

dutiful, anti-instinctual effort for the virtue of Fortitude *within* the *appetitus irascibilis* (the instinctive "will to power"). This loss of the traditional pre-Reformation Catholic moral theology is a veritable breeding ground of psychological conflict, frustration, psychoneurosis—and "leakage".³

³ *God and the Unconscious*. (Harvill Press; pp. 157-158.)



AN ADVENT SERMON OF ST GREGORY THE GREAT¹

Translated by HENRY ASHWORTH, O.S.B.

OUR Lord and Redeemer, my dear brethren, wishing to find us prepared, intimates what evils will attend the world in its old age, in order to keep us from loving it now. He makes known the number of upheavals which will herald the approaching end, so that, if in times of tranquillity we do not want to fear God, we may at least fear his approaching judgment, when we are reduced to extremity by such catastrophes. Now, a little before the passage of the Holy Gospel which, brethren, you have just heard read, our Lord uttered these words: *Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be great earthquakes, and in places plagues and famines.*² And after a few verses he added the passage which has just been read: *And there shall be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on earth anguish of nations bewildered by the roaring of the sea and of the*

¹ St Gregory's Homilies on the Gospel were delivered during the first year of his pontificate. They have come down to us in the revised form which he gave them in 593. A critical edition is still awaited and it would be wise not to attach too much importance to the topographical indications which appear in the printed editions. Not all manuscripts give these stationary headings, nor is there complete harmony among those that have such indications. From internal evidence it would appear that St Gregory preached the present Homily during the Advent of 590. In it he alludes to the unprecedented tempests which had afflicted Rome during the November of 589, to the decimation of the population by the consequent plague, to the collapse of buildings and churches. All these details are corroborated by the words of Agiulf, deacon of St Gregory of Tours, who was an eye-witness of the events: 'In the preceding year' (589) he writes, 'in the ninth month, the River Tiber so flooded the City of Rome that ancient buildings were washed away, and the Church's granaries were submerged.' (cf. *Hist. Franc.* x, 1.) Much of the final passages of this homily is resumed in almost identical terms in the collect for the Vigil of Christmas.

² Luke xxi, 10.

*surge.*³ It is obvious that some of these things have already occurred. Moreover we fear that the others will shortly come to pass. For already in our time nation has been seen to rise against nation, and the consequent distress experienced throughout the land we consider to be greater than that of recorded history. You yourselves know how frequently one hears from every quarter of the globe how earthquakes have destroyed countless cities. We ourselves suffer plagues without cease. As to signs in the sun and the moon and the stars, if we have not yet seen such things, recent disturbances of the atmosphere allow us to infer that these also are not far distant, although, before Italy was given over to be ravaged by the Gentile's sword, we saw in the heavens armies as of fire, and the sky glowing with the blood of the human race, which was afterwards poured out. It is true that as of yet, there have been no new disturbances of the sea and the waves; but when so many things which were foretold have been accomplished, there is no doubt that the few which remain will come to pass: indeed, coming events cast their shadows before.

We speak to you thus, dear brethren, that your minds may watch in a state of preparedness, lest they be lulled by false security, or faint through ignorance. Let fear always incite them and a certain uneasiness strengthen them in doing good; let them ponder the words of our Redeemer: *men fainting from terrified expectation of the things that are to come upon the world; for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.*⁴ What exactly does our Lord mean when he speaks of the powers of heaven, if not the Angels and Archangels, the Thrones and Dominations, the Principalities and Powers? These will appear in visible form to the eye, at the coming of the severe Judge. They will then be severe in demanding an account from us, because now our invisible Creator bears with us patiently; hence is added: *And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in cloud with power and great glory.*⁵ Which is as much as to say: they shall see in power and glory him whom they refused to hear in his lowliness. Then shall they feel his power so much the more severe that now they bend not their obstinate hearts before his patience.

However, because such things are spoken to the wicked, the

³ Luke xxi, 25.

⁴ Luke xxi, 26.

⁵ *ibid.* xxi, 27.

following passage is added for the consolation of the elect: *But when these things are beginning to befall, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand.*⁶ Which is as much as to say to the elect: When disasters grow ever more frequent in the world, when the terror of judgment is announced by the very powers of heaven which are shaken, lift up your heads, that is, rejoice in your hearts. Rejoice, because while that world whose friends you are not draws to its end, that deliverance which you have awaited draws near.

Holy Scripture often speaks of the head when it means the mind. The reason for this is that it is the head which rules the members of the body, and the mind which disposes the thoughts. Hence to lift our heads means to direct our minds to the joys of the heavenly country. Wherefore those who love God are bidden to rejoice and be merry at the nearness of the world's doom, because they will soon find him, whom they love, as the world which they have not loved passes away. Far be it from any of the faithful who loves God to lament over the disasters that afflict the world, when he knows that the world must perish by these very disasters. For it is written: *the man who would have the world for his friend makes himself God's enemy.*⁷ Wherefore, the man who does not rejoice at the nearness of the world's doom, proves himself to be its friend, and thereby is convicted as God's enemy. Let such an attitude be far from the hearts of the faithful. Let such a state of mind be far from those who through faith believe in another life, and whose behaviour proves their love of that life. Let us leave to those whose hearts are rooted in the love of this world to lament its destruction, to those who seek no life hereafter, to those who are not even aware of its existence, for we, who know that the everlasting joys of the heavenly country are a reality, ought to hasten towards them with all possible speed. We should desire to go on more quickly and reach the heavenly country by a shorter route. With what evils is the world not afflicted? With what sadness, with what misfortune are we not straitened? What is mortal life, if not a pilgrimage? Brethren consider seriously what it means to be worn out with fatigue of a pilgrimage, and at the same time not to want that pilgrimage to end. Our Redeemer himself clearly teaches by an apt comparison

⁶ *ibid.* xxi, 28.

⁷ James iv, 4.

that the world should be despised and trodden under foot, since he immediately adds: *See the fig-tree, and all the trees; as soon as they shoot forth, ye see for yourselves and know that now summer is nigh. So in like manner yourselves, when ye see these things coming to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh.*⁸ This is to tell us plainly: Just as when the fruit appears on the trees you know that summer is near, so from the ruin of the world you may be sure that the kingdom of God is close at hand. Such words certainly make it clear that the fruit of the world is ruin. See how this world grows only to fall. See how it germinates; but how whatever it produces is destined only to be destroyed by disasters. Compare this with the kingdom of God. See how well that is symbolized by summer: because then the clouds of our sadness pass, and the days of our life shine in the brightness of the eternal Sun.

*Amen I say to you, this generation shall not pass away until all things be accomplished. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*⁹ A passage which gives us the greatest certainty concerning all these things of which we have spoken. Obviously, in the natural constitution of material creation, there is nothing more lasting than heaven and earth, and, in the nature of things, nothing passes more speedily than a word. For until words are fully pronounced, they are not yet words: and yet as soon as they are fully pronounced they are no longer words because they can only be brought into existence in passing. Hence our Lord says: *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.* Which is as much as to say: all you consider lasting does not last for ever without change, but that of mine which appears to pass, is held fixed and without change: because my word, which passes, expresses truths which remain unchanged.

Observe, my dear brethren, how we have already before our eyes the events of which we were just hearing. Each day fresh and greater evils afflict the world. Once you were a countless people, now you yourselves see how few of you remain. Yet each day scourges still chastise us, we are oppressed by sudden misfortunes, new and unforeseen disasters afflict us. Look at the body in youth, see how vigorous it is, how well-developed and strong is the chest, how muscular the neck, how brawny the arms. Now consider that body in old age; how bent it is, how scraggy the

⁸ Luke xxi, 29-31.

⁹ Luke xxi, 32-33.

neck; how shortness of breath burdens the chest; strength ebbs away, panting impairs the speech. Even if there is no real ailment, for many old people what health they have is little better than sickness. So it is with the world. Vigorous in its early years, as if in its youth, strong to increase the human race, green with luxuriant vegetation, rich in mineral resources; now it is weighed down by old age, harassed by ever increasing burdens, as if on the threshold of death. Wherefore, my brethren, love not that which, as you perceive, cannot last much longer. Place in your hearts the words of the Apostle, by which he warns us, saying: *Love not the world, or the things in the world. If any one love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*¹⁰ Three days ago, as you know, brethren, sturdy old trees were torn up by a whirlwind, houses destroyed, churches overthrown from their very foundations. How many there were, hale and hearty in the evening, who made their plans for the morrow, and yet were carried off that same night by sudden death, trapped in the ruins of their homes.

But consider, my dear children in Christ, how, to bring such things about, the invisible judge stirred up the force of a slight wind; how he set in motion the whirlwind of a single storm cloud; and the earth rocked, and the foundations of so many buildings tottered and fell. What then will this judge do, when he shall come in person, and his anger is kindled in vengeance upon sinners, if now it can scarcely be endured when he strikes us with the force of such a slight storm-cloud? What human being will withstand the presence of his anger, if, when he stirs up the wind, the earth rocks, there are atmospheric disturbances, and so many buildings collapse? St Paul himself, considering this severity of the Judge who shall appear, says: *It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!*¹¹ The Psalmist expresses the same sentiments when he writes: *God shall come manifestly: our God shall come, and shall not keep silence. A fire shall burn before him: and a mighty tempest shall be round about him.*¹² The tempest and the fire accompany the severity of such great justice, because the tempest is to winnow out those whom the fire is to burn. Wherefore, brethren, keep that day before your eyes, and what now appears heavy will appear light in comparison. For it is

¹⁰ 1 John ii, 15.

¹¹ Hebrews x, 31.

¹² Psalm xlix, 3.

foretold by the prophet: *The great day of the Lord is near, it is near and exceeding swift: the voice of the day of the Lord is bitter, the mighty man shall there meet with tribulation. That day is a day of wrath, a day of tribulation and distress, a day of calamity and misery, a day of darkness and obscurity, a day of clouds and whirlwinds.*¹³ A day of which the Lord also says through his prophet: *Yet one little while, and I will move the heaven and the earth.*¹⁴ We have already told you how he created disturbances in the atmosphere, and the earth shook. Who then will be able to stand firm when he makes the heavens to move? And what shall we say of these present terrors, unless we consider them as the heralds of the wrath to come? One ought to consider that these present tribulations differ from the ultimate tribulation in much the same way that the status of the herald differs from that of the judge armed with all the power of the law. Brethren, give all your attention to the thought of that day which is to come. Amend your lives, alter your ways. Overcome, by resisting, the evils that tempt you; punish with tears the evil you have done. For whensoever you shall behold the coming of the eternal judge, you will then be the more untroubled the more out of reasonable fear you now anticipate his severity. (*In Euang. I, 1.*)

¹³ Sophonias i, 14.

¹⁴ Aggeus ii, 7.



COMMENT

I—UNION WITH CHRIST

This is not an article. It does not discuss or explain or meet objections or even raise them. It leaves the obvious difficulties aside. It is simply one person's attempt to frame answers to some of the urgent questions that arise on the subject of the relation between consecrated virginity and married holiness, and the relation of both to the end and aim of Christian life: that union with Christ which has traditionally been expressed in terms of sexual love.

SACRAMENTS contain what they signify. What is signified by the sacrament of marriage? 'For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh. This is a great sacrament, but I