

## SERMON 227: PREACHED ON THE HOLY DAY OF EASTER TO THE INFANTES, ON THE SACRAMENTS

Date: 414-415†1

*You are yourselves what you receive*

I haven't forgotten my promise. I had promised those of you who have just been baptized a sermon to explain the sacrament of the Lord's table, which you can see right now, and which you shared in last night. You ought to know what you have received, what you are about to receive, what you ought to receive every day. That bread which you can see on the altar, sanctified by the word of God, is the body of Christ.†2 That cup, or rather what the cup contains, sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ. It was by means of these things that the Lord Christ wished to present us with his body and blood, which he shed for our sake for the forgiveness of sins. If you receive them well, you are yourselves what you receive. You see, the apostle says, We, being many, are one loaf, one body (1 Cor 10:17). That's how he explained the sacrament of the Lord's table; one loaf, one body, is what we all are, many though we be.

In this loaf of bread you are given clearly to understand how much you should love unity. I mean, was that loaf made from one grain? Weren't there many grains of wheat? But before they came into the loaf they were all separate; they were joined together by means of water after a certain amount of pounding and crushing. Unless wheat is ground, after all, and moistened with water, it can't possibly get into this shape which is called bread. In the same way you too were being ground and pounded, as it were, by the humiliation of fasting and the sacrament of exorcism. Then came baptism, and you were, in a manner of speaking, moistened with water in order to be shaped into bread. But it's not yet bread without fire to bake it. So what does fire represent? That's the chrism, the anointing. Oil, the fire-feeder, you see, is the sacrament of the Holy Spirit.

Notice it, when the Acts of the Apostles are read; the reading of that book begins now, you see. Today begins the book which is called the Acts of the Apostles. Anybody who wishes to make progress has the means of doing so. When you assemble in church, put aside silly stories†3 and concentrate on the scriptures. We here are your books.†4 So pay attention, and see how the Holy Spirit is going to come at Pentecost. And this is how he will come; he will show himself in tongues of fire. You see, he breathes into us the charity which should set us on fire for God, and have us think lightly of the world, and burn up our straw, and purge and refine our hearts like gold. So the Holy Spirit comes, fire after water, and you are baked into the bread which is the body of Christ. And that's how unity is signified.

Now you have the sacraments in the order they occur.†5 First, after the prayer,†6 you are urged to lift up your hearts; that's only right for the members of Christ. After all, if you have become members of Christ, where is your head?†7 Members have a head. If the head hadn't gone ahead before, the members would never follow. Where has our head gone? What did you give back in the creed? On the third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father. So our head is in heaven. That's why, after the words Lift up your hearts, you reply, We have lifted them up to the Lord.

And you mustn't attribute it to your own powers, your own merits, your own efforts, this lifting up of your hearts to the Lord, because it's God's gift that you should have your heart up above. That's why the bishop, or the presbyter who's offering, goes on to say, when the people have answered We have lifted them up to the Lord, why he goes on to say, Let us give thanks to the Lord our God, because we have lifted up our hearts. Let us give thanks, because unless he had enabled us to lift them up, we would still have our hearts down here on earth. And you signify your agreement by saying, It is right and just to give thanks to the one who caused us to lift up our hearts to our head.

Then, after the consecration of the sacrifice of God, because he wanted us to be ourselves his sacrifice, which is indicated by where that sacrifice was first put, that is the sign of the thing that we are;†8 why, then after the consecration is accomplished, we say the Lord's prayer, which you have received and given back. After that comes the greeting, Peace be with you, and Christians kiss one another with a holy kiss. It's a sign of peace; what is indicated by the lips should happen in the conscience; that is, just as your lips approach the lips of your brothers or sisters, so your heart should not be withdrawn from theirs.

So they are great sacraments and signs, really serious and important sacraments. Do you want to know how their seriousness is impressed on us? The apostle says, Whoever eats the body of Christ or drinks the blood of the Lord unworthily is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor 11:27). What is receiving unworthily? Receiving with contempt, receiving with derision. Don't let yourselves think that what you can see is of no account. What you can see passes away, but the invisible reality signified does not pass away, but remains. Look, it's received, it's eaten, it's consumed. Is the body of Christ consumed, is the Church of Christ consumed, are the members of Christ consumed?†9 Perish the thought! Here they are being purified, there they will be crowned with the victor's laurels. So what is signified will remain eternally, although the thing that signifies it seems to pass away. So receive the sacrament in such a way that you think about yourselves, that you retain unity in your hearts, that you always fix your hearts up above. Don't let your hope be placed on earth, but in heaven.

Let your faith be firm in God, let it be acceptable to God. Because what you don't see now, but believe, you are going to see there, where you will have joy without end.

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## NOTES

†1 This date is my compromise between those proposed by two authorities who are usually in perfect accord: Fischer, who suggests 412-413, and Kunzelmann who favors 416-417. The sermon, though primarily on the eucharist, explains all three “sacraments of initiation”: baptism, confirmation, and eucharist.

†2 Evidently the sermon was preached just before communion, after the great eucharistic prayer, or canon of the Mass.

†3 Presumably he means pagan myths; but possibly also various popular superstitions or naive misconceptions about the sacraments or the Holy Spirit.

†4 When we read the scriptures aloud, the books of the illiterate?

†5 He is going on to talk about the Mass, from the preface onward. So here by “sacraments” he seems to mean the successive stages of the eucharistic prayer, beginning with the exchange between celebrant and people which opens the preface; here each utterance appears to be a “sacrament.”

†6 What we now call the intercessions, or prayers of the faithful.

†7 We have to remember that *membrum* in Latin still meant primarily a limb or organ of the body, whereas in English it is the metaphorical sense of “member” that has become the ordinary meaning: member of an organization, institute, or society.

†8 The text is overloaded and corrupt here. As far as “because he wanted us to be ourselves his sacrifice” all is plain. Then it continues—I leave out variously suggested punctuations—*quod demonstratum est ubi impositum est primum illud sacrificium Dei et nos id est signum rei quod sumus*. I have simply omitted *Dei et nos* after the second *sacrificium*. I am guessing that “where the sacrifice was first put” refers to the offertory, and that this somehow indicated that the offerings represented the people's offering of themselves.

For the same doctrine that we are also the sacrifice or victim being offered in the Mass, see *The City of God*, X,6.

†9 Notice how his thought does not linger on the real presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements, but passes straight to the ultimate meaning of the eucharist, the ultimate grace signified by Christ's body and blood in the sacrament, namely the unity of the body of Christ which is the Church, and our living incorporation into it. He doesn't deny the real presence, as was later thought by, for example, some of the Protestant reformers. But he knows that it is only, so to say, the middle stage of the sacrament, what Saint Thomas Aquinas calls the *res et sacramentum*, the thing signified by the visible celebration, which is itself also the sacrament, that is the sign, of a further thing. It is this further thing, what Saint Thomas calls the *res tantum*, the ultimate thing or grace signified, that always interests Augustine. And the grace of the eucharist is the unity of the body of Christ and our participation in it. The real presence of Christ under the appearances of bread and wine has the same place in this sacrament as the baptismal character has in baptism: a kind of half-way stage, or middle level, in the sacramental mystery of grace.

## SERMON 228: ON EASTER DAY TO THE PEOPLE AND THE INFANTES

Date: uncertain†1

*The older faithful exhorted to give a good example to the newly baptized “infantes”*

1. After all the hard work of last night, I mustn't detain you with a long sermon, because even if the spirit is willing, still the flesh is weak;†2 all the same, though, I do owe you a sermon. All these days after the passion of our Lord, during which we sing to God with alleluia, we keep in joy as feast days until Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven as promised.†3 And of these days, the seven or eight we are in at the moment are earmarked for telling the infantes about the sacraments they have received.†4 A short while ago they were called “Askers”; now they're called “Infants.” They were called askers, because they were agitating their mother's womb, asking to be born. They are called infants because they have just now been born to Christ, having previously been born to the world.

What ought to be growing strongly in you has been started afresh in them; and you that are already the faithful must set them good examples which can help them to make progress, not bad ones that may cause their ruin. Being newly born, you see, they look to you to observe how you live, who were born a long time ago. That's what we all do, when born of Adam's line; first we are babies, and then, once we've begun to notice the habits of grown-ups, we watch out for things to imitate. And since the younger follows where the elder leads, it is to be hoped that the elder will proceed along a good road, or else by following along a bad one younger and elder may perish together.

And so you, brothers and sisters, who are after a fashion, in virtue of your age, parents of rebirth, I am addressing you and urging you so to live, that you may rejoice with those who imitate you and not perish with them. A person newly born observes one or other of the faithful who's a drunkard; what I'm afraid of is that he may say to himself, “Why is that guy one of the faithful, and yet he drinks so much?” He observes one or other of the faithful who's a money-lender, a stingy giver, a harsh exactor of interest, and he says to himself, “I'll do that too.”†5 He's told, “But you're a believer now, don't do it; you've been baptized, been born again, your hopes have changed radically, your morals should change too.” And he answers, “Why are So-and-so and Such-and-such believers, then?”

I don't want to say any more; I mean, who could run through the whole list? That's why, my dear brothers and sisters, when you live bad lives, you that are already believers, you will have a bad account to give to God both about yourselves and about these new Christians.

*The “infantes” exhorted to model themselves on good Catholics*

2. I am now going to address them, telling them to be grain on the threshing-floor, not to follow the chaff which is whirled around by the wind, and with which they would be lost; but to stay put on the floor with the weight of charity,†6 so that they may eventually reach the kingdom of immortality.

So you then, brothers and sisters, you, sons and daughters, you, the new offspring of mother Church, I beg you by what you have received to fix your eyes on the one who called you, who loved you, who went looking for you when you were lost, who enlightened you when you were found; and not to follow the ways of the lost, for whom the name of “faithful” is just a mistake; I mean, we're not asking what they are called, but whether they fit their name. If they have been born, where is their new mode of life? If they are of the faithful, believers, where is their faith? I hear the name, let me also recognize the reality.

Choose for yourselves the ones to imitate; those who fear God, who enter the church†7 of God with reverence, who listen carefully to the word of God, commit it to memory, chew over it in their thoughts, carry it out in their actions; choose them for your imitation. And don't let a little voice say to you, “And where are we to find such people?” Be such people yourselves, and you will find such people. Like always sticks to like; if you live an abandoned sort of life, only abandoned people will attach themselves to you. Start living a good life, and you'll see how many companions surround you, what a wonderful brotherhood you can rejoice in. Finally, you can't find anyone to imitate? Be the sort of person someone else should imitate.  
Sermon on the eucharist

3. We owe a sermon at the altar of God today to the “infants” about the sacrament of the altar.†8 We have explained to them about the sacrament of the symbol, or creed, on what they ought to believe; we have explained about the sacrament of the Lord's prayer, how they ought to make their petitions; and about the sacrament of the font and baptism.†9 But about the sacrament of the sacred altar, which they have seen today, they have as yet heard nothing. Today they are owed a sermon on this subject. That's why this sermon has to be short, both because of the hard work it is for me, and because of their edification.†10

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## NOTES

†1 No scholars suggest a date, though one suggests the Sunday after Easter, rather than Easter Sunday itself. I don't quite understand how he would explain the first sentence in that case. The general tone suggests to me a middle to late date; say about 420.

†2 See Mt 26:41.

†3 See Acts 2:33.

†4 Literally, “for the sacraments of the Infants.” But he cannot mean for giving the sacraments to the Infants. because that has already been done. Hence my longer paraphrase.

†5 A sin that has rather dropped out of the official Christian list of “don'ts” in the last few centuries. And so we have the astonishing, the appalling situation of “third world debt”; and while everyone agrees it is a serious problem, nobody—at least among the creditors in the first world—seems to think there is any wickedness or moral obliquity involved. It's all a matter of finance and economics, sciences that are not considered to have anything to do with ethics, let alone with the gospel. In this matter of the sin of usury, the medieval Church, with all its blind spots, was streets ahead of our contemporary Church today.

†6 It is a favorite idea of Augustine's that love (good or bad) on the moral and spiritual plane is what weight is on the material plane; it carries persons to their proper places. Commenting on one of his favorite texts, You have disposed all things in measure and number and weight (Wis 11:20), he says in the Confessions (XIII, 9, 10): *Pondus meum amor meus*: "my weight is my love/ my love is my weight."

†7 Here I think he must mean the church building.

†8 At the same service as this sermon was preached at? And does "at the altar of God" mean immediately before communion, as suggested in note 2 to Sermon 227? Again questions without answers, at least here.

†9 Note the very wide use of the word "sacrament."

†10 That is, if this sermon goes on any longer, there will be no time for the sermon on the sacrament of the altar, which they need for their edification.

## SERMON 229: ON HOLY EASTER SUNDAY ABOUT THE SACRAMENTS OF THE FAITHFUL

Date: 405-411†1

*The bread and wine on the altar become the body and blood of the Word, which he made us into as well*

1. What you can see here, dearly beloved, on the table of the Lord, is bread and wine; but this bread and wine, when the word is applied to it, becomes the body and blood of the Word. That Lord, you see, who in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (Jn 1:1), was so compassionate that he did not despise what he had created in his own image;†2 and therefore the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14), as you know. Because, yes, the very Word took to himself a man, that is the soul and flesh of a man, and became man, while remaining God. For that reason, because he also suffered for us, he also presented us in this sacrament with his body and blood, and this is what he even made us ourselves into as well.†3

Call to mind what this created object was, not so long ago, in the fields; how the earth produced it, the rain nourished it, ripened it into the full ear; then human labor carried it to the threshing floor, threshed it, winnowed it, stored it, brought it out, ground it, mixed it into dough, baked it, and hardly any time ago at all produced it finally as bread. Now call yourselves also to mind: you didn't exist, and you were created, you were carried to the Lord's threshing floor, you were threshed by the labor of oxen, that is of the preachers of the gospel.†4 When, as catechumens, you were being held back, you were being stored in the barn. You gave in your names; then you began to be ground by fasts and exorcisms. Afterward you came to the water, and you were moistened into dough, and made into one lump. With the application of the heat of the Holy Spirit you were baked, and made into the Lord's loaf of bread.†5

*Be one yourselves, in the same way as you can see the bread and wine have been made one*

2. There you have what you have received. So just as you can see that what has been made is one,†6 mind you are one yourselves too in the same way, by loving each other, by holding one and the same faith, one and the same hope, an undivided charity. When the heretics†7 receive this sacrament, they receive what is a testimony against themselves; because they insist on division, while this bread is a sign of unity. So too the wine was there in many grapes, and has now been concentrated into a unity; it is one in the pleasant taste of the cup, but only after the pressure of the wine-press. And you, after those fasts, after the hard labors, after the humiliation and the contrition,†8 have now at last come, in the name of Christ, into the Lord's cup, so to say; and there you are on the table, and there you are in the cup. You are this together with us; we all take this together, all drink together, because we all live together.†9

*Explanation of the rite of the Mass from the preface onward*

3. You are about to hear what you also heard yesterday; but today what you heard is being explained to you and also what you answered—or perhaps you kept quiet when the answers were given, but you learned yesterday what you should answer today. After

the greeting that you know, that is, The Lord be with you, you heard, Lift up the heart.†10 That's the whole life of real Christians, Up with the heart; not of Christians in name only, but of Christians in reality and truth; their whole life is a matter of Up with the heart. What does Up with the heart mean? Hoping in God, not in yourself; you, after all, are down below, God is up above; if you put your hope in yourself, your heart is down below, it isn't up above. That's why, when you hear Lift up the heart from the high priest,†11 you answer, We have it lifted up to the Lord. Try very hard to make your answer a true one, because you are making it in the course of the activity of God;†12 let it be just as you say; don't let the tongue declare it, while the conscience denies it.

And because this very thing of your having the heart up above is something that God, not your own capability, bestows on you, when you have said that you have your heart up above, the high priest continues and says, To the Lord our God let us give thanks. What should we give thanks for? Because we have our heart up above, and unless he had lifted it up, we would be lying on the ground.

And from there we come now to what is done in the holy prayers which you are going to hear, that with the application of the word we may have the body and blood of Christ. Take away the word, I mean, it's just bread and wine; add the word, and it's now something else. And what is that something else? The body of Christ, and the blood of Christ. So take away the word, it's bread and wine; add the word and it will become the sacrament. To this you say, Amen. To say Amen is to add your signature. Amen means “True” in English. Then comes the Lord's prayer, which you have already received and given back. Why is it said before we receive the body and blood of Christ? Because if, as is the case with human frailty, our thoughts have turned perhaps to something that they shouldn't have done, if our tongues have poured out something they ought not to have done, if our eyes have looked at something they shouldn't have, if our ears have listened with more pleasure than was proper to something they shouldn't have; if by any chance we have contracted any of that sort of thing from this world's temptations and the frailty of human life, it's all wiped clean by the Lord's prayer, where it says, Forgive us our debts (Mt 6:12), so that we may approach without any anxiety; otherwise we may eat and drink what we receive to our own condemnation.†13

After that comes Peace be with you; a great sacrament, the kiss of peace. So kiss in such a way as really meaning that you love. Don't be Judas; Judas the traitor kissed Christ with his mouth, while setting a trap for him in his heart. But perhaps somebody has unfriendly feelings toward you, and you are unable to win him round, to show him he's wrong; you're obliged to tolerate him. Don't pay him back evil for evil in your heart. He hates; just you love, and you can kiss him without anxiety.

It's only a few things that you've heard, but they are important ones. Don't treat them as cheap because they are few, but as dear because they are weighty. Also it would be wrong to overload you, or you wouldn't remember what's been said.

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## NOTES

†1 The Maurists only have this sermon as a short fragment, preserved by Bede and Florus; in fact as a chain of scattered fragments—every other sentence, as it were, from

sections 1 and 2. The sermon's authenticity has been questioned; the only solid reason I can surmise for this from the sermon itself is the fact that in section 3 below the preacher refers to the celebrant of the eucharist (himself, presumably) as the sacerdos, the high priest: a usage I have never come across before in Augustine's writings. In a similar context in Sermon 227 he speaks of the episcopus vel presbyter qui offert, the priest or presbyter who offers. For less tangible reasons of style and tone, I am hesitantly inclined to share the doubts about the sermon being genuinely one of Augustine's. If it is not, though, then it is one of a very faithful disciple of the master, someone like Caesarius of Arles.

†2 See Gn 1:26-27.

†3 This text illustrates very well how Augustine in his eucharistic theology is unequivocally “realist” in stating the reality of Christ's presence in the sacrament—“this bread and wine becomes the body and blood of the Lord”; and yet he never lingers, as later theology and devotion have done, on that real presence, but goes on immediately to reflect on what the real presence itself means or signifies: namely our unity with him, and in him with each other, in being ourselves the body of Christ. This is the ultimate grace of the eucharist, the ultimate thing signified; what scholastic theology calls the res tantum of the eucharist. The real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the consecrated species of bread and wine is what that same terminology calls the res et sacramentum: the reality signified by the sacramental sign of bread and wine, which is itself the sacrament, that is the sign, of the ultimate reality, the res tantum, namely our communion in the body of Christ, and thus the unity of the body of Christ, which is his Church. It is the fundamental, definitive concept of the sacraments being essentially signs, or if you prefer the word, symbols, rather than merely things, that has faded away almost to nothing in the Catholic consciousness, so strong, in a one-sided way, has been the stress on sacramental realism. And so we can get, in a Lesotho hymn in honor of the blessed sacrament, the following erroneous and deeply misguided statement: “Truly 'tis a matter of reality,/ It is not a sign and memorial;/ No, it is he himself/ Who has come to me out of love” (Lifela tsa Bakriste, 32, verse 4). To which one can only say, “Accentuate the positive, but eliminate the negative, and your statement will be not only pious but correct.”

†4 See 1 Cor 9:9. Corn was threshed by oxen dragging a heavy sledge, with iron teeth in it, a tribulum, round and round over the sheaves on the threshing-floor; it still is in communities where combine harvesters are not available, or feasible. See Sermon 111, note 17.

†5 His brief explanation of the sacraments of initiation in these terms, like that of all the Fathers, both Latin and Greek, presupposes the order baptism, confirmation, first communion. This is indeed the theologically correct sacramental order. Is it not time that the Latin Churches started taking it more seriously, and putting confirmation back in its proper place before first communion, as the most suitable preparation for first communion?

†6 Was there just one loaf of bread on the altar, even at this stage of the Church's history? Or was unity signified by all the small loaves the faithful had brought being piled in one heap on one dish? This seems more likely. The Latin Churches were not yet using unleavened bread for the eucharist.

†7 He means primarily the Donatists.

†8 The exercises through which the catechumens and the competentes were put, especially perhaps the exorcisms, but also their always being sent out of church before the Mass of the faithful began, and finally, no doubt, their having to strip naked in order to be baptized, must have been very humbling, if not exactly humiliating in the harsh

sense of that word. Augustine records somewhere in the Confessions his astonished admiration of what he considered the humility of the distinguished rhetorician Victorinus Afer publicly confessing his faith, in the “giving back” of the symbol by the competentes, when he became a Christian in Rome (Confessions VIII, 2, 5).

†9 “We” being, presumably, both clergy and older faithful.

†10 Augustine's liturgy has it in the singular, Sursum cor, instead of the plural of the Roman formula, Sursum corda.

†11 A sacerdote. In Patristic times the word sacerdos, priest, was almost invariably applied only to bishops, never—or hardly ever—to the presbyters whom we now call priests (the English word “priest” deriving from “presbyter”). So to avoid the reader thinking that it refers to priests in the sense in which we now use the word, it has to be translated “high priest.”

This usage, to the best of my knowledge, is so untypical of Saint Augustine that it does provide a ground for questioning the authenticity of this sermon.

†12 Apud acta Dei—a very strong way of describing the eucharist; it refers above all, one assumes, to the divine act of changing the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

†13 See 1 Cor 11:29.

## SERMON 272: ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST TO THE INFANTES, ON THE SACRAMENT

Date: 408†1

*One thing is seen, another is to be understood*

What you can see on the altar, you also saw last night; but what it was, what it meant, of what great reality it contained the sacrament, you had not yet heard. So what you can see, then, is bread and a cup; that's what even your eyes tell you; but as for what your faith asks to be instructed about, the bread is the body of Christ, the cup the blood of Christ. It took no time to say that indeed, and that, perhaps, may be enough for faith; but faith desires instruction. The prophet says, you see, Unless you believe, you shall not understand (Is 7:9). I mean, you can now say to me, "You've bidden us believe; now explain, so that we may understand."

Some such thought as this, after all, may cross somebody's mind: "We know where our Lord Jesus Christ took flesh from; from the Virgin Mary. He was suckled as a baby, was reared, grew up, came to man's estate, suffered persecution from the Jews, was hung on the tree, was slain on the tree, was taken down from the tree, was buried; rose again on the third day, on the day he wished ascended into heaven. That's where he lifted his body up to; that's where he's going to come from to judge the living and the dead; that's where he is now, seated on the Father's right. How can bread be his body? And the cup, or what the cup contains, how can it be his blood?"

The reason these things, brothers and sisters, are called sacraments is that in them one thing is seen, another is to be understood. What can be seen has a bodily appearance, what is to be understood provides spiritual fruit. So if you want to understand the body of Christ, listen to the apostle telling the faithful, You, though, are the body of Christ and its members (1 Cor 12:27). So if it's you that are the body of Christ and its members, it's the mystery meaning you that has been placed on the Lord's table; what you receive is the mystery that means you. It is to what you are that you reply Amen, and by so replying you express your assent. What you hear, you see, is The body of Christ,†2 and you answer, Amen. So be a member of the body of Christ, in order to make that Amen true.†3

So why in bread? Let's not bring anything of our own to bear here, let's go on listening to the apostle himself, who said, when speaking of this sacrament, One bread, one body, we being many are (1 Cor 10:17). Understand and rejoice. Unity, truth, piety, love. One bread; what is this one bread? The one body which we, being many, are. Remember that bread is not made from one grain, but from many. When you were being exorcised, it's as though you were being ground. When you were baptized it's as though you were mixed into dough.†4 When you received the fire of the Holy Spirit,†5 it's as though you were baked. Be what you can see, and receive what you are.

That's what the apostle said about the bread. He has already shown clearly enough what we should understand about the cup, even if it wasn't said. After all, just as many grains are mixed into one loaf in order to produce the visible appearance of bread, as though what holy scripture says about the faithful were happening: They had one soul and one heart in God (Acts 4:32); so too with the wine. Brothers and sisters, just remind

yourselves what wine is made from; many grapes hang in the bunch, but the juice of the grapes is poured together in one vessel. That too is how the Lord Christ signified us, how he wished us to belong to him, how he consecrated the sacrament of our peace and unity on his table. Any who receive the sacrament of unity, and do not hold the bond of peace, do not receive the sacrament for their benefit, but a testimony against themselves.

Turning to the Lord, God the Father almighty, with pure hearts let us give him sincere and abundant thanks, as much as we can in our littleness; beseeching him in his singular kindness with our whole soul, graciously to hearken to our prayers in his good pleasure; also by his power to drive out the enemy from our actions and thoughts, to increase our faith, to guide our minds, to grant us spiritual thoughts, and to lead us finally to his bliss; through Jesus Christ his Son. Amen.†6

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## NOTES

†1 Fischer, Kunzelmann, and Monceaux actually suggest between 405 and 411. Several eminent scholars think this sermon was preached at Easter, not Pentecost. The Maurists, however, accept the evidence of all the manuscripts—all they had access too, that is—in assigning it to Pentecost. There is no reason why it should not have been preached at Pentecost; it was the time for solemn baptisms as well as Easter. The sermon can scarcely have been preached anywhere else but in Augustine's own Church of Hippo Regius.

†2 At the administration of communion, presumably.

†3 Amen, of course, means “True.”

†4 Because water is added to the flour to make dough. This is suggested more obviously by the Latin *conspersi estis*, since *conspargo* means to sprinkle or moisten.

†5 Confirmation, anointing with chrism.

†6 See Sermon 15A, note 12, for this concluding prayer; but the text will first be found at the end of Sermon 67, not Sermon 34.

SERMON 272A: ON THE FIFTIETH DAY OF THE RESURRECTION: A  
FRAGMENT

Date: uncertain†1

*The miracle of the whole world believing*

The Lord Christ humbled himself, so that we might know how to be humble. Though containing all things he was conceived; though giving birth to all things he was born; though giving life to all things he died; but after three days he rose again, and ascended into heaven, and placed the human flesh which he had taken to himself at the Father's right hand. It's a miracle, brothers and sisters—and this is what the godless refuse to believe—it's wonderful that a man should have risen again in the flesh, and have ascended into heaven with his flesh; but it's a much greater miracle that the whole world should have believed something so unbelievable.

Which is the harder to believe, that God did such things, or that the world was able to believe them? Which indeed, particularly if we consider the way in which the world believed? That too can be observed to be truly divine, and found to be an astounding marvel. It was men quite untrained in the liberal arts, and as far as secular disciplines go totally uneducated, unskilled in grammar, unequipped with the techniques of dialectic,†2 it was fishermen whom Christ sent into the sea of the world with the nets of faith, and very few of them at that. Why should I say very few? He sent twelve. And yet by their means he so filled the Churches with every kind of fish, that a great many even of the wise ones of the world, to whom the cross of Christ seemed so disgraceful, are signing themselves with it on the forehead, and setting up in the seat of shame†3 the very thing they thought we should be ashamed of, and about which they used to taunt us.

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NOTES

†1 The Maurists edit this fragment in their supplement from the florilegium of Florus, who includes it as a kind of comment on 1 Cor 1, probably with reference to verses 26-30.

†2 Grammar and dialectic, the two basic liberal arts.

†3 The forehead.

## SERMON 341A: ON THE HUMILITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Date: uncertain†1

*The humility of Christ shown in the mystery of the incarnation, the eternal God humbling himself to become a mortal man*

1. I am hoping to impress upon you, dearest brothers and sisters, the humility of our Lord Jesus Christ; indeed he himself is impressing it upon us all. Just how great his humility was, let me show you. Isaiah the prophet cries out, All flesh is grass, and all the glory of the flesh as the flowers in the grass; the grass has dried up, the flowers fallen; but the Word of the Lord abides for ever (Is 40:6-8). With what scorn he disregarded and rejected the flesh! With what conviction he put first the Word of God and praised it! I say it again, please notice again, take a look at his disregard of the flesh: All flesh is grass, and all the glory of the flesh as the flowers in the grass. What does grass amount to, what do the flowers in the grass amount to? He goes on to tell us. Do you want to hear what grass amounts to? The grass has dried up, the flowers fallen. What about the Word of God? It abides for ever.

Let us see if we can recognize the Word which abides for ever; let us listen to the evangelist praising the Word. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; this was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing. What was made in him is life, and the life was the light of men (Jn 1:1-4). Great praise indeed of the eternal Word; high praise indeed of the Word of God abiding for ever. And what does the evangelist say later on? And the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us (Jn 1:14). If this was all that God the Word did, to become flesh, it would be unbelievable humility; and blessed are those who believe this unbelievable thing; our faith, after all, consists of unbelievable things.†2 The Word of God became grass,†3 God was crucified, it's all incredible; because your disease had become so grave, that it needed unbelievable remedies to cure it.

And indeed that humble doctor came, he found the patient lying sick, he shared his infirmity with him, summoning him to share his own divinity; he became in his passion the slayer of passions, and dying he was hung on the tree in order to put death to death. He made a food for us, which we were to take, and be cured. Where does this food come from? Having died, he rose again.†4 And whom does it nourish? Those who have imitated the Lord's humility. You won't even imitate that humility; how much more will you fail to imitate the divinity! So imitate the humility, if you can.

When? How?

He, being divine, became a human being; you, a human being, just realize that you are merely human. If only you would acknowledge what he became on your account! Acknowledge what you are on his account; see that you are merely human, and yet you are worth so much that on your account God became man. And don't make that a matter for your pride, but put it down to his mercy. The Lord our God, you see, has redeemed us with his blood, and has willed that his blood, innocent blood, should be the price of our souls.

*The difference between God and man infinitely greater than that between man and beast*

2. Coming back to what I had started to say, brothers and sisters, if God humbled himself so much that he became man, who would dream of demanding anything more from him? You, after all, don't humble yourself to the point of becoming a brute beast; and yet where's the comparison? If you were humbled to the extent of being made into a beast from being a human being, you wouldn't be humbled to the same extent, by the same amount as God humbled himself. A human being, after all, made into an animal, would indeed be something endowed with reason made into something lacking reason; but still in each case mortal and mortal. A human being is conceived just as an animal is conceived; is fed on material nutriment and grows just like an animal. How many things the human animal has in common with brute beasts! The sole difference is that it has a mind endowed with reason, in which the image of the creator is set.†5 The God, on the other hand, who was made man, was the eternal made mortal, clothing himself with flesh from the lump of our human stock, but without sin, becoming a human being, being born, taking to himself that in which he would suffer on our behalf.

But look, he hasn't yet suffered; take a look now at what he has become for you, before he suffers. Is this a trifling act of humility? God has become man. Man, man, notice that you are just a man. It is on your account that God is a man; and you there still won't acknowledge that you are merely a man? Let's take a look, brothers and sisters, at those who won't acknowledge that they are merely human beings. Who are the ones who refuse to acknowledge that they are merely human beings? Those who justify themselves, and blame God.†6 Let people suffer something hard and harsh in this life; nothing comes so readily to their tongues as blaming God and praising themselves. They exclaim indignantly about their distress, and instead of confessing their sins they boast of their merits, and say, "God, what have I done to you? Why am I suffering all this?"

"God, what have I done to you?" says a human being to God.

God may well reply, "You're right to say 'What have I done to you?' because you haven't done anything to me, but everything to yourself."

If you did anything to God, after all, you would do what gives him pleasure; that's what doing something to him means.†7 But as it is, whatever you've done, you've done it to and for yourself, because following your own will you have ignored his authority. Assuredly, if you understand it that way, you are right to say this. What, after all, can you do to God, that you should exclaim "What have I done to you"? If you hurl a stone towards the sky, are you hurling it at the sky, or at yourself? What you've thrown doesn't stick up there, and it falls back on you. It's the same with all the blasphemies you may throw in God's direction, the same with all the insults, the same with everything that upsets that sacrilegious and godless and proud mind of yours; the more you hurl them upwards, all the heavier the weight with which they fall back on top of you.

*Never try to run away anywhere from God, except to God*

3. So what were you going to do to God? Now you would indeed be going to do something to, or for, him, if you acted on his word; if you did what he had commanded, you would be right to exclaim, “What have I done to you?” And yet for all that, shake out your justice, shake up your conscience, enter into your heart; don't cry outside, take a look inside, go back into the inner chambers of your heart. See if you've really done nothing bad; see if you are not suffering what you deserve for what you've done, when you find yourself in any distress. All that the sinner is owed, after all, is the scourge of eternally burning fire. You have forsaken your God and followed your own lusts. What are you suffering, when you're being scourged? It's correction, not damnation. If God scourges you in this life, it means he is not angry with you.

Don't offend him when he's scourging you, don't provoke him, and then he will spare you. You provoke him by complaining, and then he abandons you. Take refuge under the scourge of the one who is correcting you; don't flee from the scourge, but under the scourge. Where he's beating you, that's where you must run to. He certainly knows where to strike, and where to find you; and it's in vain that you wish to hide from the eyes of one who is everywhere. Do you want to run away from God in his anger? Run away to God who has been placated; nowhere away from him except to him. You thought you were running away from him when you stiffened that proud neck of yours; humble it, and run away to him. He scourges every son whom he accepts (Prv 3:12). But you scornfully decline to be scourged? Then scornfully decline to inherit. The good Father is training you for the inheritance; he's good when he spares you, and good when he beats you, in every case truly kind-hearted.

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## NOTES

†1 The title in the manuscript from which this sermon is taken actually reads, *Incipit de humilitate...*: “It/he begins on the humility...” etc. This may simply be, perhaps, because the first word of the sermon is *Humilitatem*; or just possibly because the sermon came first in some collection of texts on the subject.

There is no reason to doubt that it was preached in Hippo Regius. My personal inclination would be to date it about 420-425; there are signs here and there of an old man's incoherences and slightly wandering thoughts.

†2 He is here echoing, no doubt deliberately, a famous saying of Tertullian's, the doughty African apologist of 200 years earlier, *Credo quia incredibile*, I believe it because it is unbelievable. This is one of the many pieces of theological spice with which Lewis Carroll (the Rev. Charles Dodgson) flavors his masterpieces, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*; see the White Queen's boast, “Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast”; *Through the Looking Glass*, chapter 5.

†3 The text here adds a phrase, *mortuus resurrexit*, having died he rose again, which is surely completely out of place in this context. I tentatively insert it a few lines further down, where it reasonably answers a question he asks, that in the text as it stands is left unanswered. It could, within the bounds of possibility, have shifted its place through a series of mistakes and corrections by successive copyists.

†4 Here is the place to which I transfer the phrase mentioned in note 3.

†5 Augustine places the image of God in our minds, not in our souls, where most catechisms and old theology textbooks usually locate it. Animals too have souls, *animae*, which is indeed why they are called anima-*ls*.

†6 How does this imply that they don't acknowledge that they are merely human beings? It shows that they think they can pass judgment on God, and so are putting themselves in a position of superiority over him; they are indeed again succumbing to that false suggestion, You shall be like gods, knowing good and evil, Gn 3:5.

†7 It means the same as doing something for him. The Latin dative can be translated both ways; both meanings are conveyed by that single case.

## SERMON 342: ON THE EVENING SACRIFICE, WITH AN EXPLANATION OF THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Date: uncertain†1

*The evening sacrifice is the sacrifice of the cross, in which the priest is himself the victim*

1. A sermon has to be preached about the evening sacrifice. We prayed after all as we sang, and sang as we prayed, May my prayer rise straight up like incense in your presence; the lifting up of my hands an evening sacrifice (Ps 141:2). In the prayer we observe the man, in the extension of the hands we recognize the cross. So this is the sign which we carry on our foreheads, the sign by which we have been saved. A sign that was mocked, in order to be honored; despised in order to be glorified. God appears in visible form, so that as man he may intercede; he remains hidden so that as man he may die. For if they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor 2:8). So this sacrifice, in which the priest is also the victim, has redeemed us by the shedding of the Creator's blood.

Not that he created us with blood, but he redeemed us by blood. He created us, after all, in the beginning which was the Word,†2 and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. It was by this that we were created. The text goes on to make the connection: All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing. That's the one we were created by. Now listen to whom we were redeemed by: What was made, it says, in him was life,†3 and the life was the light of men; and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it (Jn 1:1.3-5). He is still God; still being called what he always remains, unchangeable; still being called what hearts are to be purified by the sight of;†4 but how they are to be purified, he doesn't yet say. The light, he says, shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not comprehend it. But that it may cease to be darkness, and be able to comprehend it—the darkness, you see, is sinners, the darkness is unbelievers; so in order that they may cease to be darkness and be able to comprehend, the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14).

Observe the Word, observe the Word as flesh. As regards the Word before flesh, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; all things were made through him. Where is there any blood there? There you already have your maker, but it's not yet your price. So how is it you have been redeemed? It's because the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

*A comparison between John the Baptist and Christ*

2. Look back a little earlier on: The light, he says, shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it (Jn 1:5). So because the darkness did not comprehend the light, human beings needed some human testimony. They couldn't see the daylight, perhaps they would be able to tolerate a lamp. So because they were less able to see the daylight, but could nevertheless somehow or other tolerate a lamp, there was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came to bear witness about the light (Jn 1:6-7). Who about whom? John about Christ, the lamp about the daylight?†5 How was he not the light, if he was at least a lamp? First of all, observe that he was in fact a lamp. Do you want to listen to the lamp about the daylight, and the daylight about the lamp?

You people, he says, sent to John, and you were willing for a time to exult in his light; he was a lamp, burning and shining (Jn 5:33.35). So what did this other John†6 see, to make him play down the lamp? He was not the light, but to bear witness about the light. About what light? That was the true light, which enlightens every man coming into this world (Jn 1:9-10). If every man, then John as well.

The one who was not yet ready to show himself as the daylight, himself lit his lamp as a witness to himself. But it was such a lamp as could be kindled from the daylight. Listen to John himself confessing: We, he says, have all received from his fullness (Jn 1:16).†7 He was thought to be the Christ, he confessed that he was merely a man; he was thought to be the Lord, he confessed that he was a servant. You do well, Lamp, to acknowledge your humble state, or else the wind of pride would blow you out. That, after all, was the true light which enlightens every man coming into this world; that is, every living creature which is capable of being enlightened; that is, every one of us human beings possessed of a mind and reason, by which we are able to be partakers of the Word.

### *Two ways of understanding “world”*

3. So that true light which enlightens every human being possessed of a mind coming into this world—where was it? He was in this world. But the earth too was in this world, and the sun and the moon were in this world.†8 Listen, eye of the human mind, to what is said about your daylight. He was in this world, and the world was made through him. He was here in such a way as to be even before the world was, not as though he didn't have a place to be in. God, you see, contains things by dwelling in them, he is not contained by them. So it was in a marvelous and inexpressible way that he was in this world. And the world was made through him, and the world did not know him (Jn 1:10).

Which is the world that was made through him? In the beginning God made heaven and earth (Gn 1:1), because all things were made through him (Jn 1:3). Which world did not know him? There's world and world, just as there's house and house; house in the sense of the building, house in the sense of the occupants. House in the sense of a building, as “He's built a big house, he's constructed a very beautiful house.” House in the sense of the occupants, as “It's a good house, may God bless it; it's a bad house, may God spare it.” So, the world was made through him, both habitation and inhabitants; and the world did not know him, its inhabitants.

### *Those who did not receive him, and those who did*

4. He came into his own domain, and his own people did not receive him (Jn 1:11). So why did he come—as though he did not know beforehand that his own people would not receive him? Listen to the reason he came for: But as many as did receive him (Jn 1:12). His own people did not receive him, and his own people did receive him; the world did not believe, and the whole world did believe. It's like our saying, “The whole tree is full of leaves”; is there no place left for the fruit? Each can be said, each understood, both that the tree is full of leaves, and that the tree is full of fruit; one and the same tree in each case, but full of leaves that are to be blown away, full of fruit that is to be picked.†9 So then, you his faithful, you his servants, his lovers, to whom the glory belongs, to whom the hope, to whom the reality belongs; when you hear, His own people did not receive him, don't grieve; because you are his by believing.

His own people did not receive him. Who are these? The Jews, perhaps, called out of Egypt long ago, delivered with a mighty hand, brought across through the Red Sea, escaping on dry ground, suddenly deprived of enemies in hot pursuit, fed on manna, rescued from slavery, brought through to the kingdom, bought by so many favors. There you have his own people who did not receive him; but by not receiving him they became foreigners. They were part of the olive tree; it was for their pride that they were broken off. The contemptible wild olive, to be scorned for the bitterness of its berries, was to be found throughout the world; the whole world was bristling with that wild olive of the woods; but all the same it earned the right, through humility, to be grafted in where the olive, through pride, had deservedly been lopped off.†10

Listen to the olive being proud, and deserving to be broken off: We were not born of slavery; we have Abraham for our father. The answer comes, If you were the children of Abraham, you would do the deeds of Abraham. And in reply to their saying, We were not born of slavery, he says, If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. Are you boasting about being free? Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.†11 So, man, how much safer for you to have been the slave of a man, rather than of your distorted desires! They, all the same, by being so proud, did not receive the humble one.

See now a wild olive deserving to be grafted in—that centurion, not an Israelite, but a Gentile: Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof; and the Lord's comment, Amen, I tell you, I have not found such great faith in Israel. I haven't found in the olive what I have just found in the wild olive; so let the proud olive be lopped off, the humble wild olive grafted in. Observe him grafting, observe him lopping: That is why I tell you that many shall come from the east and the west; many wild olives to be grafted on the olive; and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. You have heard how the humble wild olive is to be grafted in; listen to how the proud olive is to be lopped off: But the sons of the kingdom shall go into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt 8:8-12). Why? Because his own people did not receive him. And why the wild olive grafted in? Because as many as did receive him, he gave them authority to become children of God (Jn 1:11-12).

*The nature of the authority given to those who did believe in him*

5. Don't be downhearted, human race; breathe in the fresh air of life and of the surest liberty. What are you hearing? What's being promised you? He gave them authority. What sort of authority? The sort, perhaps, which swells people's heads, to sit in judgment on human lives, in capital cases, to deliver verdicts on the innocent and the guilty? He gave them authority, it says, to become children of God. They weren't yet sons, you see, and they became sons, because the one through whom they become sons of God was himself already the Son of God, and became the Son of man. So they were already sons of men, and became sons of God.

He came down to what he was not, the one who was something else. He lifted you up to what you were not, because you were someone else. So stir up your hope. It's a great thing that has been promised you,†12 and it seems incredible, and it's generally reckoned that it's impossible for the sons of men to become sons of God. But much more was done for them, when the Son of God became a son of man. So stir up your

hope, Mr. and Mrs. Man, expel disbelief from your hearts. Something more incredible has already been done for you than what has been promised you. Are you amazed that as human beings you should have eternal life? Are you amazed that as human beings you should arrive at eternal life? You should rather be amazed that God for your sake arrived at death.

So notice how he gives you every assurance, how he confirms the promise of God: As many, he says, as did receive him, he gave them authority to become children of God. Engendered in what kind of way? Not in that usual one, not in the old way, not in the fleeting or fleshly way. It is not of the flesh, he says, nor of blood, nor of the will of the man, but of God that they are born (Jn 1:13). Does that amaze you? You don't believe it? The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:13-14).

There you have what the evening sacrifice is constituted by. Let us cling fast to him; let the one who was offered for us be offered with us. In this way, you see, the old life is slain with the evening sacrifice, and the new life rises with the dawn.

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## NOTES

†1 A curiously complicated, involuted sermon. Does it represent the excessive intellectual ebullience of the younger Augustine near the beginning of his ministry, or the occasional tendency to incoherence and wandering of the older man, 25 years or so later? I lean towards the former inference, and suggest, very tentatively of course, a date about 400. Perhaps it was preached to a more select congregation than usual at an evening service, and at a church in Carthage as likely as not.

†2 There is a curious mix of references here: Gn 1:1, then Jn 8:25, where in answer to the Jews asking who he was, he replied, according to Augustine's reading of the text, "The beginning." Only after that does he enter into the text of Jn 1:1-14.

†3 It seems clear that he understands the statement "what was made in him was life" to refer to the incarnation, to the Word being made flesh; and this was indeed, in all likelihood, the meaning of the author.

†4 That is to say, light.

†5 I here follow one manuscript. The Maurist text reads, "Who came here, about whom, to bear witness to the light?" But then that single manuscript continues: "Who, about whom? John, about Christ; therefore the lamp about the daylight. We are not doing John any injustice; but if we cannot gaze constantly on our daylight, at least let us praise him with honor. He came to bear witness about the light. He was not himself the light, but to bear witness about the light. How was he not, etc." This mostly seems redundant.

†6 The evangelist.

†7 All contemporary editions of the gospel treat this as comment by the evangelist, not as the words of John the Baptist. But Augustine's interpretation is perfectly reasonable.

†8 "World" in the total sense of the universe or cosmos—which is indeed the word employed in the Greek text. In translation we have to stick to the familiar "world," though we don't normally use it to mean the universe.

†9 This is more than an example of a manner of speaking; it is a little simile or parable, which he invariably develops when dealing with the trees of scripture, like the one in the incident of the barren fig-tree, for example. In this case the leaves represent those who did not receive him, the fruit those who did.

†10 See Rom 11:17-24.

†11 He is quoting snatches of Jn 8:33-39 in a very mixed up order, which readers, if they wish, can sort out for themselves.

†12 Here the Maurists follow that one manuscript already referred to (note 5 above), in inserting, *sed a magno promissum est. Multum...*; “but it has been promised by a great person. It seems much and incredible...”

## SERMON 343: DISCOURSE ON SUSANNA AND JOSEPH

Date: 397†1

*Susanna a splendid example of conjugal chastity and fidelity*

1. May the divine readings and the holy oracles of God which have sounded in our ears make a nest for themselves in our minds. May they not fly away, mere birds of passage, or stay for a moment and then depart, but instead may they hatch out some progeny there. For if the sparrow has found herself a house, and the turtle-dove a nest where she may lay her fledglings (Ps 84:3), how much more the sparrow which is the word of God, and the turtle-dove which is the mercy of God! We have heard the reading about Susanna.†2 May married chastity be built up by it, and laid on such a firm foundation, and fenced about with such a wall, that it can both repel intruders, and convict false witnesses.

This woman had remained chaste, though she would have been doomed to die unless someone had been present who saw what was hidden from her judges. Her words are recorded, which she spoke in the paradise (Dn 13:7), that is her shrubbery; words that no human being heard, apart from the two who were lying in wait to ensnare the modesty of another man's wife, and planning to give false evidence against her if she proved unwilling. They were the only ones who heard what she said: I am trapped on every side. For if I do this thing, it means death for me; but if I do not do it, I shall not escape your hands. But it is better for me not to slip out of your hands, than to sin in the sight of God (Dn 13:22-23). She turned down what she heard, because she feared one whom she could not see, to whose divine eyes, however, she was herself visible. Because she couldn't see God, after all, it doesn't mean she couldn't be seen by God either. God could see what he was building, he was inspecting his work, living in his temple. He was there; he was himself replying to the trap they were setting. If the giver of chastity, I mean, had abandoned her, chastity would have been undone.

So she said, I am trapped on every side. But she was waiting for the one who would save her from weakness of spirit, and from the stormy attack of the false witnesses, as from adverse winds. In the midst of those winds and waves, however, chastity did not suffer shipwreck, because the Lord was at the helm. The cry was raised, people came running, proceedings began, the case came up for judgment. Susanna's household believed the lying elders against their mistress. And although the innocent and stainless life she had hitherto led would seem quite sufficient to testify in favor of her virtue, it still seemed irreligious to them not to believe the elders. No such word had ever been heard about Susanna. So there they are, false witnesses, but known to God. The household believed one thing, the Lord could see another. But what the Lord could see, human beings were ignorant of; it seemed right that the elders should be believed.†3 So she had to die.

But even if†4 the flesh were to die, chastity would be crowned. The Lord was at hand to her prayers, he heard the one whom he knew.†5 He did not abandon her to death, after having helped her to avoid adultery. The Lord stirred up the holy spirit of Daniel (Dn 13:45), still a stripling in age, but a sturdy oak in piety. So because there was a prophetic spirit in him, he immediately saw through the deceitfulness of the utterly

depraved elders. But he had to work out how what he could discern plainly could be demonstrated to the others. They are false witnesses, he said. Resume the trial (Dn 13:49). Yes, he knew they were false, as the prophetic spirit had revealed it to him. Those who didn't know had to be convinced. So if the judges were to be convinced, the witnesses had undoubtedly to be convicted. So to convict them, concentrating on the falseness of their evidence, which he was already aware of, he ordered them to be separated from each other. He questioned them one at a time. You see, they could certainly both have one and the same lust, but they couldn't both think up one and the same plan. The first was questioned under which tree he had caught the adulterers. He replied, Under a mastic tree (Dn 13:55). The other was questioned. He answered, Under a holm-oak (Dn 13:59). The disagreement of their testimony made truth plain, set chastity free.

*As death is inevitable anyway, the innocent should not be afraid of false witnesses*

2. And chastity in fact, brothers and sisters, would have been set free and crowned, even if the flesh, which was due to die some time anyway, had died in that trial. We are all going to die, after all, nor does anyone who is eager to avoid death manage to eliminate it, but only to delay it. This is a debt that all are held by. This is a debt we are all going to pay, having inherited it from Adam. And because we don't want to die, we can ask the collector of this debt for a delay, we can't be given a remittance. So Susanna, religious woman and virtuous wife that she was, would certainly be going to die some time or other. And if that some time or other had been right then and there, what damage would it have done to her virtue? Her flesh would have been laid in a tomb, her chastity given back to God and crowned by God.

I mean, do you imagine, brothers and sisters, that it is a matter of great consequence, if false witnesses do not prevail against an innocent person? It isn't of great consequence if false evidence doesn't prevail against the innocent. It would have been of great consequence if it hadn't prevailed against the Lord.

Our Lord Jesus Christ himself was crucified by the tongues of false witnesses. But while these same false witnesses did indeed prevail for a time, what harm did they do to the one who was going to rise again? And so by his example the Lord our God in his flesh, in his weakness, and in the form of a slave which he took in order to liberate the slave, to seek the fugitive, to redeem the captive, to release the prisoner from his chains, to make of the slave a brother; coming to all this in the form of a slave, he showed the slave an example not to be too horrified by false witnesses, and not to be afraid when they are believed. Yes, they can ruin your reputation, but they can't kill your conscience. The three men were delivered from the burning fiery furnace. Their God was present, they were walking in the midst of harmless fires, which were blazing all round them and not burning them, and as they walked they sang God's praises, and came out as unscathed as when they had been thrown in.†6 So their God was present with them. Does that mean the God of the Maccabees was absent from them?†7 The former escaped unscathed, the latter were soon burned to death; both were tested. The flesh of these was consumed, the flesh of those unharmed; both were crowned. That the three men should escape the flames, it was granted to Nebuchadnezzar to believe in their God.†8 Because the one who was able to deliver them so publicly, would also have been able to crown them secretly. But if he had crowned them in secret, he would not have delivered the king who was raging against them. The saving of their bodies

became the saving of his soul. They by praising God escaped—from present flames; he by believing God escaped—but from eternal gehennas. Antiochus, however, who was torturing the Maccabees, was not worthy to have such favors granted him. That's why he exulted while they were being consumed by their torments; but whoever exalts himself shall be humbled†9 (Lk 18:14).

#### *The case of Mary saved from false suspicions*

3. So the one who delivered Susanna, a chaste woman, a faithful wife, from the false evidence of the elders, is the same as the one who also delivered the virgin Mary from the false suspicions of her husband. So this virgin was found to be pregnant, though her husband had not approached her. Her womb, indeed, had begun to swell with child, but her virginity had remained intact. It was by faith that she had conceived the sower of faith. She had taken the Lord into her body, and he had not allowed her body to be interfered with. Her husband, however, being human, had his suspicions. He thought another must be responsible for what he knew he himself was not, and suspected adultery from some other quarter. He is put right by an angel. Why was he worthy to be put right by an angel? Because there was nothing evil-minded about his suspicions, of the sort the apostle mentions, evil-minded suspicions arising among the brotherhood.†10

Evil-minded suspicions are nursed by scandal-mongers, right-minded suspicions can be entertained by persons responsible for others. Anyone may justifiably entertain wrong suspicions about his son, but hardly be justified in spreading scandal about his son. You suspect evil, but hope to discover good. When you suspect something in a benevolent frame of mind, you are eager to be proved wrong; you are rightly and really happy when you discover your suspicions were unfounded. Such were Joseph's suspicions about his wife, with whom he had not been coupled in the flesh, but to whom he had already plighted his troth. So the virgin too came under false suspicion. But just as the Spirit was present in Daniel to help Susanna, so also to help Mary the angel was present to Joseph: Do not be afraid to accept Mary as your wife. For what is being born of her is of the Holy Spirit (Mt 1:18-20).

#### *A comparison between married and virginal chastity*

4. A few moments ago married women were rejoicing over Susanna. Now it's the turn of virgins to rejoice over Mary. Let each group hold on to chastity, married chastity in the one case, virginal chastity in the other. Even if virginal chastity is the greater kind, married the lesser, still each is pleasing to God, because each is the gift of God. All sorts come through to eternal life, but in eternal life all don't obtain the same honor, the same dignity, the same merit. Eternal life and the kingdom of God will be like what, for the sake of a comparison, we say about the sky. In the sky are all the heavenly bodies; so too in the kingdom of God will be all the good faithful. Eternal life will be the same for all of them. It's not the case, I mean, that one has more life there, another less, since they are all going to have life without end. That is the tenner†11 which all the workers are going to receive, whether they have worked in the vineyard from early morning, or have come at the eleventh hour; that tenner is eternal life, which is one and the same for all. But look at the sky, remember the apostle: Heavenly bodies are one thing, earthly ones another. The glory of the sun is one thing, the glory of the moon another, yet

another the glory of the stars. For star differs from star in glory; it is the same too with the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:40-42).

So let each one of you, my brothers and sisters, fight the good fight in this life with the gift you have received, in order to rejoice in the next. Are you married? It's a lower sort of life, you can only hope for a lower sort of reward; but all the same you must not despair of the eternal kingdom.†12 You have to remember and observe the rules about marriage. What's the case, after all? Just because you have a wife, does it mean you don't have to recognize that you are just a foreign visitor in this world?†13 Shouldn't you be reflecting that you are going to die, that you are going to leave the bed of pleasure? And consider where precisely you will get to, whether the torments of ultimate disaster or the reward of eternity. Reflect carefully then, keep what you have received, carry your burden through to the end, because it is light if you love, heavy if you hate. It's not for nothing, after all, that the Lord said—or was he really, when he said this, only talking to those vowed to celibacy?—Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; because I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls—not for your flesh, but for your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Mt 11:28-30); light for the one who loves, heavy for the one who denies.

Have you taken the Lord's yoke upon your neck? It's easy and smooth, if you pull well; rough if you show reluctance. The married life is hedged about with trials and temptations. Did this Susanna, for example, avoid being tested and tempted in her virtue, just because she was wedded to a husband? Here's Susanna, another man's wife, with her own husband; yet she was tested. She was tossed about in the storm: I am trapped, she said, on every side (Dn 13:22). She was afraid of being condemned to die, you see, by the false witnesses, but she was also afraid of being condemned definitively to die by God the true judge. By the false witnesses, I mean, she would be doomed to die in time, by the divine judge she would be punished for eternity. She weighed up the alternatives, she made her choice. First she was afraid, and weighed the alternatives. She weighed the alternatives and made her choice. She made her choice and was victorious. She had a lesson to teach religious married women. She taught them to resist the tempter, taught them to fight, taught them to struggle, taught them to implore God's help.

*Susanna a model for women; what about men?*

5. If scripture bears witness to such a great woman,†14 does that mean it has abandoned men? Has it really permitted them to be without a model to imitate? We were watching Susanna severely tried by men who were lusting to undermine her virtue. We were watching her engaging in the contest. That reading was a kind of theater for our minds. We were on the lookout for God's athlete, for a virtuous spirit, we saw her opponent closing with her.†15 We shared the winner's triumph over her defeated foe. Religious married women have here their edifying example,†16 have something to imitate. Let them owe to God the fidelity they keep, not to man. It's then indeed that they really keep it, when they owe it to God. It's then that they keep it when they owe it to the one who sees what they are keeping, which even the husband cannot see. The husband, after all, is often away, God is always there. And sometimes, because the husband is only human, he entertains false suspicions. Then the wife should pray for her husband who is suspecting her falsely—pray that he may be saved, not that he may be condemned. I

mean, the man's false suspicions don't blinker the eyes of God. Her conscience is open to the sight of the one who creates her. He, you see, sets her free for eternity from her temporary oppression.

But let her pray for her husband, and take pains not only to lead a good life, but also to have an unblemished reputation. Her very virtue ensures the deliverance of a good wife,<sup>†17</sup> and her not being condemned. But a good reputation contributes to the deliverance of others, who might otherwise err by entertaining false suspicions, and fall into sin, perhaps, by passing judgment on what they cannot see; as those judges did, in fact; and then Saint Daniel, or rather the Lord through Daniel, delivered the judges rather than Susanna from an inner death. He delivered her, you see, from a temporal and temporary condemnation. But he delivered them from making a bad judgment and condemning an innocent woman, and so incurring being sentenced to eternal punishment by a judge whom nobody can bribe, and from whom nobody can hide.

### *Joseph a model for men*

6. So I was saying about the men, that they haven't been left without a model either. You chaste men, men who fear God, men for whom your own wives are enough, men who don't break the promise you don't want broken to you, men who show the fidelity you require to be shown to you; come and watch, yes you too, as I remind you of it, the same sort of spectacle as your wives were watching when the reader was telling that story. The divine scriptures haven't left you without a model either. The ladies were hearing about Susanna, and rejoicing at her victory. You now pay attention to Joseph. Not the Joseph to whom the virgin Mary was betrothed when she gave birth to Christ, because he was tempted to be suspicious, and was soon cured of that by an angel. Scripture tells of another Joseph, who was tempted by a shameless woman.<sup>†18</sup>

She loved his beauty, being unchaste herself, and of a twisted mind in which she didn't have those eyes by which spiritual beauty may be discerned. She loved him because he was beautiful, she didn't want him to be chaste. She loved him although he belonged to another, she loved her husband's slave. But she didn't love him<sup>†19</sup> being loyal to his master. Or do you think she loved him, or rather herself? I myself don't think either him or herself. After all, if she loved him, why did she wish to destroy him? If she loved herself, why did she wish to perish?<sup>†20</sup> She was on fire with the poison of lust, not aglow with the flame of charity. But he was able to see what she wasn't able to. He was more beautiful inwardly than outwardly, more beautiful in the light of his heart than in the skin of his body. Where that woman's eyes couldn't penetrate, he was himself enjoying his own beauty.<sup>†21</sup> So then, as he gazed on the inner beauty of chastity, when could he ever allow it to be soiled, ever allow it to be ravished by the seduction of that woman? She was in love; but he was in love too. And what he was in love with was worth more than what she was in love with; because he could see what she couldn't.

### *If you love chastity in your wife or daughter, love it in yourself*

7. If you want to see in any way at all the spiritual beauty of chastity, if you have any sort of eyes for it, let me propose something as an example; you love it in your wife. So don't hate in another man's wife what you love in your own. What in fact do you love in your wife? Her chastity, of course. Precisely what you hate in another man's wife is what you love in your own. You hate it in another man's wife, because you want to

destroy her chastity by lying with her. What you love in your own wife, do you want to kill in another man's? What you love in your own, do you want to destroy in another man's? How will you be able to make the prayer of piety,†22 you murderer of chastity? Preserve, then, in another man's wife what you wish to have preserved in your own. Love chastity itself, rather than the flesh.†23

But perhaps you reckon you are a lover of your wife's body, not of her chastity. It's a sordid calculation indeed, but I won't leave you without an example. I, you see, do think that you love chastity in your wife more than her body. But to show you up to yourself without question as a lover of chastity; it's something you love in your daughter. What man is there who doesn't want his daughters to be chaste? What man is there who doesn't rejoice over the chastity of his daughters? Is it the flesh that you love even in this case? Do you really lust after a beautiful body, where you're shocked at the thought of its being unchaste? There you are then, I've proved you are a lover of chastity. So if I've shown you to be a lover of chastity, how have you offended yourself, so that you don't love it in yourself? There you have it in a nutshell: love in yourself what you love in your daughter. Love it in another man's wife, because your daughter too is going to be another man's wife. So love chastity also in yourself. If you love another man's wife, you won't get her straightaway. If you love the lady chastity, you will have her at once. So love chastity, so that you may have eternal felicity.

#### *The example of Joseph recalled in more detail*

8. But perhaps you'll be tempted; a shameless woman will fall in love with you. She'll find you alone somewhere, and make every effort to extract a kiss and an embrace from you. If you refuse, she will threaten to punish you by blackening your good name. That's what those false old men did to Susanna. That's what the wife of his master did to Saint Joseph. Just because there's no witness, does it mean God is not there?†24 It was his eyes that Joseph was unwilling to offend, the eyes of that Lord of his who was present. He refused to consent to the shameless woman and to unlawful intercourse with her. He repelled another person's lust, embraced his own virtue.

However, she carried out her threat. She lied to her man, she was believed by her husband. God is still patient. Joseph is thrown into prison, kept in custody as guilty,†25 though God had not been offended by him. But even there God was not absent, because Joseph was not, in fact, guilty. God was there with Joseph in his sufferings; the fact that he didn't come to his aid at once, meant that he was deferring him for greater rewards. After putting him through his paces with punishment, he rewarded him with the blessing he deserved. This holy man Joseph, you see, had rightly to suffer something for the sake of chastity, yes even something hard, which is to say bitter. If by any chance he had loved that shameless woman, he would have been prepared to suffer hardships for her sake. And she wouldn't have accepted his love for her as genuine, unless he had endured such difficulties and hardships on her account, and in that way returned her love—or rather not love but evil lust. She in turn would be burning with love for him, because she would see him on fire with such love for her, that on account of it he didn't refuse to endure any kind of punishment. If all that for a shamelessly unchaste woman, how much more for the lady chastity herself! So it's good that God sometimes puts off helping people in order to test them, in order to put them through their paces, in order that people may come to know themselves; because nothing, after all, is hidden from God.

*We must put the sweetness of wisdom, the splendor of virtue, the beauty of chastity before the vanities of this life*

9. So this, brothers and sisters, is what I want to warn your graces about: that above all you should prefer to the lusts of the flesh and the joys of the world and the vain and fleeting parade of this life and its vapidness, that you should have a preference for the splendor and beauty of wisdom, a preference for the pleasant sweetness of wisdom, a preference for the splendor of virtue, the beauty of chastity. These things are all hidden away in the heavenly treasury.<sup>†26</sup> These are precious gems, laid out openly in their dazzling brilliance before the very eyes of God. If you've got eyes for them, you can all see them too. So put these things before the whole gamut of unlawful pleasures.

And if trial and temptation comes your way, to the extent that you even suffer serious annoyance, my brothers and sisters, well, do any of you not suffer such things on account of your purses? Don't you put up with annoyances on account of your land, on account of one boundary stone on your land? If you put up with annoyances on account of these things, which you do not have under your control, however long you wish to hold onto them, and whoever you wish to leave them to—but they are often lost while we are still alive, and they often go after our death to people we hate; if for these goods (if in any case they are to be called good, since they don't make people good) people endure so many evils with unruffled composure, why are they so reluctant to endure difficulties for the sake of fidelity and truth? Why are they so timid in standing up for the heavenly treasure, for those riches which not even shipwrecks can deprive us of? The just man, you see, emerges from a shipwreck both rich and stripped of everything.

#### *The example of Job*

10. Holy Job was well endowed with these riches. He had lost everything at a single stroke, there was nothing left in his house of what a short while before had made him seem so wealthy. Suddenly reduced to beggary, sitting on his dunghill, riddled with worms from head to foot. What could be more wretched than wretchedness like that? What could be better off than such inner prosperity? He had lost everything God had given him, but he still had the one who had given him everything. Naked, he said, I came out from my mother's womb, naked shall I return to the earth. The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away. As it pleased the Lord, so has it been done. Blessed be the name of the Lord (Jb 1:21). Is he really poor? Does he really have nothing? If there's nothing left, from what treasury were these gems of praise being offered to God?<sup>†27</sup>

Later on the tempter approached as far as the flesh was concerned.<sup>†28</sup> Having taken everything off him, he left him his wife to tempt him. He left Eve behind—but that man wasn't Adam. And in this instance too, as what kind of man did he emerge? How did he answer his wife's suggestion that he should blaspheme? You have spoken, he said, like the silly woman you are. If we have received good things from the hand of the Lord, why can we not bear with evil things? (Jb 2:10). What a man, rotting away, yet whole and entire! Filthy, and at the same time lovely! Sorely stricken, yet in perfect health! Sitting on a dunghill, and at the same time reigning in heaven! If we love him, let us imitate him. To imitate him, let us wear ourselves out. And if in our weariness we become feebler than ever, let us beg for help.

The one who arranged the contest helps the contestant. God, you see, doesn't watch you in the ring in the same way as the populace watch a charioteer; they know how to shout, they don't know how to help. God doesn't watch you battling in the ring in the same way as the president at the games watches an athlete, and prepares a crown of leaves for the winner; he doesn't know how to give strength to the man struggling in the arena and he can't do it anyhow; after all he's a man, not God. And perhaps while he's watching, he endures more weariness sitting there than the other does as he wrestles. God, you see, when he watches his champions, helps them when they call upon him. I mean, it's the voice of his athlete in the psalm, If I said, My foot is slipping, your mercy, Lord, came to my help (Ps 94:18). So, my brothers and sisters, don't let's be slow about it; let us ask, let us seek, let us knock. For everyone who asks receives, and who seeks will find, and who knocks will have the door opened (Lk 11:10).

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## NOTES

†1 All are agreed on this date, even on more precise dating to the week 7 to 13 May of that year; and on the sermon being preached in Carthage.

†2 Daniel 13, Jerusalem Bible; Susanna, RSV Apocrypha.

†3 See Dn 13:4.

†4 Reading *etsi* instead of the text's *si*, if.

†5 See Dn 13:42-44.

†6 See Dn 3:19-27.

†7 See 2 Mac 7.

†8 Surely he has put it the wrong way round? Their coming unscathed from the flames was the reason and occasion for Nebuchadnezzar believing, not vice versa, as indeed Augustine goes on to spell out.

†9 See 2 Mac 9.

†10 See 1 Tm 6:4.

†11 The denarius of Mt 20:9-10. When it has occurred in other sermons he has usually played on its connection with the number ten, which is why I translate by “tenner” there. So I keep to that translation here. The old translation “a penny” was strictly accurate, the penny being the *d* (denarius, or French *denier*) of L.s.d., pounds, shillings, and pence. But nowadays it just sounds ridiculous.

†12 For a more up-to-date, less starkly stated theology of the different states of life, see Vatican II's document on The Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, Part II, chapter 1.

†13 See 1 Cor 7:27-31; also 2 Cor 5:6.

†14 Reading with the Maurists *de femina tanta*. A later edition reads *de femina tentata*, about a woman being tested.

†15 As it is in the singular, *adversarius*, it presumably does not refer to the two old men directly, but to the sin they were trying to drag her into committing.

†16 I here combine, and adjust, the Maurist reading, *Habent exemplum suum*, and that of the later edition, *Habent aedificium suum*, to read: *Habent ad aedificium exemplum suum*. This is something, according to the approved canons of textual criticism, one should hardly ever do. But I feel it is justified in this case, in which the fuller reading could, by simple scribal error, give rise to each of the other two alternatives. Neither of them, on the other hand, could very accountably give rise to the other.

†17 The text says “of a good life,” bonam vitam; shorthand, you could say, for the wife leading a good life. I wonder, though, if he didn't in fact say bonam uxorem, which an early copyist, his eye caught by bonam vitam in the line above, then understandably and unintentionally changed into bonam vitam.

†18 See Gn 39:6-18.

†19 Following the Maurists; the later edition reads, “But did she love him...?”

†20 So the Maurists; from “I myself” to this point the later edition reads, “Not even him. If she loved him, why did she wish to destroy him?”

†21 In fact the beauty of chastity, as he goes on to say.

†22 So the Maurists; Quomodo habetis orationem pietatis. The later edition reads, ...rationem pietatis, how will you have the essence of piety...

†23 So the Maurists; the later edition omits “than the flesh.”

†24 So the Maurists; the later edition makes it a statement, beginning the sentence with Non instead of the Maurists' Num.

†25 So the Maurists; the later edition simply has, “But Joseph is kept in prison as guilty.” See Gn 39:13-23.

†26 See Col 2:3.

†27 Reading Deo instead of the text's Dei, these gems of the praise of God being offered.

†28 Usque ad carnem, literally, “as far as the flesh.” I don't know what it means. Perhaps it was a saying, like “up to the hilt,” “down to the quick,” “to the very limit,” “the last straw.”