

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

I. ST ANTONY ABBOT: ON HUMILITY AND ON DECEIT

II. ST BASIL: ON MODESTY AND VAINGLORY

III. ST BASIL: ON ENVY

IV. ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM: MORAL EXHORTATION TO
HUMILITY

V. ST AUGUSTINE: MEDITATION ON THE HUMILITY OF CHRIST

THE GOSPEL OF THE SUNDAY

LUKE xiv. 1-II

At that time: When Jesus went into the house of one of the chief of the Pharisees, on the sabbath day, to eat bread, they watched him. And, behold, there was a certain man before him that had the dropsy. And Jesus answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying: Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? But they held their peace. But he, taking him, healed him and sent him away. And answering them he said: Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a pit and will not immediately draw him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him to those things.

And he spoke a parable also to them that were invited, marking

how they chose the first seats at the table, saying to them: When thou art invited to a wedding, sit not down in the first place, lest perhaps one more honourable than thou be invited by him; and he that inviteth thee and him come and say to thee: Give this man place. And then thou begin with shame to take the lowest place. But, when thou art invited, go, sit down in the lowest place; that, when he who inviteth thee cometh, he may say to thee: Friend, go up higher. Then shalt thou have glory before them that sit at table with thee. Because everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

EXPOSITION FROM THE CATENA AUREA

I

CYRIL: Though the Lord knew the malice of the Pharisees, nevertheless He partook of their hospitality, so that by His words and miracles He might do some good among those present. For this reason we read:

V.I. And it came to pass, when Jesus went into the house of one of the Pharisees, on the sabbath day, to eat bread, that they watched him:

To see if He would ignore the Law, or do any of the things that were forbidden on the sabbath day.

And so when the dropsical man came among them, by a question Jesus checks the arrogance of the Pharisees, seeking to find fault with Him. Hence we read:

VV.2 and 3. *And, behold, there was a certain man before him that had the dropsy. And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying: Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?*

BEDE: That Jesus is said to have answered relates to the words: *And they watched him.* For the Lord knows the thoughts of men. THEOPHYLACTUS: By His question He makes public their foolishness: for while God blesses on the seventh day, they prevent good works on that day. A day that does not allow the doing of good works is accursed.

V.4. *But they held their peace.*

BEDE: And well did they, when questioned, hold their peace. For they see that whatever they say would be said against themselves. If it is lawful to heal on the sabbath why do they watch the Saviour to see if He will heal on that day? If it is not lawful, why do they care for their cattle on the sabbath? And so there follows: *But they held their peace.* CYRIL: Avoiding the snares of the Jews, He delivers the man from his dropsy; who, for fear of the Pharisees, does not ask to be healed, but simply stands by; so that, moved by compassion at his appearance, Jesus might heal him: The Lord knows this, and does not ask him if he wishes to be healed; but there and then heals him. Hence follows: *But He taking him, healed him and sent him away.*

THEOPHYLACTUS: In doing this the

Lord was not concerned to see whether He gave scandal to the Pharisees or not, but looked only to do good to one in need of His help. For it is right, when what we are doing yields great good, to pay no heed to the scandal of the foolish. CYRIL: And as the Pharisees continued in their foolish silence, Christ reproves their unvarying forwardness, using in this certain reflections. Hence there follows:

V.5. *And answering them he said: Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a pit and will not immediately draw him out, on the sabbath day?*

THEOPHYLACTUS: As though to say: If the law forbids you to have compassion on the sabbath, then neither should you have a care for your son, should he fall into danger on the sabbath. But why do I speak of your son, when you will not neglect even your ox, should you see it in danger?¹ BEDE: In which He makes clear to the Pharisees watching Him, that He is accusing them also of avarice, revealing greed in their concern for animals. How much more should Christ not help man, who is more precious than any beast?

AUGUSTINE, *Gospel Questions*, II, 29: He aptly compares the dropsical man to the beast that fell into a well, for he was encumbered with water; just as He compares the woman He had called *bound*, and whom He had *loosed*, to a beast that is loosed to be led to water. BEDE: By this apt example He solves the question: to show them that they are accusing Him of breaking the sabbath by a work of charity, who themselves

break it by works of covetousness. Hence there follows:

V.6. And they could not answer him to these things.

Mystically, the dropsical man is a figure of one overwhelmed by the flow of carnal pleasures: for dropsy is a disease named from excess of watery humour. AUGUSTINE, as above: Or, we may rightly compare the dropsical man to a covetous rich man: For the more the one is swollen with excess of water, the more he thirsts; so also the other: The more he abounds in riches, which he does not use well, the more eagerly he desires them.

GREGORY, *Morals in Job*, xviii, 19: Rightly therefore is the dropsical man healed in the presence of the Pharisees: for by the bodily sickness of the one, is signified the weakness or the sickness of heart and soul of the others. BEDE: Well does He speak in this parable of the ass and the ox, as signifying either the wise and the foolish, or both peoples: namely, the Jews, laden with the yoke of the Law; and the Gentiles, unbroken by any law. It is the Lord draws all men out who have sunk into the pit of concupiscence.

2

V.7. And he spoke a parable also to them that were invited, marking how they chose the first seats at table, saying to them:

AMBROSE: He first heals the dropsical man, in whom excess of the body's fluid oppressed the activity of the soul, and extinguished the ardour of his spirit. Then we are taught humility, when we are forbidden to

be eager for the higher place at a wedding feast.

V.8. When thou art invited to a wedding, sit not down in the first place.

CYRIL: Here He shows that we are rash and deserving of rebuke, should we rush eagerly towards the places of honour that do not belong to us. Then follows: *lest perhaps one more honourable than thou be invited by him.*

V.9. And he that invited thee and him come and say to thee: Give this man place. And then thou begin with shame to take the lowest place.

CHRYSOSTOM: And so he who was eager for prominence, does not obtain what he desired, but suffers a repulse; and striving to gain honour is not honoured. And as nothing is more to be desired than modesty, the Lord leads the minds of His listeners to the opposite of this conduct. He tells us not only must we not be eager for the first place, but bids us seek the lowest. Hence follows:

V.10. But when thou art invited, go, sit down in the lowest place.

CYRIL: For should someone not desire a place above others, he shall be given this; according to the divine sentence. For there follows: *That, when he who inviteth thee cometh, he may say to thee: Friend, go up higher.* In saying this, He is not harshly rebuking, but mildly advising them: for a word to the wise suffices. And so it is for humility a man is crowned with honour. For there follows: *Then shalt thou have glory before them that sit at table with thee.*

BASIL (*Regulae Disp.* 21): To take the lowest place at feasts, as the Lord advises, is a fitting thing to do; but again, to seize it forcibly is a thing to be condemned, as disturbing order and causing confusion. Contending for the last place, you will be no different from those who strive for the first. Accordingly, as the Lord here says, it is for him who gives the feast, to decide the order of place. We should have a patient concern for one another, doing all things becomingly and in order; and not for the sake of how we may appear before the crowd. Neither should we make a show of humility by resisting strongly: humility is practised rather by simple submission; refusal shows pride more decidedly than taking the first place when invited to do so.

THEOPHYLACTUS: Let no one think the teaching the Lord here gives is of little importance, or unworthy of the sublimity of the Word of God. For you do not call a physician kind who undertakes to heal gout, but refuses to treat a cut finger or an aching tooth. And how can the sickness of vanity be a little thing, when it throws into disorder those seeking the first places? It was therefore fitting that the Teacher of humility should cut off every branch of this evil root. And consider also, that, with the supper ready, and with the craving for the first place troubling the foolish, and in the presence of the Saviour, it was a suitable time for a word of advice.

CYRIL: Having shown by this simple example the humiliation of the vain-glorious, and the exaltation of the humble, to this small incident He

joins something great; instructing all the faithful:

V.II. *Because everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

And this is the utterance of the Divine Judgement, not of human experience: for in this world, many who desire honour gain it; while those who humble themselves, remain unknown. THEOPHYLACTUS: But in the end, he who thrusts himself into honours is not honoured by all men: while honoured by some, others will speak ill of him, sometimes even while honouring him.

BEDE: But since the Evangelist calls this admonition a parable, let us consider briefly its mystical content. Whoever was invited and has come to the nuptials of Christ and His Church, let him not, glorying in his own merits, set himself above the other members of the Church to whom he is joined by faith. For he shall give place to one more honourable, invited after him, who has surpassed him in activity in following Christ, and with shame must fill the lowest place, when, learning of the greater things others have done, he lowers the exalted notions he had of his own works. But when a man sits in the lowest place, in accord with the words: *The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things: and thou shalt find grace before God* (Ecclus. iii. 20). the Lord, when He comes, finding him humble, shall bless him with the name, *friend*, and shall bid him go higher: For, *Whosoever shall humble himself as a child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven* (Mt. xviii. 4). And well does He say: *Thou shalt*

have glory: That you may not begin to seek *now* the glory laid up for you at the end.

The parable may also be understood of this life, for the Lord comes daily in to His marriage feast, putting down the proud, and sometimes giving such gifts of His Spirit to the humble that the company sitting down, that is, the faithful, are astonished, and glorify them. From the general conclusion that follows,

it is clearly manifest, that the preceding discourse of the Lord is to be understood mystically. For not every one who exalts himself before men is humbled; neither is everyone who humbles himself in the sight of men, exalted by them. But, he who prides himself on his merits, he shall be humbled by the Lord; and he who humbles himself because of the favours he has received, he shall be exalted by Him.

I. ST ANTONY, ABBOT AND EGYPTIAN FATHER OF THE CHURCH

*On Humility; and on Deceit*²

I. Humility

Brethren, the Prophet says: *But to whom shall I have respect, but to him that is poor and little and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my words* (Is. lxii. 2)? And in the Gospel the Lord says the same: *Learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart; and you shall find rest to your souls* (Mt. xi. 29). He therefore who has gained humility, has already become a dwelling place of the Most High God; and has attained to sublimity of soul, to the love of innocence, to peace and to charity. Come then, dispose your heart towards humility, and do not walk in the company of devils in pride of heart. For God and His angels and saints turn away from the proud in heart. Whosoever therefore walks in the pride of his own heart, is an associate of demons.

Because of pride of heart the heavens were bowed down, the foundations of the earth were shaken, the deeps of the sea were troubled and angels were cast down from glory, and became demons be-

cause of their pride of heart. Because of this the Almighty was angered, and caused fire to come forth from the abyss, and waves to rise up as a sea of fire (Num. xvi). Because of pride of heart He made hell, and its torments. Because of pride of heart bonds were made and scourges, with which the devil is tormented because of the pride of his heart. Because of pride of heart the abyss of hell was made, and the worms that do not die or sleep (Mk. ix. 45). Because of pride of heart the fiery chariots were made, the torment of burning flames, the coals of living fire. Because of pride of heart all things are troubled and thrown into disorder, and men war against each other, and from this came tyranny.

All this has happened through pride of heart. The pride of heart of men is unclean before God: but hearts that are humble and contrite the Lord will not despise. The Mercy of God, my beloved brothers and sons, coming to us from on

high, became humble to His last breath. And because of this we glory with the psalmist, saying: *See my*

abjection and my labour: and forgive me all my sins (Ps. xxiv. 18).

II. Deceit

Let us lift up our hands and hearts to the Most High God Who is in heaven, and let us strive to keep far from that first sin of all, namely, the deceit that was in Cain; of which it was written: *Deliver me, O God, from the unjust and deceitful man* (Ps. xlii). The deceitful man deceives only his own soul; for his deceit returns upon his own head; as was written in the Psalm: *His sorrow shall be turned on his own head: and his iniquity shall come down upon his crown* (vii. 17). Be not familiar with an evil man, nor the companion of an unjust man, nor have anything whatsoever to do with him; but shun him as you would a garment that reeks of the corruption of the dead.

For the tongue of a deceitful man provokes strife among peoples, and the shedding of blood. He who enters into a friendship with a deceitful woman, enters into the same with a most wicked devil. He who enters into friendship with a deceitful man, joins company with spillers of blood, and becomes guilty of his own death. Far, far better to dwell in solitude, than in the company of a treacherous man. Make no friendship with a treacherous man; and go not into any house with him; for if you once enter, he will drag you down to his own foulness. You are safer in the company of wild beasts, than in the company of a deceitful man.

And should such a man approach

you pleasantly, and speak mildly with you; nevertheless, should you once trouble his heart, of a sudden the hidden guile bursts forth and he will destroy you when you least expect it. Because of this let God be with you, as He was with our Fathers, with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, that He may deliver you from him whose *strength is in his loins* (Job xl. 11); that is, the devil, who at all times looks with malice on men who serve God, and strives to catch them with his hook, that he may devour them.

But we have One Who makes intercession for us (Heb. vii. 25), Jesus Christ our Lord, Who has given us power to tread down his strength (Lk. x. 19). The eye that is not filled with seeing, and the ear that is not filled with hearing (Eccles. i. 8; a reference to St Paul), tells us that love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. xiii. 10). The fulfilment of such things as these: That you be all of one heart in Christ Jesus; helping one another, loving one another as brothers, having compassion on one another, so that the Lord may prepare our hearts to fulfil His commandments, until the day of the manifestation of the fulness of His Glory in Jesus Christ, unto all generations that are without corruption: the brethren whom I love, through Christ Jesus; to Whom be Glory and Honour, now and for ever, throughout all ages and ages. Amen.

II. ST BASIL THE GREAT, BISHOP AND DOCTOR

*Meditation on Humility and on Vainglory*³

1. It is not possible for a man to control his anger when abused, or to overcome trials with patience when afflicted, if he is not willing to take the last and the lowest place among other men. But a man who has attained to true humility will not be troubled by offensive or ignominious words, since he is already aware of his own great unworthiness even before he is insulted. And should he be called a beggar, he already knows he is poor, and in want of everything, and that he has need each day of God's help. If he is spoken of as insignificant and of no importance he is already aware of this in his own heart: that he was made from clay. In a word, let me say that he is *great* in heaven who humbly submits to his neighbour, and, without any cause for shame, bears patiently accusations made against him, even though they are false, if by this he may be at peace with his brother.

And it is not easy to keep one's soul humble in the midst of difficulties, just as it is not easy not to be proud in prosperity and honour. And the proud, the more they are flattered, the more disdainful they become. The manner of one who is humble of heart is modest and somewhat downcast. Such as these also dress simply and for use, not cultivating the hair, or particular about clothing; so that the appearance mourners put on is natural to them. And as to dress, let the outer garment (tunic) be held in place by a girdle, not fastened above the waist, like a woman's, nor yet loosely, so that the garment is slack, which

looks foolish. And as to your manner of walking, let it not be sluggish, which shows a dull relaxed soul. Neither should it be too quick, or strutting, lest your movements show a mind that is rash, or lacking in good sense. The purpose of clothing is to provide suitable covering for the body both winter and summer. Avoid what is striking in colour. And as to quality, it should not be too fine, or effeminate. For a man who indulges in bright colours is no different from a woman who paints her face and dyes her hair. Let your clothes be sufficiently thick, so that you have no need of another to keep you warm. Shoes should cost little; yet they should be such as we need. The practice of modesty consists in this; in being content with things that are cheap and simple, and in being watchful against the affectations of vainglory.

A man is vainglorious who will do or say anything for the sake of this world's miserable applause. As, for instance, a man who gives alms to be honoured by others. He receives his reward (Mt. vi. 2); though he is neither generous nor compassionate. Or a man who is temperate, so as to be praised for his moderation. He is not temperate; since he is not striving for this virtue, but for the credit that will come to him through this virtue. Ananias for example (Acts v.), in the beginning, was not compelled to consecrate his property to God by a vow. But thinking only of human glory, when he had consecrated it to God by his promise, so as to be honoured by

others for his generosity, keeping back a part of the price, he so provoked against himself the anger of God, whose minister Peter was, that he was not even given time to repent. For the Lord Who resists the proud, and brings the wicked down even to the earth (Ps. cxlvi. 6), has Himself promised that He will bring down the folly of the proud. And He Who humbles the proud will therefore also free them from that resemblance they have to the devil, the father of all pride, and will Himself guide them so that they may become disciples of the One Who says: *Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart.*

And why do you esteem yourself so highly, as though you who had defeated nations, and brought down the might of kingdoms? May not the axe swell with pride for the same reason; for it has brought low many mighty trees? And likewise the saw, that has cut up the firm and solid wood? But the axe does not cut without hands, nor the saw cut up without the one who draws it through the wood.

2. Should you see your neighbour commit a sin, see that you think not only of his sin, but that you also think of what he does, and has done well, and doing this you will often-times find that he is better than you are; when you consider all he has done, and not a part. God does not judge a man on a part of his life only. He says: *I know their works and their thoughts; I come that I may gather them together* (Is. lxvi. 18). And when the Lord rebuked Josaphat for the sin he had just committed, He recalled the good he had also done, saying to him: *But good works are*

found in thee (II Par. xix. 3). Humility therefore will often save a man who is guilty of many and grievous sins. Do not then justify yourself above some other man, for fear that though justified by your own sentence, you shall be condemned by the just sentence of God.

If you think you have done something good, then give thanks to God; do not place yourself above your neighbour. For how have you helped your neighbour by confessing the faith, or by suffering exile for the name of Christ, or by bearing hardships in patience? The profit is yours, not another's. Take care not to fall as the devil fell who, uplifted above men, was brought low by a Man, and delivered to men as a footstool to be trodden on. In a word, be mindful of that saying: *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble* (Jas. iv. 6). Keep close to you the Lord's words: *Everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted* (Lk. xiv. 11).

Neither let you be an unjust judge in your own case. Do not try it with favour towards yourself; taking note of whatever good you have done, forgetting the evil. Do not take pride in today's good actions, whilst giving yourself full pardon for past or recent wicked ones. Rather, should you be pleased and satisfied with some present action, bring before your mind another kind of action from the past, and then your foolish pride will cease. The most difficult of all things seems to be to know one's self. For not alone does our eye look outwardly, and not use its power to look at itself, but our mind also; so sharp to note the sins of others, it is slow to

see its own sins. Neither should you be too severe, or too prompt, in rebuking others. Do not judge in anger; for this is a ruthless thing. Do not condemn for trifles; as though you were yourself faultless in the sight of the law. And those who have been overtaken by some fault, treat them with a spirit of mildness, as the Apostle warns us: *Considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted* (Gal. vi. 1). For should we offend in something, we are the better for a little rebuke. But where we have done no wrong, why should we be made to suffer?

For myself, Brethren, I have always striven more not to be noticed, than they strive to be seen who look for notice. Let you show as much zeal in seeking not to be praised by men, as others show in seeking praise. But if you have been raised to honour, and men surround you with respect and reverence, then be as those subject to you. For he who wishes to be first, the Lord commands that he shall be the servant of all (Mk. x. 44). The great Moses, who in all things was mild and gentle, when God sent him to rule His people, prayed: *I beseech thee, Lord, choose another whom thou wilt send* (Ex. iv. 13). Because of this the Lord urged him, as it were with persistence; as though by this confession of his own unsuitability, he showed that he was worthy of being placed over the people. It was in the light of this example that Scripture lays down the counsel: *Seek not to be made a judge unless thou have strength enough to extirpate iniquities* (Ecclus. vii. 6).

But the words of the prophet Isaias makes plain that the refusal of those who were called to rule rebel-

lious peoples was not a rule for all. For Isaias did not simply say: *Make me not a ruler*, but *make me not a ruler of this people* (Is. iii. 7). And he gave the reason. *Because their tongue and their devices are against the Lord*. And so when Moses was called to this prominence, and to be leader of such a people, he pleads to be spared this honour. *Who am I*, he says, *that I should go to Pharaoh, and should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?* (Ex. iii. 11). And again he says: *I beseech thee, Lord, I am not eloquent from yesterday and the day before; and since thou hast spoken to thy servant, I have more impediment and slowness of tongue* (iv. 10). And also: *I beseech thee, Lord, send another whom thou wilt send*. But the Lord said to him: *Go thou, and lead this people whither I have told thee. My angel shall go before thee* (Ex. xxxii. 34). And what does Moses answer? *If thou thyself dost not go before, bring us not out of this place* (xxxiii. 15). Isaias however, though he had heard nothing like this, but only of the people's need of an apostle among them, offers himself freely, and places himself in the midst of dangers.

What was in the minds of these two men? The thought of Moses was that: this is a sinful people. It has need of One Who can forgive its sins; and this is not possible to angels. Angels are the instruments of God's punishments on those who sin; their sins they are not able to pardon. Therefore let the True Lawgiver come: He Who has power to save, and Who alone has power to forgive sin. Isaias, however, in the fervour of his love, held as nothing what this people might do to him. Let us imitate the fervour and humility of these two men, that we may also be

sharers of their future joy and blessing in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom with the Father and the

Holy Ghost, be there glory and honour and majesty now and for ever, world without end. Amen.

III. ST BASIL, BISHOP AND DOCTOR

*On Envy*⁴

1. God is good, and the Giver of good things to those who are worthy of them. The devil is evil, and the contriver of wickedness everywhere. And just as freedom from envy is the consequence of goodness, so malice obeys the devil. Let us therefore, Brethren, be on our guard against the passion of envy, so that we may not become partner in the works of our Adversary; and find ourselves condemned together with him. For if the man who is puffed up with pride *falls into the judgement of the devil* (I Tim. iii. 6), how shall the envious escape the punishment prepared for the devil? For nothing more destructive springs up in the souls of men than the passion of envy, which, while it does no harm to others, is the dominant and peculiar evil of the soul that harbours it. As rust consumes iron, so does envy wholly consume the soul it dwells in. More than this. As vipers are said to be born through devouring the maternal womb, so envy devours the soul that gives it birth.

Envy is the pain that arises from another's good fortune. And because of this the envious man is never without pain, never without grief of mind. Is his neighbour's field fertile? Does his house abound in good things? Is its owner without care, and wanting for nothing? All this but feeds his affliction; an increase of pain to the envious; so much so that in

nothing does he differ from a man stripped naked and wounded by all men. Is someone brave and manly; in good health? Such things are like a wound to the envious. Is another more pleasing in appearance? This is like a blow to the envious. Is another endowed with many gifts of soul? Is he respected and admired, because of his wisdom, his eloquence? Is another man rich, generous of his wealth to the poor and needy, honoured for his benevolence? All these things are like so many wounds and blows that strike the envious to the heart.

And the worst of this sickness of soul is that the sufferer cannot make it known; but with bowed head and downcast eyes he suffers torment, he grieves, he perishes of his affliction. Asked of what he is suffering, he is ashamed to reveal his disease and confess, 'I am envious and bitter: the gifts of my friends are a torment to me. I grieve at my brother's happiness, I cannot endure the sight of another's good fortune.' For this is what he must say if he would tell the truth. But unwilling to speak out, he conceals in the depths of his mind the sickness that smoulders within, consuming him.

2. And so he neither seeks the help of a physician for his disease, nor finds a remedy to drive out his sickness; though the Scriptures are filled with such remedies. He looks

for but one remedy for his affliction: to see one of those he envies fall into misfortune. This is the goal of his hate: to see someone he envies miserable instead of happy, to see one who is admired pitied. Then he is at peace. And when he sees him weeping, when he sees him in affliction, he is his friend. He does not rejoice with them that rejoice, but he weeps with them that weep (Rom. x. 15). He pities him in his changed circumstances, not however from human tenderness, or from sympathy; with kind words for his former state, but so that he may make his present circumstances seem worse. He speaks well of his son, when he is dead; honouring his memory with a thousand praises: how fine he was, how beautiful to see, how gifted, how balanced in everything. But while he lived his tongue had not a good word for him. But should he see many others adding their praises to his, he changes again, and envies the dead. He admires riches, after they have been lost. He praises grace and vigour of body, when disease has laid it low. In a word, he is an enemy of things present, their friend when they have perished.

3. What could be more deadly than this disease, which is a corruption of life, a defilement of our nature, a hatred of the things God has given us, a contradiction of God? What urged the devil, the beginner of evil, to wage fierce war against man? Was it not envy? It was through envy he came to war openly against God; enraged against Him because of His great bountifulness to man, but avenging himself on man because he is powerless against God.

We see these very qualities revealed in Cain, the first disciple of the devil, who taught him envy and murder; kindred crimes, which Paul has joined together in the words: *full of envy, murder* (Rom. i. 29). What was it Cain did? He saw another honoured by God, and burned with envy. He killed the one who was honoured, that he might insult Him Who honoured him. Since he could not attack God, he turned his hatred to the murder of his own brother.

Let us fly, brethren, from this wickedness of soul that would teach us to war against God, this mother of murder that does violence to our nature, that knows no kinship; a most senseless evil. Why must you grieve, man, you who have suffered nothing? Why must you show enmity to those who enjoy good things, while taking nothing that is yours? Should you be enraged because someone does you a kindness, are you not then an enemy of your own profit? Saul was of such a nature, for whom the very greatness of the things David had done for him was the reason of his war against him. For first, cured of madness by the wondrous harmony of David's music, he attempts to transfix with a lance the giver of this favour. Then with his army he was delivered from the enemy, and delivered from the insults of Goliath; and when the women dancing at his victory proclaim that David's part in it is ten times that of Saul: *Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands* (I Kings xviii. 7), because of this one sentence, and because of the truth of what they proclaimed, he tried to kill David with his own hand, and then attacked him by treachery.

And when David was forced to fly, he still did not cease from enmity, but prepared an army of three thousand chosen men and went out to search the desert for him (I Kings xxiv. 3). Had Saul been asked the reason for his persecution of David, clearly he would have to answer that it was because of the favours David had done to him.

At the very time Saul was pursuing him, David came upon him as he slept, and could readily have slain his persecutor, yet again was he spared by this just man, who would not lay a hand on him. But not even for this favour did Saul relent; but once more gathers his armies and pursues him, and is once again intercepted, in a cave, by David, where he even more clearly revealed his great virtue, and Saul his own manifest wickedness.

Envy is the most implacable form of hatred. For favours will make friends of those who would otherwise be enemies, but to show kindness to the envious only provokes him the more. And the more he receives, the more aggrieved and embittered he becomes. He is more angered by the worth of his benefactor, than thankful for his gifts. How the envious surpass even wild beasts in the savagery of their disposition! Could even savages surpass them in cruelty? Dogs will become gentle when you feed them, lions when their wounds are treated, but the envious become more savage, should you once do them a favour.

4. What caused the high-minded Joseph to be sold as a slave? What but the envy of his brethren? And here it is worth while to note the

foolishness of envy. For being fearful that a dream should come true, they sell their brother into slavery (Gen. xxxvii. 28), as if, made a slave, he would never be adored by them. But if a dream is true, what arts can prevent its fulfilment? If it is false, why envy the one who is deluded? But the Providence of God made nothing of their foolish scheme. The means they believed would prevent the fulfilment of the prophecy, were those that prepared the way for it. For had Joseph not been sold as a slave, he would not have come to Egypt, and would not, because of his chastity, have been thrown by a woman's treachery into prison, nor have become a high servant of Pharaoh, nor an interpreter of his dream; through which he was made prince of Egypt, and was then adored by his brethren, who came to him when there was a wheat famine among them.

Turn now in your mind to the greatest envy, linked to the greatest of all happenings, which burst forth from the rage of the Jews against Christ. For what cause was He envied? Because of His miracles. And what were these miracles? The healing of those in need: the hungry were fed; and they attacked the One Who fed them. The dead were raised again to life; and they envied the One Who recalled them to life. Demons were cast out; and they made snares for the One Who had commanded them to go out. Lepers were made clean, the lame walked again, the deaf heard, the blind saw, and He Who had done all this they persecuted.

And lastly they delivered the Author of life to death, they scourged the Deliverer of men, and

they condemned to death the Judge of the world. So do the evils of envy reach to all things. And so from the beginning of the foundations of the world until the end of time, the Devil, the Destroyer of life, by means of this sole weapon, wounds and strikes down all men. He who rejoices in our destruction, he who fell himself through envy, is preparing the same path for us by means of this same vice. Wise indeed is he who forbade us sit at the table with an envious man (Prov. xxiii. 6); and by sitting *at table*, he is warning us against all association with him. Just as we are careful to keep what is inflammable from the fire, so are we to avoid the company of the envious, and so should we keep from friendly association with the malicious, and from the darts of their envy.

For we cannot be caught by the snares of envy unless we approach to familiarity with it. In the words of Solomon: *Envy is from a man's neighbour* (Eccles. iv. 4, Sept.). For it is. A Scythian is not envious of an Egyptian, but each will envy one of the same nation. And among people of the same nation, those not known are not envied, but those with whom we are familiar; and among these again, it arises between persons of the same age, the same kinship, among brothers. As red blight is a pest in the growing wheat, so is envy a pest among friends.

In this evil there is one thing can be praised: that the more it is aroused, the more bitter it is to the one it masters. As a javelin shot with great force, should it strike a resisting object, will fly back at the thrower, so does the thrust of envy, leaving the one envied unwounded,

become the wound of the one envying. Who, by the torments he inflicts on himself, lessens what his neighbour possesses? But the envious consumes himself, pining away through grief. Nevertheless, those who labour under this affliction are looked upon as more deadly than venomous serpents: for they inflict poison through a wound, and then the part bitten begins to putrefy. But there are those who believe that envious persons can do harm by their eyes alone, so that persons in good health, and in the flower of their age, will wither away through their envy, and of a sudden lose their good health, as though it were washed away by some deadly stream, corrupting and destroying, flowing from their envying eyes. For my part, however, I dismiss this as popular credulity and old wives' tales. But I say this, that the demons, haters of whatever is good, where they find natures akin to their own, they use them in every kind of way for their own evil purposes. So they may even use the very eyes of the envious as instruments of their purpose. Do you not shrink in horror from being the tool of an evil demon? Yet you entertain within you, the wickedness through which you will become an enemy of those who have done no wrong; an enemy even of God, Who is good and free of all envy?

5. Let us fly from this insupportable vice. It is the teaching of the serpent, an invention of demons, seed sown by an enemy, a pledge of torment to come, a barrier to the love of God, the way to Gehenna, the loss of the kingdom of heaven. The envious can be known even by

their faces. With them the eye is dry and lustreless, the cheek withered, the brow furrowed, the mind perturbed by the violence of their feeling, their judgement upon things lacking the criterion of truth. For them no work of virtue is worthy of praise, no power of speech, though adorned with judiciousness and grace; nor any of the things that men seek and admire. Just as vultures in their flight will pass over fields and meadows, places sweet and pleasant, drawn by the odours of corruption, and flies pass over what is healthy, to swarm upon what is prurient, so the envious have no eyes for the splendours of life, for the grandeur of virtue, but only for what is decayed and rotten.

And should someone stumble, as will happen to men, they make it public. They will strive to make men known by their falls; just as bad painters will gain prominence for their pictures by a distorted nose or by some swelling or defect of nature or accident, so the envious are adept at distorting the appearance of what is good, at calumniating virtue through its opposing vice. A man who is courageous, they will say is reckless; a temperate man, unfeeling; a just man, harsh; a prudent man cunning. They speak of a man of great generosity as vulgar, of a liberal man as prodigal, while a careful man is mean, and in general whatever virtue a man may possess, they will give it a name taken from its opposite vice.

Well then! Is our sermon to be but a denunciation of this vice! That would be only half its cure. To point out to a sick man the seriousness of his disease, so that he may take due care of himself, is not an

unprofitable thing to do. But to leave him to suffer, not to lead him as it were by the hand towards good health, is nothing other than to abandon a man lying in his sickness. What then are we to do? How are we, as a beginning, to avoid contracting his sickness; or should it attack us, how can we be cured? The first step is, that we should not look upon anything in the affairs of men as either great or impressive: neither their wealth nor their perishable glory nor their health of body. Let us not believe that our highest good consists of these so fleeting things, but rather remember that we are called to the enjoyment and possession of real and eternal blessings. And so, the one who possesses much is not to be envied because of his riches, nor the ruler because of his rank, nor the strong because of his health of body, nor the wise because of the wisdom of his speech. All these things are but instruments of virtue to those who use them well; they do not in themselves contain happiness. He however who uses them ill is to be pitied: he is like a man receiving a sword against the enemy, who instead turns it deliberately against himself. But when a man uses rightly the things of the present life, and in a manner that accords with right reason, and as a steward of the things of God, not using them for his sole pleasure, he is, because of his love of his brother, and because of the justice and humanity of his life, deserving of both love and praise.

Again a man may be noted for his prudence, and held in honour through the word of God, because he is a teacher of divine truth. Be not envious of such a man, and

never wish that as a teacher of the Holy Scriptures he should be silent; because, through the grace of the Spirit, he is praised by those who hear him. For the good he does is yours also, sent to you by means of your brother's gift of teaching: provided you receive it. But then, no one blocks up a gushing fountain, nor will anyone close his eyes to the sunlight, or envy those who enjoy it; rather, all pray that they too may enjoy these things. And so when the spiritual word is welling forth in the Church, or when some pious heart gushes forth like a fountain from the gift of the Spirit, why not give ear with joy? Why not receive these graces with thankfulness? But the applause of those who listen pierces you, and you would that no one might receive profit, no one receive praise. What excuse can there be for such things in the presence of the Judge of our hearts?

We must therefore suppose that the gifts of nature serve the good of the soul. He however who abounds in wealth and dominion, and in great understanding, and in health of body, and uses these gifts rightly is to be loved and respected, as holding certain endowments that serve the common life; provided he uses them in accord with right reason, so that he is liberal with his abundance to those in need, and has care for the weak in body; and looks upon what is over and above his own needs as belonging as much to whoever is in want as to himself. He who is not of this mind is to be pitied rather than envied; in that he possesses greater opportunities for evil doing. For this is to perish from excess of planning and striving. For if wealth is a source of wrong, the rich man is to

be pitied. If however it serves the ends of virtue, there is no ground for envy; since its common use is intended for the good of all; unless there is someone so engulfed in wickedness, that he envies himself even what is good. In a word, if in your mind you are uplifted above human things, and intent upon that good which is truly worthy of praise, you will be far from thinking that whoever possesses any perishable or earthly riches must be either happy or to be envied. It is impossible for a person who is of this mind, who does not look upon earthly things as precious, ever to feel envy.

And if you are eager for glory, and you wish to shine above others, and so cannot endure second place; for this also is an occasion of envy; then direct your ambition as though it were a stream of water towards the cultivation of virtue. Let the desire to enrich yourself be wholly absent from your mind, and the desire to be esteemed because of your worldly riches. For these things do not rest with you. But be just and temperate and prudent and courageous and patient in all that you suffer in serving God. For it is in this way you will save your soul; and the greater your virtues, the more you shall shine above others. For virtue does rest with us, and can be acquired by our loving efforts; while great riches, gifts of body, rank and dignity, are not in our power to acquire. If then virtue is a greater and more enduring possession, and held in greater honour by all men, it is this we should strive for. But it cannot be born in the soul, unless the soul is free of all violence of feeling; and free above all of envy.

6. You know how great an evil hypocrisy is? Well hypocrisy is the fruit of envy. For more than any other vice, envy begets duplicity. For while showing outwardly the appearance of friendship, it will cherish hate within the heart, and like rocks hidden in the sea, covered by shallow waters, of a sudden will bring disaster to the unwary. Therefore, if death comes to us from this source as from a spring, and brings with it the loss of every blessing, estrangement from God, the defeat of His laws, the undoing in a

moment of all the good we have done throughout our life, then let us comply with the counsel of the Apostle, and let us not be made desirous of vainglory, *provoking one another, envying one another* (Gal. v. 26); but let us rather, *be kind one to one another*; let us be *merciful, forgiving one another, even as God hath forgiven you* (Eph. iv. 32), in Christ Jesus our Lord, with Whom be there glory to the Father and to the Holy Ghost, throughout all ages and ages. Amen.

IV. ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, BISHOP AND DOCTOR

*Moral Exhortation to Humility*⁵

ABRAHAM TO LOT: *Let there be no quarrel, I beseech thee, between me and thee; for we are brethren; if thou wilt go to the left hand, I will take the right: if thou choose the right hand, I will pass to the left* (Gen. xiii. 8).

You now know how evil it is to take the first places, and to pay no attention to what is right and becoming? You have seen how good it is to be mild and reasonable, to yield the first place, and to take the lowest. And see how in the course of our instruction we have come to understand, that he who chooses the first place for himself derives no profit from it; but that he who chooses the lowest place, becomes daily more regarded and respected by all, and esteemed in all things.

And not to prolong our instruction on this point, this I would exhort you, that you become imitators of the blessed Patriarch, Abraham, and that you should never be desirous of the first places, but rather be mindful of the counsel of

the blessed Paul, who bids us yield to one another in honour (Rom. xii. 10), and that, rising above ourselves, we should be eager for the lowest place; as Christ in today's Gospel has said; concluding: *And he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*.

What then can compare with this, that yielding first place to others, we come to enjoy a higher place; that esteeming others above ourselves, we come to the highest honour. I exhort you therefore: let us be eager, let us strive to imitate the humility of the Patriarch, to follow in his footsteps who, even before the law, gave such an example of holy wisdom to us who live under the Dispensation of grace. For it was true humility of spirit this illustrious man showed to one who was not only inferior to him in virtue, but also in age and all other respects. Consider how this venerable man yields to the other, who was the younger, the uncle to the son of his brother; he who had received such

graces from God, to one who had nothing to show in his favour, and how that which he as a young man should say to his elder and to his uncle, this the patriarch says to the young man.

Let us therefore show honour and respect, not alone to those that are older than us, but also to our equals. For it is no humility to do what you ought to do, or are compelled to do: that is not humility, but duty. It is true humility to give way to those who are seen to be less than us. And if we are truly wise, we shall consider no one as less than ourselves, but all men as our superiors.

And this I say to you, not because of what we are, immersed in so many sins, but even should anyone be conscious to himself of innumerable virtuous actions, he shall have

no profit of his so many good works unless he looks upon himself as the lowest of men. For this is humility; when someone who has reason to be honoured, remains obscure and unknown, and holds himself modestly. For then he is uplifted to true honour, according to the promise of our Lord, Who said: *Everyone that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

Let us therefore, I beseech you, let us all be earnest in striving through humility to come to the summit of true glory, that we may receive from the Lord the reward of the just, and be worthy of the same ineffable blessings, through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be there glory and honour, now and forever, throughout all ages. Amen.

V. ST AUGUSTINE, BISHOP AND DOCTOR

Meditation on the Humility of Christ⁶

We commend to you, dearest brethren, the humility of Christ Jesus our Lord; rather, He commends it to us Himself. Reflect upon the wonder of His humility. The prophet Isaiah cries out: *All flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field. The grass is withered and the flower is fallen: but the word of our Lord endureth for ever* (xl. 6, 8). How he condemns and humbles the flesh! And how he exalts and praises the word of God!

Again I say, and again give ear: behold the lowliness of the flesh: *All flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field.* And what does he say of the grass? What of the flower of the field? He goes on to tell us. Do you wish to hear what

he says of the grass? *The grass is withered, and the flower is fallen.* And what of the word of God? *It endureth for ever.* Let us know the Word that endureth for ever.

Listen to the Evangelist as he praises the Word. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was made nothing. What was made in him was life: And the life was the light of men* (Jn. i. 1-4). Great this praise of the Eternal Word. Sublime the praise of the Word of God enduring for ever. And after this what does the Evangelist say? **AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH, AND DWELT AMONG US.**

Had God the Word done only this; had He only become Flesh, His humility would be unbelievable. And blessed are they who believe this unbelievable thing: for it is from unbelievable things our faith is made up. That the Word of God became grass, that dead He rose again, that God was crucified, are unbelievable things. It was because your sickness had become great, it was healed through unbelievable things. For He came, the humble Physician, He finds man lying sick; He shares his sickness, inviting man to become a sharer in His Divinity. He was offered in suffering, destroying suffering; and hung dying upon a Cross, that He might destroy death. He became Food for us: that we might eat, and be healed.⁷

For whom is this Food; whom does it nourish. Those who imitate the Lord in His humility. If you will not imitate His humility, how much more shall you not imitate His divinity? Imitate His humility if you can. When? How? He Who is God became a man. You who are man, know that you are a man. Would that you might know clearly what He became for you! Know thyself, for His sake. Let you reflect on this, that you are a man, and yet of such value that because of you God became man. Do not attribute this happening to your own lofty spirit, but to His mercy. For God our Lord redeemed us by His Blood; willing that the price of our souls should be His Blood, His innocent Blood.

2. And since I began, brethren, by saying that had God only humbled Himself to this; that He became a man, who could have looked for more from Him? For you would not

humble yourself to this; that from being a man you would become an animal: something not unlike man? And should you so humble yourself, that from being a man you became a beast, you would have not humbled yourself, as God has humbled Himself. For a man to become a beast, what was rational would become something irrational; yet what was mortal would be mortal: for man is mortal, and a beast is mortal; man is born, and a beast is born; man is conceived, as a beast is conceived; man eats corporal food, and increases as a beast increases. How many things has he not in common with the beast! In one thing only is he different: In his reasoning soul, upon which has been imprinted the image of the Creator. Yet God Who became man, the Eternal Who became mortal, took flesh from the substance of our race, without sin, became man, was born, taking upon Him that in which He would suffer for us.

But at this point He has not yet suffered. Contemplate Him now; what He has become for you, before He suffers. Is this lowliness a little thing? God has become man. O man! reflect that you are a man. It is because of you that God is man: And you do not acknowledge you are a man? Let us consider, brethren, who they are who do not wish to know they are men? Who are they; who are they who will not accept they are men? They are those who justify themselves, and blame God. Does one of them suffer something harsh or severe in this present life: From his tongue comes nothing but blame for God, praise of himself; and crying out in indignation at his affliction, he will admit

no sin, rather he boasts of his merits, and exclaims: 'God, what have I done to Thee? Why must I suffer these things?'

'God, what have I done to thee?' says man to God. Let God answer him. 'Well indeed do you say: "What have I done to Thee?" For to me you have done nothing. All this have you done to yourself.' For had you done something to God, you would have done something that would please Him: for this is to serve Him. But now, whatever you have done, you have done to yourself: for you followed your own will, and ignored His authority. It is plain that if this is what you mean you are speaking the truth. For what *can* you do to God, that you should cry out: 'What have I done to Thee?' He who throws a stone at heaven, does it fall on heaven or on himself? What you have thrown has not remained there, but has fallen on you. So is it with all blasphemies, should you hurl them at God: so is it with all insults; so is it with whatever stirs up your sacrilegious, impious and insolent mind: whatever you hurl upwards, falls back with far greater weight upon yourself.

3. What was it you would have done to God? You would have done something to Him had you obeyed His word. Had you done what He commanded you, you might well cry out: 'What have I done to Thee?' But now instead, look well into this justice of yours, examine your conscience, enter in to your own heart, make no noise without, look inward, to the inner chambers of your heart. See whether it is true or not that you have done no

wrong; see whether you are not suffering what you deserve, for something you have done, for which you now suffer some affliction; for all that is owing to the sinner is the scourge of burning and eternal fire. You abandoned your God; and you followed your own desires. What is it you suffer, when you feel the scourge? Correction: not damnation.

If God scourges you in this life, He is not angry with you. Do not offend Him because He chastises you; do not provoke Him, that He may spare you. Provoke Him by murmuring, and He will abandon you. Fly towards the scourge of the Chastiser, not from it; bow beneath it: where it falls, hasten thither. He knows where He strikes, and where to find thee; and in vain do you hide from His eyes Who is everywhere. Do you desire to escape from an angry God? Then fly to an appeased One: fly nowhere from Him, only to Him.

You thought to escape from Him when you lifted your heads in pride. Humble them, and fly to Him. *He scourgeth every son whom he receiveth* (Heb. xii. 6). You think it unworthy of yourself to suffer chastisement. And do you also disdain to receive from Him an inheritance? Your Good Father trained *thee for an inheritance* (Deut. viii. 5). He is Good, both when He spares thee, and when He chastises thee; and everywhere truly Merciful. (*Explicit De Humilitate Domini Nostri Jesu Christi.*)

Turning then to the Lord our God, we pray that the power of His mercy may strengthen our hearts in His holy truth, and confirm and give peace to our souls. May His grace abound in us, and may He have pity

on us, and deliver us from all evil,
and help us to please Him for ever,
through Jesus Christ our Lord His

Son, Who with Him and the Holy
Ghost lives and reigns for ever and
ever. Amen.

NOTES

¹ Many codices have *son*, for *ass*.

² PG 40, cols. 966, 976, *Sermones* XX, S. Antonii Abbatis. Serm. 5 and 20, col. 966.

³ PG 32, *Sermones* XXIV, compiled by Symeon Logotheta, from the works of St Basil M. Sermo. XX, col. 1354.

⁴ PG 31, col. 372, *Sermo* XI.

⁵ PG 53, col. 311, *in fine*, Hom. 33 in *Genesis*, xiii, peroration.

⁶ *Miscellanea Agostiniana, Sermones Reperti*, Mai, XXII, p. 314. The Prologue of St John as in the text of the sermon. The punctuation of verses 4 and 5, as here given by the late Cardinal Mai, conflicts with tradition; especially with Chrysostom and Augustine. See vol. I of this work, pp. 134 *et seq.*, from the

exposition of the Catena Aurea on the Prologue.

⁷ Elsewhere also the holy Doctor teaches that the Eucharist relates to the humility of Christ; cf. First Discourse on Ps. xxxiii, par. 6: Christ willed that we should find healing in His Body and Blood. And how can it be that He gives us His Body and Blood? (Cf. Mt. xxvi.) Because of His humility. For unless He were humble, these would be neither eaten nor drunken. Here is His humility. For man ate the Bread of Angels; as it was written: *He gave them the Bread of heaven: man ate the Bread of Angels* (Ps. lxxxvii. 24, 25); that is, man ate the Word, on which the Angels are fed eternally, and which is equal to the Father.