed in doing us good, since He gives us even coals of fire to help us.⁴¹³⁹ I know also a fire which is not cleansing, but avenging; either that fire of Sodom⁴¹⁴⁰ which He pours down on all sinners,⁴¹⁴¹ mingled with brimstone and storms, or that which is prepared for the Devil and his Angels⁴¹⁴² or that which proceeds from the face of the Lord, and shall burn up

4131 Ps. xcvi. 11.

4132 Prov. xiii. 9.

4133 Ps. lxxvi. 4.

4134 Ib. xliii. 3.

4135 Ib. iv. 7.

4136 Isa. i. 11.

4137 Luke xii. 49.

4138 Anagoge is one of the three methods of mystical interpretation, according to the distich,

Littera scripta docet: Quid credas allegoria:

Quid speres anagoge; Quid agas tropologia.

4139 cf. Isa. xlvii. 14. LXX.

4140 Gen. xix. 24.

4141 Ps. xi. 6.

4142 Matt. xxv. 41.

his enemies round about;⁴¹⁴³ and one even more fearful still than these, the unquenchable fire⁴¹⁴⁴ which is ranged with the worm that dieth not but is eternal for the wicked. For all these belong to the destroying power; though some may prefer even in this place to take a more merciful view⁴¹⁴⁵ of this fire, worthily of Him That chastises.

XXXVII. And as I know of two kinds of fire, so also do I of light. The one is the light of our ruling power directing our steps according to the will of God; the other is a deceitful and meddling one, quite contrary to the true light, though pretending to be that light, that it may cheat us by its appearance. This really is darkness, yet has the appearance of noonday, the high perfection of light. And so I read that passage of those who continually flee in darkness at noonday;⁴¹⁴⁶ for this is really night, and yet is thought to be bright light by those who have been ruined by luxury. For what saith David? “Night was around me and I knew it not, for I thought that my luxury was enlightenment.”⁴¹⁴⁷ But such are they, and in this condition; but let us kindle for ourselves the light of knowledge.⁴¹⁴⁸ This will be done by sowing unto righteousness, and reaping the fruit of life, for action is the patron of contemplation, that amongst other things we may learn also what is the true light, and what the false, and be saved from falling unawares into evil wearing the guise of good. Let us be made light, as it was said to the disciples by the Great Light, ye are the light of the world.⁴¹⁴⁹ Let us be made lights in the world, holding forth the Word of Life;⁴¹⁵⁰ that is, let us be made a quickening power to others. Let us lay hold of the Godhead; let us lay hold of the First and Brightest Light. Let us walk towards Him shining, before our feet stumble upon dark and hostile mountains.⁴¹⁵¹ While it is day let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness,⁴¹⁵² which are the dishonesties of the night.

XXXVIII. Let us cleanse every member, Brethren, let us purify every sense; let nothing in us be imperfect or of our first birth; let us leave nothing unilluminated. Let us enlighten our eyes,⁴¹⁵³ that we may look straight on, and not bear in ourselves any harlot idol through curious and busy

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⁴¹⁴³ Ps. xcvi. 3.

⁴¹⁴⁴ Mark ix. 44, &c.

⁴¹⁴⁵ i.e. To view the Fire there spoken of as Temporal punishment, with a purpose of correcting and reforming the sinner.

This is not S. Gregory's own view of the meaning of the passage, though he admits it to be tenable.

⁴¹⁴⁶ Isa. xvi. 3.

⁴¹⁴⁷ A strange paraphrase of the last clause of Ps. cxxxix. 11, in the LXX., “And I said, then the darkness shall swallow me, and night is enlightenment in my luxury.”

⁴¹⁴⁸ Thus LXX. in Hosea x. 12, where we read “Break up your fallow ground.”

⁴¹⁴⁹ Matt. v. 14.

⁴¹⁵⁰ Phil. ii. 15, 16.

⁴¹⁵¹ Jer. xlii. 16.

⁴¹⁵² Rom. xiii. 13.

⁴¹⁵³ Prov. iv. 25.

sight; for even though we might not worship lust, yet our soul would be defiled. If there be beam or mote,⁴¹⁵⁴ let us purge it away, that we may be able to see those of others also. Let us be enlightened in our ears; let us be enlightened in our tongue, that we may hearken what the Lord God will speak,⁴¹⁵⁵ and that He may cause⁴¹⁵⁶ us to hear His lovingkindness in the morning, and that we may be made to hear of joy and gladness,⁴¹⁵⁷ spoken into godly ears, that we may not be a sharp sword, nor a whetted razor,⁴¹⁵⁸ nor turn under our tongue labour and toil,⁴¹⁵⁹ but that we may speak the Wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden Wisdom,⁴¹⁶⁰ reverencing the fiery tongues.⁴¹⁶¹ Let us be healed also in the smell, that we be not effeminate; and be sprinkled with dust instead of sweet perfumes,⁴¹⁶² but may smell the Ointment that was poured out for us,⁴¹⁶³ spiritually receiving it; and so formed and transformed by it, that from us too a sweet odour may be smelled. Let us cleanse our touch, our taste, our throat, not touching them over gently, nor delighting in smooth things, but handling them as is worthy of Him, the Word That was made flesh for us; and so far following the example of Thomas,⁴¹⁶⁴ not pampering them with dainties and sauces, those brethren of a more baleful pampering,⁴¹⁶⁵ but tasting and learning that the Lord is good,⁴¹⁶⁶ with the better and abiding taste; and not for a short while refreshing that baneful and thankless dust, which lets pass and does not hold that which is given to it; but delighting it with the words which are sweeter than honey.⁴¹⁶⁷

XXXIX. And in addition to what has been said, it is good with our head cleansed, as the head which is the workshop of the senses is cleansed, to hold fast the Head of Christ,⁴¹⁶⁸ from which the whole body is fitly joined together and compacted; and to cast down our sin that exalted itself, when it would exalt us above our better part. It is good also for the shoulder to be sanctified and purified that it may be able to take up the Cross of Christ, which not everyone can easily do. It is

⁴¹⁵⁴ Matt. vii. 2.

⁴¹⁵⁵ Ps. lxxxv. 8.

⁴¹⁵⁶ Ib. cxliii. 8.

⁴¹⁵⁷ Ib. li. 8.

⁴¹⁵⁸ Ib. lvii. 4; lii. 2.

⁴¹⁵⁹ Ib. x. 7.

⁴¹⁶⁰ 1 Cor. ii. 7.

⁴¹⁶¹ Acts ii. 3.

⁴¹⁶² Isa. iii. 34.

⁴¹⁶³ Cant. i. 3.

⁴¹⁶⁴ John xx. 28.

⁴¹⁶⁵ Quia gula est parens immunditiæ et luxuriæ.

⁴¹⁶⁶ Ps. xxxiv. 8.

⁴¹⁶⁷ Ps. cxix. 103.

⁴¹⁶⁸ Ephes. iv. 16.

good for the hands to be consecrated, and the feet; the one that they may in every place be lifted up holy;⁴¹⁶⁹ and that they may lay hold of the discipline⁴¹⁷⁰ of Christ, lest the Lord at any time be angered; and that the Word may gain credence by action, as was the case with that which was given in the hand of a prophet;⁴¹⁷¹ the other, that they be not swift to shed blood, nor to run to evil,⁴¹⁷² but that they be prompt to run to the Gospel and the Prize⁴¹⁷³ of the high Calling, and to receive Christ Who washes and cleanses them. And if there be also a cleansing of that belly which receiveth and digesteth the food of the Word, it were good also; not to make it a god by luxury and the meat that perisheth,⁴¹⁷⁴ but rather to give it all possible cleansing, and to make it more spare, that it may receive the Word of God at the very heart, and grieve honourably over the sins of Israel.⁴¹⁷⁵ I find also the heart and inward parts deemed worthy of honour. David convinces me of this, when he prays that a clean heart may be created in him, and a right spirit renewed in his inward parts;⁴¹⁷⁶ meaning, I think, the mind and its movements or thoughts.

XL. And what of the loins, or reins, for we must not pass these over? Let the purification take hold of these also. Let our loins be girded about and kept in check by continence, as the Law bade Israel of old when partaking of the Passover.⁴¹⁷⁷ For none comes out of Egypt purely, or escapes the Destroyer, except he who has disciplined these. And let the reins be changed by that good conversion by which they transfer all the affections to God, so that they can say, Lord, all my desire is before Thee,⁴¹⁷⁸ and the day of man have I not desired;⁴¹⁷⁹ for you must be a man of desires,⁴¹⁸⁰ but they must be those of the spirit. For thus you would destroy the dragon that carries the greater part of his strength upon his navel and his loins,⁴¹⁸¹ by slaying the power that comes to him from these. Do not be surprised at my giving a more abundant honour to our uncomely parts,⁴¹⁸² mortifying them and making them chaste by my speech, and standing up against the flesh. Let us give to God


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⁴¹⁶⁹ 1 Tim. ii. 8.

⁴¹⁷⁰ Ps. ii. 12.

⁴¹⁷¹ Hag. i. 1.

⁴¹⁷² Mal. i. 1 sq.; Prov. i. 16.

⁴¹⁷³ Phil. iii. 14.

⁴¹⁷⁴ John vi. 27.

⁴¹⁷⁵ Jer. iv. 19.

⁴¹⁷⁶ Ps. li. 10.

⁴¹⁷⁷ Exod. xii. 11.

⁴¹⁷⁸ Ps. xxxviii. 9.

⁴¹⁷⁹ Job xvii. 16.

⁴¹⁸⁰ Dan. x. 11.

⁴¹⁸¹ Job xxxix. 16.

⁴¹⁸² 1 Cor. xii. 23.

all our members which are upon the earth;⁴¹⁸³ let us consecrate them all; not the lobe of the liver⁴¹⁸⁴ or the kidneys with the fat, nor some part of our bodies now this now that (why should we despise the rest?); but let us bring ourselves entire, let us be reasonable holocausts,⁴¹⁸⁵ perfect sacrifices; and let us not make only the shoulder or the breast a portion for the Priest to take away,⁴¹⁸⁶ for that would be a small thing, but let us give ourselves entire, that we may receive back ourselves entire; for this is to receive entirely, when we give ourselves to God and offer as a sacrifice our own salvation.

XLI. Besides all this and before all, keep I pray you the good deposit, by which I live and work, and which I desire to have as the companion of my departure; with which I endure all that is so distressful, and despise all delights; the confession of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. This I commit unto you to-day; with this I will baptize you and make you grow. This I give you to share, and to defend all your life, the One Godhead and Power, found in the Three in Unity, and comprising the Three separately, not unequal, in substances or natures, neither increased nor diminished by superiorities or inferiorities; in every respect equal, in every respect the same; just as the beauty and the greatness of the heavens is one; the infinite conjunction of Three Infinite Ones, Each God when considered in Himself; as the Father so the Son, as the Son so the Holy Ghost; the Three One God when contemplated together; Each God because Consubstantial; One God because of the Monarchia. No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three I think of Him as the Whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me.⁴¹⁸⁷ I cannot grasp the greatness of That One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the Rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the Undivided Light.

XLII. Do you fear to speak of Generation lest you should attribute aught of passion to the impassible God? I on the other hand fear to speak of Creation, lest I should destroy God by the insult and the untrue division, either cutting the Son away from the Father, or from the Son the

⁴¹⁸³ Col. iii. 5.

⁴¹⁸⁴ Levit. iii. 4. The Mosaic Law ordered that the upper part of the liver and the kidneys, together with the fat, should in creation sacrifices be consecrated to God; signifying that anger (which was intimated by the liver, which produces bile), and lust (signified by the kidneys and the fat) should especially be sacrificed to God. Again Moses assigned the shoulder and the breast of some sacrifices to the Priests, hinting obscurely at this, that we ought to take care to offer our hearts to the Priests by confession (for the heart is signified by the breast which protects it) and also our actions, which are intended by the shoulder, that by the Priest they may be presented to God. But the Apostle bids us mortify all our members which are upon the earth, and offer ourselves entire as a sacrifice to God, destroying with the sword of the Word of God all our evil and corrupt affections.—NICETAS.

⁴¹⁸⁵ Rom. xii. 1.

⁴¹⁸⁶ Levit. vii. 34.

⁴¹⁸⁷ i.e. If I think of One Blessed Person, the other Two are not in my mind, and so the greater part of God escapes me.

Substance of the Spirit. For this paradox is involved, that not only is a created Life foisted into the Godhead by those who measure Godhead badly; but even this created life is divided against itself. For as these low earthly minds make the Son subject to the Father, so again is the rank of the Spirit made inferior to that of the Son, until both God and created life are insulted by the new Theology. No, my friends, there is nothing servile in the Trinity, nothing created, nothing accidental, as I have heard one of the wise⁴¹⁸⁸ say. If I yet pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ, says the Apostle;⁴¹⁸⁹ and if I yet worshipped a creature, or were baptized into a creature, I should not be made divine, nor have changed my first birth. What shall I say to those who worship Astarte or Chemosh, the abomination of the Sidonians, or the likeness of a star,⁴¹⁹⁰ a god a little above them to these idolaters, but yet a creature and a piece of workmanship, when I myself either do not worship Two of Those into Whose united Name I am baptized, or else worship my fellow-servants, for they are fellow-servants, even if a little higher in the scale; for differences must exist among fellow-servants.

XLIII. I should like to call the Father the greater, because from him flows both the Equality and the Being of the Equals (this will be granted on all hands), but I am afraid to use the word Origin, lest I should make Him the Origin of Inferiors, and thus insult Him by precedencies of honour. For the lowering of those Who are from Him is no glory to the Source. Moreover, I look with suspicion at your insatiate desire, for fear you should take hold of this word Greater, and divide the Nature, using the word Greater in *all* senses, whereas it does not apply to the Nature, but only to Origination. For in the Consubstantial Persons there is nothing greater or less in point of Substance. I would honour the Son as Son before the Spirit, but Baptism consecrating me through the Spirit does not allow of this. But are you afraid of being reproached with Tritheism? Do you take possession of this good thing, the Unity in the Three, and leave me to fight the battle. Let me be the shipbuilder, and do you use the ship; or if another is the builder of the ship, take me for the architect of the house, and do you live in it with safety, though you spent no labour upon it. You shall not have a less prosperous voyage, or a less safe habitation than I who built them, because you have not laboured upon them. See how great is my indulgence; see the goodness of the Spirit; the war shall be mine, yours the achievement; I will be under fire, and you shall live in peace; but join with your defender in prayer, and give me your hand by the Faith. I have three stones which I will sling at the Philistine;⁴¹⁹¹ I have three inspirations against the son of the Sareptan,⁴¹⁹² with which I will quicken the slain; I have three floods against the faggots with which I will consecrate

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⁴¹⁸⁸ S. Gregory Thaumaturgus.

⁴¹⁸⁹ Galat. i. 10.

⁴¹⁹⁰ Amos v. 26.

⁴¹⁹¹ 1 Sam. xvii. 49.

⁴¹⁹² 1 Kings xvii. 21.

the Sacrifice with water, raising the most unexpected fire;⁴¹⁹³ and I will throw down the prophets of shame by the power of the Sacrament.

XLIV. What need have I any more of speech? It is the time for teaching, not for controversy. I protest before God and the elect Angels,⁴¹⁹⁴ be thou baptized in this faith. If thy heart is written upon in some other way than as my teaching demands, come and have the writing changed; I am no unskilled calligrapher of these truths. I write that which is written upon my own heart; and I teach that which I have been taught, and have kept from the beginning up to these hoar hairs.⁴¹⁹⁵ Mine is the risk; be mine also the reward of being the Director of your soul, and consecrating you by Baptism. But if you are already rightly disposed, and marked with the good inscription, see that you keep what is written, and remain unchanged in a changing time concerning an unchanging Thing. Follow Pilate's example in the better sense; you who are rightly written on, imitate him who wrote wrongfully. Say to those who would persuade you differently, what I have written, I have written.⁴¹⁹⁶ For indeed I should be ashamed if, while that which was wrong remained inflexible, that which is right should be so easily bent aside; whereas we ought to be easily bent to that which is better from that which is worse, but immovable from the better to the worse. If it be thus, and according to this teaching that you come to Baptism, lo I will not refrain my lips,⁴¹⁹⁷ lo I lend my hands to the Spirit; let us hasten your salvation. The Spirit is eager, the Consecrator is ready, the Gift is prepared. But if you still halt and will not receive the perfectness of the Godhead, go and look for someone else to baptize—or rather to drown you: I have no time to cut the Godhead, and to make you dead in the moment of your regeneration, that you should have neither the Gift nor the Hope of Grace, but should in so short a time make shipwreck of your salvation. For whatever you may subtract from the Deity of the Three, you will have overthrown the whole, and destroyed your own being made perfect.

XLV. But not yet perhaps is there formed upon your soul any writing good or bad; and you want to be written upon today, and formed by us unto perfection. Let us go within the cloud. Give me the tables of your heart; I will be your Moses, though this be a bold thing to say; I will write on them with the finger of God a new Decalogue.⁴¹⁹⁸ I will write on them a shorter method of salvation. And if there be any heretical or unreasoning beast, let him remain below, or he will run the risk of being stoned by the Word of truth. I will baptize you and make you a disciple in the

⁴¹⁹³ Ib. xviii. 33.

⁴¹⁹⁴ 1 Tim. v. 21.

⁴¹⁹⁵ Supposing S. Gregory's birth to have been in 325, the earliest date which seems at all probable, he would be under 60 in 381, when this Oration was delivered; so that the expression on the text must be held to be a rhetorical exaggeration. Suidas, however, pushes back the date of his birth as far as 299 or 300; which does not fit in well with the chronology of his life, as given by himself.

⁴¹⁹⁶ John xix. 22.

⁴¹⁹⁷ Ps. xl. 9.

⁴¹⁹⁸ Exod. xxxviii. 28.

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Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost;⁴¹⁹⁹ and These Three have One common name, the Godhead. And you shall know, both by appearances⁴²⁰⁰ and by words that you reject all ungodliness, and are united to all the Godhead. Believe that all that is in the world, both all that is seen and all that is unseen, was made out of nothing by God, and is governed by the Providence of its Creator, and will receive a change to a better state. Believe that evil has no substance or kingdom, either unoriginate or self-existent or created by God; but that it is our work, and the evil one's, and came upon us through our heedlessness, but not from our Creator. Believe that the Son of God, the Eternal Word, Who was begotten of the Father before all time and without body, was in these latter days for your sake made also Son of Man, born of the Virgin Mary ineffably and stainlessly (for nothing can be stained where God is, and by which salvation comes), in His own Person at once entire Man and perfect God, for the sake of the entire sufferer, that He may bestow salvation on your whole being, having destroyed the whole condemnation of your sins: impassible in His Godhead, passible in that which He assumed; as much Man for your sake as you are made God for His. Believe that for us sinners He was led to death; was crucified and buried, so far as to taste of death; and that He rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven, that He might take you with Him who were lying low; and that He will come again with His glorious Presence to judge the quick and the dead; no longer flesh, nor yet without a body, according to the laws which He alone knows of a more godlike body, that He may be seen by those who pierced Him,⁴²⁰¹ and on the other hand may remain as God without carnality. Receive besides this the Resurrection, the Judgment and the Reward according to the righteous scales of God; and believe that this will be Light to those whose mind is purified (that is, God—seen and known) proportionate to their degree of purity, which we call the Kingdom of heaven; but to those who suffer from blindness of their ruling faculty, darkness, that is estrangement from God, proportionate to their blindness here. Then, in the tenth place, work that which is good upon this foundation of dogma; for faith without works is dead,⁴²⁰² even as are works apart from faith. This is all that may be divulged of the Sacrament, and that is not forbidden to the ear of the many. The rest you shall learn within the Church by the grace of the Holy Trinity; and those matters you shall conceal within yourself, sealed and secure.

XLVI. But one thing more I preach unto you. The Station in which you shall presently stand after your Baptism before the Great Sanctuary⁴²⁰³ is a foretype of the future glory. The Psalmody

⁴¹⁹⁹ Ib. xix. 13.

⁴²⁰⁰ Matt. xxviii. 19.

⁴²⁰¹ Rev. i. 7.

⁴²⁰² James ii. 17.

⁴²⁰³ The word here used is Bema, which properly means a Platform. In an Oriental Church the East end of the building is raised by one or more steps above the choir. A little distance East of these steps is a great Screen called the Iconostasis, from the picture (Icons) with which it is covered. It has three doors, one in the centre, called the Royal Gates, leading to the Altar; one on the left hand, leading to the Prothesis, or Credence; and one on the right to the Sacristy. The whole raised portion is called the Bema, or sometimes the Altar, the Altar proper being known as the Throne.

with which you will be received is a prelude to the Psalmody of Heaven; the lamps which you will kindle are a Sacrament of the illumination there with which we shall meet the Bridegroom, shining and virgin souls, with the lamps of our faith shining, not sleeping through our carelessness, that we may not miss Him that we look for if He come unexpectedly; nor yet unfed, and without oil, and destitute of good works, that we be not cast out of the Bridechamber. For I see how pitiable is such a case. He will come when the cry demands the meeting, and they who are prudent shall meet Him, with their light shining and its food abundant, but the others seeking for oil too late from those who possess it. And He will come with speed, and the former shall go in with Him, but the latter shall be shut out, having wasted in preparations the time of entrance; and they shall weep sore when all too late they learn the penalty of their slothfulness, when the Bride-chamber can no longer be entered by them for all their entreaties, for they have shut it against themselves by their sin, following in another fashion the example of those who missed the Wedding feast⁴²⁰⁴ with which the good Father feasts the good Bridegroom; one on account of a newly wedded wife; another of a newly purchased field; another of a yoke of oxen; which he and they acquired to their misfortune, since for the sake of the little they lose the great. For none are there of the disdainful, nor of the slothful, nor of those who are clothed in filthy rags and not in the Wedding garment even though here they may have thought themselves worthy of wearing the bright robe there, and secretly intruded themselves, deceiving themselves with vain hopes. And then, What? When we have entered, then the Bridegroom knows what He will teach us, and how He will converse with the souls that have come in with Him. He will converse with them, I think in teaching things more perfect and more pure. Of which may we all, both Teachers and Taught, have share, in the Same Christ our Lord, to Whom be the Glory and the Empire, for ever and ever. Amen.



Oration XLI.

On Pentecost.

It is uncertain to what year the following Oration belongs. It was, however, certainly delivered at Constantinople; the Benedictine Editors think in the year 381, in which case the day would be May 16. An indication tending to establish this date is found in c. 14, in the expression of apprehension of personal danger to himself for his boldness in setting forth the true faith. In fact, in the earlier part of this year, after the Emperor Theodosius had put him in possession of the Patriarchal Throne, vacant by the expulsion and deposition of the Arian Demophilus, he had narrowly escaped assassination at the hands of the Arians.

⁴²⁰⁴ Luke xiv. 16 &c.