

Of Holy Virginity

By Saint Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430)

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[De Virginitate.] Translated by Rev. C. I. Cornish, M.A.

From the *Retractions* 2:23: "After I had written 'on the Good of Marriage,' it was expected that I should write on Holy Virginity; and I did not delay to do so: and that it is God's gift, and how great a gift, and with what humility to be guarded, so far as I was able I set forth in one volume. This book begins," &c.

1. We lately put forth a book "of the Good of Marriage," in which also we admonished and admonish the [virgins](#) of [Christ](#), not, on account of that greater gift which they have received, to despise, in comparison of themselves, the fathers and mothers of the People of [God](#); and not to think those men, (whom the Apostle sets forth as the olive, that the engrafted wild olive be not [proud](#).) who did service to Christ about to come hereafter, even by the begetting of sons, on this account of less desert, because by divine right continence is preferred to wedded life, and [pious virginity](#) to marriage. Forsooth in them were being prepared and brought forth future things, which now we see fulfilled in a marvellous and effectual manner, whose married life also was prophetic: whence, not after the wonted custom of human wishes and joys, but by the very deep counsel of [God](#), in certain of them fruitfulness obtained to be [honored](#), in certain also barrenness to be made fruitful. But at this time, towards them unto whom it is said, "if they contain not, let them be married," we must use not consolation, but exhortation. But them, unto whom it is said, "Whoso can receive, let him receive," we must exhort, that they be not alarmed; and alarm that they be not lifted up. Wherefore [virginity](#) is not only to be set forth, that it may be loved, but also to be admonished, that it be not puffed up.

2. This we have undertaken in our present discourse: may Christ help us, the Son of a [virgin](#), and the Spouse of [virgins](#), born after the flesh of a [virgin](#) womb, and wedded after the Spirit in virgin marriage. Whereas, therefore, the whole [Church](#) itself is a [virgin](#) espoused unto one Husband Christ, as the Apostle says, of how great [honor](#) are its members worthy, who guard this even in the flesh itself, which the whole [Church](#) guards in the [faith](#)? which imitates the mother of her husband, and her Lord. For the Church also is both a mother and a [virgin](#). For whose virgin purity consult we for, if she is not a [virgin](#)? or whose children address we, if she is not a mother? Mary bare the Head of This Body after the flesh, the Church bears the members of that Body after the Spirit. In both [virginity](#) hinders not fruitfulness: in both fruitfulness takes not away [virginity](#). Wherefore, whereas the whole [Church](#) is [holy](#) both in body and spirit, and yet the whole is not virgin in body but in spirit; how much more [holy](#) is it in these members, wherein it is virgin both in body and spirit?

3. It is written in the [Gospel](#), of the mother and brethren of [Christ](#), that is, His kindred after the flesh, that, when word had been brought to Him, and they were standing without, because they could not come to Him by reason of the crowd, He made answer, "Who is My mother? or who are My brethren? and stretching forth His Hand over His [disciples](#), He says, These are My brethren: and whosoever shall have done the [will](#) of My Father, that man is to Me brother, and mother, and sister." What else teaching us, than to prefer to kindred after the flesh, our descent after the Spirit: and that men are not blessed for this reason, that they are united by nearness of flesh unto just and [holy](#) men, but that, by [obeying](#) and following, they cleave unto their doctrine and conduct. Therefore Mary is more [blessed](#) in receiving the [faith](#) of [Christ](#), than in conceiving the flesh of [Christ](#). For to a certain one who said, "Blessed is the womb, which bare You," He Himself made answer, "Yea, rather, blessed are they who hear the [Word of God](#), and keep it." Lastly, to His brethren, that is, His kindred after the flesh, who [believed](#) not in Him, what profit was there in that being of kin? Thus also her nearness as a Mother would have been of no profit to Mary, had she not borne Christ in her heart after a more blessed manner than in her flesh.

4. Her [virginity](#) also itself was on this account more pleasing and accepted, in that it was not that Christ being conceived in her, rescued it beforehand from a husband who would violate it, Himself to preserve it; but, before He was conceived, chose it, already dedicated to [God](#), as that from which to be born. This is shown by the words which Mary spoke in answer to the Angel announcing to her her conception; "How," says she, "shall this be, seeing I [know](#) not a man?" Which assuredly she would not say, unless she had before vowed herself unto God as a [virgin](#). But, because the habits of the [Israelites](#) as yet refused this, she was espoused to a just man, who would not take from her by [violence](#), but rather guard against violent [persons](#), what she had already vowed. Although, even if she had said this only, "How shall this take place?" and had not added, "seeing I [know](#) not a [man](#)," certainly she would not have asked, how, being a female, she should give birth to her promised Son, if she had married with purpose of sexual intercourse. She might have been bidden also to continue a [virgin](#), that in her by fitting [miracle](#) the [Son of God](#) should receive the form of a servant, but, being to be a pattern to [holy virgins](#), lest it should be thought that she alone needed to be a [virgin](#), who had obtained to conceive a child even without sexual intercourse, she dedicated her [virginity](#) to [God](#), when as yet she [knew](#) not what she should conceive, in order that the imitation of a heavenly life in an earthly and mortal body should take place of vow, not of command; through [love](#) of choosing, not through necessity of doing service. Thus Christ by being born of a [virgin](#), who, before she [knew](#) Who was to be born of her, had determined to continue a [virgin](#), chose rather to approve, than to command, [holy virginity](#). And thus, even in the female herself, in whom He took the form of a servant, He willed that [virginity](#) should be free.

5. There is, therefore, no reason why the [virgins](#) of God be sad, because themselves also cannot, keeping their [virginity](#), be mothers of the flesh. For Him alone could [virginity](#) give birth to with fitting propriety, Who in His Birth could have no peer. However, That Birth of the Holy Virgin is the ornament of all [holy virgins](#); and themselves together with Mary are mothers of [Christ](#), if they do the [will](#) of His Father. For Mary also is on this account the Mother of Christ in a way more full of praise and blessing, according to His

sentence mentioned above. "Whosoever does the [will](#) of my Father Who is in heaven, that one is to Me brother, and sister, and mother." All these degrees of nearness of kin to Himself, He shows forth in a spiritual manner, in the People whom He has redeemed: as brothers and sisters He has [holy](#) men and [holy women](#), forasmuch as they all are co-heirs in the heavenly inheritance. His mother is the whole [Church](#), because she herself assuredly gives birth to His members, that is, His faithful ones. Also His mother is every [pious soul](#), doing the [will](#) of His Father with most fruitful charity, in them of whom it travails, until Himself be formed in them. Mary, therefore, doing the [will](#) of [God](#), after the flesh, is only the mother of [Christ](#), but after the Spirit she is both His sister and mother.

6. And on this account, that one female, not only in the [Spirit](#), but also in the flesh, is both a mother and a [virgin](#). And a mother indeed in the [Spirit](#), not of our Head, Which is the Saviour Himself, of Whom rather she was born after the Spirit: forasmuch as all, who have [believed](#) in Him, among whom is herself also, are rightly called "children of the Bridegroom:" but clearly the mother of His members, which are we: in that she wrought together by charity, that faithful ones should be born in the [Church](#), who are members of That Head: but in the flesh, the mother of the Head Himself. For it behoved that our Head, on account of a notable [miracle](#), should be born after the flesh of a [virgin](#), that He might thereby signify that His members would be born after the [Spirit](#), of the Church a [virgin](#): therefore Mary alone both in Spirit and in flesh is a mother and a [virgin](#): both the mother of [Christ](#), and a [virgin](#) of Christ; but the [Church](#), in the Saints who shall possess the [kingdom of God](#), in the [Spirit](#) indeed is altogether the mother of [Christ](#), altogether a [virgin](#) of Christ: but in the flesh not altogether, but in certain a [virgin](#) of [Christ](#), in certain a mother, but not of [Christ](#). Forsooth both faithful [women](#) who are married, and [virgins](#) dedicated to [God](#), by [holy](#) manners, and charity out of a pure heart, and good [conscience](#), and [faith](#) unfeigned, because they do the [will](#) of the [Father](#), are after a spiritual sense mothers of [Christ](#). But they who in married life give birth to (children) after the flesh, give birth not to [Christ](#), but to Adam, and therefore run, that their offspring having been dyed in His [Sacraments](#), may become members of [Christ](#), forasmuch as they [know](#) what they have given birth to.

7. I have said this, lest haply married fruitfulness dare to vie with virgin [chastity](#), and to set forth Mary herself, and to say unto the [virgins](#) of [God](#), She had in her flesh two things worthy of [honor](#), [virginity](#) and fruitfulness; inasmuch as she both continued a [virgin](#), and bore: this [happiness](#), since we could not both have the whole, we have divided, that you be [virgins](#), we be mothers: for what is wanting to you in children, let your [virginity](#), that has been preserved, be a consolation: for us, let the gain of children make up for our lost [virginity](#). This speech of faithful [women](#) married, unto [holy virgins](#), would any how be to be endured, if they gave birth to [Christians](#) in the flesh; that in this alone, save [virginity](#), the fruitfulness of Mary in the flesh should be more excellent, that she gave birth to the Head Himself of these members, but they to the members of That Head: but now, although by this speech there vie such as on this one account wed and have intercourse with husbands, that they may have sons, and have no other thought of their sons, than to gain them for [Christ](#), and do this so soon as they can: yet are not [Christians](#) born of their flesh, but made so afterwards: the Church giving them birth, through this, that in a

spiritual manner she is the mother of the members of [Christ](#), of Whom also after a spiritual manner she is the virgin. And unto this [holy](#) birth mothers also who have not borne in the flesh [Christians](#), are workers together, that they may become what they [know](#) that they could not give birth to in the flesh: yet are they workers together through this, wherein themselves also are [virgins](#) and mothers of [Christ](#), that is to say, in "[faith](#) which works through [love](#)."

8. Therefore no fruitfulness of the flesh can be compared to [holy virginity](#) even of the flesh. For neither is itself also [honored](#) because it is [virginity](#), but because it has been dedicated to [God](#), and, although it be kept in the flesh, yet is it kept by religion and devotion of the Spirit. And by this means even [virginity](#) of body is spiritual, which continence of [piety](#) vows and keeps. For, even as no one makes an immodest use of the body, unless the [sin](#) have been before conceived in the spirit, so no one keeps modesty in the body, unless [chastity](#) have been before implanted in the spirit. But, further, if modesty of married life, although it be guarded in the flesh, is yet attributed to the [soul](#), not to the flesh, under the rule and guidance of which, the flesh itself has no intercourse with any beside its own proper estate of marriage; how much more, and with how much greater [honor](#), are we to reckon among the goods of the [soul](#) that continence, whereby the virgin purity of the flesh is vowed, [consecrated](#), and kept, for the Creator Himself of the [soul](#) and flesh.

9. Wherefore neither are we to [believe](#) that their fruitfulness of the flesh, who at this time seek in marriage nothing else save children, to make over unto Christ, can be set against the loss of [virginity](#). Forsooth, in former times, unto Christ about to come after the flesh, the race itself of the flesh was needful, in a certain large and prophetic nation: but now, when from out every race of [men](#), and from out all nations, members of Christ may be gathered unto the People of [God](#), and City of the [kingdom of heaven](#), whoso can receive sacred [virginity](#), let him receive it; and let her only, who contains not, be married. For what, if any rich [woman](#) were to expend much money on this good work, and to buy, from out different nations, slaves to make [Christians](#), will she not provide for the giving birth to members of Christ in a manner more rich, and more numerous, than by any, how great soever, fruitfulness of the womb? And yet she will not therefore dare to compare her money to the offering of [holy virginity](#). But if for the sake of making such as shall be born [Christians](#), fruitfulness of the flesh shall with just reason be set against the loss of [chastity](#), this matter will be more fruitful, if [virginity](#) be lost at a great price of money, whereby many more children may be purchased to be made [Christians](#), than could be born from the womb, however fruitful, of a single person. But, if it be extreme folly to say this, let the faithful [women](#) that are married possess their own good, of which we have treated, so far as seemed fit, in another volume; and let them more highly [honor](#), even as they are most rightly used to do, in the sacred [virgins](#), their better good, of which we are treating in our present discourse.

10. For not even herein ought such as are married to compare themselves with the deserts of the continent, in that of them [virgins](#) are born: for this is not a good of marriage, but of nature: which was so ordered of [God](#), as that of every sexual intercourse whatever of the two sexes of human kind, whether in due order and honest, or base and unlawful, there is

born no female save a [virgin](#), yet is none born a sacred virgin: so it is brought to pass that a [virgin](#) is born even of fornication, but a sacred virgin not even of marriage.

11. Nor do we ourselves set forth this in [virgins](#), that they are [virgins](#); but that they are [virgins](#) dedicated unto God by [pious](#) continence. For it is not at a venture that I may say, a married [woman](#) seems to me happier than a [virgin](#) about to be married: for the one has what the other as yet desires, especially if she be not yet even the [betrothed](#) of any one. The one studies to please one, unto whom she has been given; the other many, in [doubt](#) unto whom she is to be given: by this one thing she guards modesty of thought from the crowd, that she is seeking, not an adulterer, but a husband, in the crowd. Therefore that virgin is with good reason set before a married [woman](#), who neither sets herself forth for the multitude to [love](#), whereas she seeks from out the multitude the [love](#) of one; nor, having now found him, orders herself for one, taking thought of the things of the world, "how to please her husband;" but has so loved "Him of fair beauty above the sons of [men](#)," as that, because she could not, even as Mary, conceive Him in her flesh, she has kept her flesh also virgin for Him conceived in her heart. This kind of [virgins](#) no fruitfulness of the body has given birth to: this is no progeny of flesh and blood. If of these the mother be sought for, it is the [Church](#). None bears sacred [virgins](#) save a sacred virgin, she who has been espoused to be presented chaste unto one Husband, Christ. Of her, not altogether in body, but altogether in spirit virgin, are born [holy virgins](#) both in body and in spirit.

12. Let marriages possess their own good, not that they beget sons, but that honestly, that lawfully, that modestly, that in a spirit of fellowship they beget them, and educate them, after they have been begotten, with cooperation, with wholesome teaching, and earnest purpose: in that they keep the [faith](#) of the couch one with another; in that they violate not the sacrament of wedlock. All these, however, are offices of human duty: but virginal [chastity](#) and freedom through [pious](#) continence from all sexual intercourse is the portion of Angels, and a practice, in corruptible flesh, of perpetual incorruption. To this let all fruitfulness of the flesh yield, all [chastity](#) of married life; the one is not in (man's) power, the other is not in [eternity](#); free choice has not fruitfulness of the flesh, heaven has not [chastity](#) of married life. Assuredly they will have something great beyond others in that common [immortality](#), who have something already not of the flesh in the flesh.

13. Whence they are marvellously void of wisdom, who think that the good of this continence is not necessary for the sake of the [kingdom of heaven](#), but for the sake of the present world: in that, forsooth, married [persons](#) are strained different ways by earthly cares more and more straitened, from which trouble [virgins](#) and continent [persons](#) are free: as though on this account only it were better not to be married, that the straits of this present time may be escaped, not that it is of any profit unto a future life. And, that they may not seem to have put forth this vain opinion from out the vanity of their own heart, they take the Apostle to [witness](#), where he says, "But concerning [virgins](#) I have not command of the Lord, but I give counsel, as having obtained mercy from God to be faithful. Therefore I think that this is [good](#) on account of the present necessity, because it is [good](#) for a man so to be." Lo, say they, where the Apostle shows "that this is [good](#) on account of the present necessity," not on account of the future [eternity](#). As though the

Apostle would have regard for the present necessity, otherwise than as providing and consulting for the future; whereas all his dealing calls not save unto life [eternal](#).

14. It is, therefore, the present necessity that we are to avoid, but yet such as is a hindrance to somewhat of the [good](#) things to come; by which necessity the married life is forced to have thought of the things of the world, how to please, the husband the wife or the wife the husband. Not that these separate from the [kingdom of God](#), as there are [sins](#), which are restrained by command, not by counsel, on this account, because it is matter of condemnation not to [obey](#) the Lord when He commands: but that, which, within the kingdom of God itself, might be more largely possessed, if there were larger thoughts how they were to please [God](#), will assuredly be less, when as this very thing is less thought of by necessity of marriage. Therefore he says, "Concerning [virgins](#) I have not command of the Lord." For whosoever obeys not a command, is guilty and liable for punishment. Wherefore, because it is not [sin](#) to marry a wife or to be married, (but if it were a [sin](#), it would be forbidden by a "Command,") on this account there is no "Command" of the Lord concerning [virgins](#). But since, after we have shunned or had forgiveness of [sins](#), we must approach [eternal](#) life, wherein is a certain or more excellent [glory](#), to be assigned not unto all who shall live for ever, but unto certain there; in order to obtain which it is not enough to have been set free from [sins](#), unless there be vowed unto Him, Who sets us free, something, which it is no matter of fault not to have vowed, but matter of praise to have vowed and performed; he says, "I give counsel, as having obtained mercy from God that I should be faithful." For neither ought I to grudge faithful counsel, who not by my own merits, but by the mercy of [God](#), am faithful. "I think therefore that this is [good](#), by reason of the present necessity." This, says he, on which I have not command of the Lord, but give counsel, that is concerning [virgins](#), I think to be good by reason of the present necessity. For I [know](#) what the necessity of the present time, unto which marriages serve, compels, that the things of God be less thought of than is enough for the obtaining that [glory](#), which shall not be of all, although they abide in [eternal](#) life and [salvation](#): "For star differs from star in brightness; so also the Resurrection of the dead. It is," therefore, "good for a man so to be."

15. After that the same Apostle adds, and says, "You are bound to a wife, seek not loosening: you are loosed from a wife, seek not a wife." Of these two, that, which be set first, pertains unto command, against which it is not lawful to do. For it is not lawful to put away a wife, save because of fornication, as the Lord Himself says in the [Gospel](#). But that, which he added, "You are loosed from a wife, seek not a wife," is a sentence of counsel, not of command; therefore it is lawful to do, but it is better not to do. Lastly, he added straightway, "Both if you shall have taken a wife, you have not [sinned](#); and, if a [virgin](#) shall have been married, she [not](#)." [But, after that former saying of his, "You are bound to a wife, seek not loosening," he added not, did he, "And if you shall have loosed, you have not sinned?"](#) For he had already said above, "But to these, who are in marriage, I command, not I, but the Lord, that the wife depart not from her husband: but, if she shall have departed, that she remain unmarried, or be reconciled unto her own husband;" for it may come to pass that she depart, not through any fault of her own, but of her husband. Then he says, "And let not the man put away his wife," which, nevertheless, he set down of command of the Lord: nor did he then add, And, if he shall have put her

away, he [not. For this is a command, not to obey](#) which is [sin](#): not a counsel, which if you shall be unwilling to use, you will obtain less good, not do any ill. On this account, after he had said, "You are loosed from a wife, seek not a wife;" because he was not giving command, in order that there be not [evil](#) done, but was giving counsel, in order that there be done what is better: straightway he added, "Both, if you shall have taken a wife, you have not [sinned](#); and, if a [virgin](#) shall have been married, she [not](#)."

[16. Yet he added, "But such shall have tribulation of the flesh, but I spare you:" in this manner exhorting unto virginity](#), and continual continence, so as some little to alarm also from marriage, with all modesty, not as from a matter [evil](#) and unlawful, but as from one burdensome and troublesome. For it is one thing to incur dishonor of the flesh, and another to have tribulation of the flesh: the one is matter of crime to do, the other of labor to suffer, which for the most part men refuse not even for the most [honorable](#) duties. But for the having of marriage, now at this time, wherein there is no service done unto Christ about to come through descent of flesh by the begetting of the [family](#) itself, to take upon one to bear that tribulation of the flesh, which the Apostle foretells to such as shall be married, would be extremely foolish, did not incontinent [persons fear](#), lest, through the [temptation](#) of [Satan](#), they should fall into damnable [sins](#). But whereas he says that he spares them, who he says will have tribulation of the flesh, there suggests itself to me in the mean while no sounder interpretation, than that he was unwilling to open, and unfold in words, this self-same tribulation of the flesh which he fore-announced to those who choose marriage, in suspicions of jealousy of married life, in the begetting and nurture of children, in fears and sorrows of childlessness. For how very few, after they have bound themselves with the bonds of marriage, are not drawn and driven to and fro by these feelings? And this we ought not to exaggerate, lest we spare not the very [persons](#), who the Apostle thought were to be spared.

17. Only by this, which I have briefly set down, the reader ought to be set on his guard against those, who, in this that is written, "but such shall have tribulation of the flesh but I spare you," [falsely](#) charge marriage, as indirectly condemned by this sentence; as though he were unwilling to utter the condemnation itself, when he says, "But I spare you;" so that, forsooth, when he spares them, he spared not his own [soul](#), as saying [falsely](#), "And, if you shall have taken a wife, you have not [sinned](#); and if a [virgin](#) shall have been married, she [not](#)." [And this, whoso believe](#) or would have [believed](#) concerning [holy](#) Scripture, they, as it were prepare for themselves a way for liberty of lying, or for defense of their own perverse opinion, in whatever case they hold other sentiments than what sound doctrine demands. For if there shall be alleged any plain statement from the divine books, whereby to refute their [errors](#), this they have at hand as a shield, whereby defending themselves as it were against the [truth](#), they lay themselves bare to be wounded by the [devil](#): to say that the author of the book did not speak the [truth](#) in this instance, at one time in order to spare the weak, at another in order to alarm despisers: just as a case shall come to hand, wherein to defend their own perverse opinion: and thus, while they had rather defend than amend their own opinions, they essay to break the authority of [holy](#) Scripture, whereby alone all [proud](#) and hard necks are broken.

18. Wherefore I admonish both men and [women](#) who follow after perpetual continence and [holy virginity](#), that they so set their own good before marriage, as that they judge not marriage an [evil](#): and that they understand that it was in no way of deceit, but of plain [truth](#) that it was said by the Apostle, "Whoso gives in marriage does well; and whoso gives not in marriage, does better; and, if you shall have taken a wife, you have not [sinned](#); and, if a [virgin](#) shall have been married, she [not](#);" [and a little after, "But she will be more blessed, if she shall have continued so, according to my judgment." And, that the judgment should not be thought human, he adds, "But I think I also have the Spirit of God."](#) This is the doctrine of the Lord, this of the Apostles, this [true](#), this sound, so to choose greater gifts, as that the lesser be not condemned. The [truth](#) of [God](#), in the [Scripture](#) of [God](#), is better than [virginity](#) of man in the mind or flesh of any. Let what is chaste be so loved, as that what is [true](#) be not denied. For what [evil](#) thought may they not have even concerning their own flesh, who [believe](#) that the tongue of the Apostle, in that very place, wherein he was commending [virginity](#) of body, was not virgin from corruption of lying. In the first place, therefore, and chiefly, let such as choose the good of [virginity](#), hold most firmly that the [holy Scriptures](#) have in nothing spoken lies; and, thus, that that also is [true](#) which is said, "And if you shall have taken a wife, you have not [sinned](#); and, if a [virgin](#) shall have been married, she [not](#)." [And let them not think that the so great good of virgin chastity](#) is made less, if marriage shall not be an [evil](#). Yea rather, let her hence feel confident, rather, that there is prepared for her a palm of greater [glory](#), who feared not to be condemned, in case she were married, but desired to receive a more [honorable](#) crown, in that she was not married. Whoso therefore shall be willing to abide without marriage, let them not flee from marriage as a pitfall of [sin](#); but let them surmount it as a hill of the lesser good, in order that they may rest in the mountain of the greater, continence. It is on this condition, forsooth, that this hill is dwelt on; that one leave it not when he will. For, "a [woman](#) is bound, so long as her husband lives." However unto widowed continence one ascends from it as from a step: but for the sake of virgin continence, one must either turn aside from it by not consenting to suitors, or overleap it by anticipating suitors.

19. But lest any should think that of two works, the good and the better, the rewards will be equal, on this account it was necessary to treat against those, who have so interpreted that saying of the Apostle, "But I think that this is [good](#) by reason of the present necessity," as to say that [virginity](#) is of use not in order to the [kingdom of heaven](#), but in order to this present time: as though in that [eternal](#) life, they, who had chosen this better part, would have nothing more than the rest of men. And in this discussion when we came to that saying of the same Apostle, "But such shall have tribulation of the flesh, but I spare you;" we fell in with other disputants, who so far from making marriage equal to perpetual [virginity](#), altogether condemned it. For whereas both are [errors](#), either to equal marriage to [holy virginity](#), or to condemn it: by fleeing from one another to excess, these two [errors](#) come into open collision, in that they have been unwilling to hold the mean of [truth](#): whereby, both by sure reason and authority of [holy Scriptures](#), we both discover that marriage is not a [sin](#), and yet equal it not to the good either of virginal or even of widowed [chastity](#). Some forsooth by aiming at [virginity](#), have thought marriage hateful even as [adultery](#): but others, by defending marriage, would have the excellence of perpetual continence to deserve nothing more than married [chastity](#); as though either the

good of Susanna be the lowering of Mary: or the greater good of Mary ought to be the condemnation of Susanna.

20. Far be it, therefore, that the Apostle so said, unto such as are married or are about to marry, "But I spare you," as if he were unwilling to say what punishment is due to the married in another life. Far be it that she, whom Daniel set free from temporal judgment, be cast by [Paul](#) into [hell](#)! Far be it that her husband's bed be unto her punishment before the judgment seat of [Christ](#), keeping [faith](#) to which she chose, under false charge of [adultery](#), to meet either danger, or death! To what effect that speech, "It is better for me to fall into your hands, than to [sin](#) in the sight of God:" if God had been about, not to set her free because she kept married [chastity](#), but to condemn her because she had married? And now so often as married [chastity](#) is by [truth](#) of [holy](#) Scripture justified against such as bring [calumnies](#) and charges against marriage, so often is Susanna by the [Holy Spirit](#) defended against false witnesses, so often is she set free from a false charge, and with much greater ado. For then against one married [woman](#), now against all; then of hidden and untrue [adultery](#), now of [true](#) and open marriage, an accusation is laid. Then one [woman](#), upon what the [unjust](#) elders said, now all husbands and wives, upon what the Apostle would not say, are accused. It was, forsooth, your condemnation, say they, that he was silent on, when he said, "But I spare you." Who (says) this? Surely he, who had said above; "And, if you shall have taken a wife, you have not [sinned](#); and, if a [virgin](#) shall have been married, she [not](#)." [Why, therefore, wherein he has been silent through modesty, suspect ye a charge against marriage; and wherein he has spoken openly, recognize ye not a defense of marriage? What, does he condemn by his silence them whom he acquitted by his words? Is it not now a milder charge, to charge Susanna, not with marriage, but with adultery](#) itself, than to charge the doctrine of the Apostle with [falsehood](#)? What in so great peril could we do, were it not as sure and plain that chaste marriage ought not to be condemned, as it is sure and plain that [holy](#) Scripture cannot lie?

21. Here some one will say, What has this to do with [holy virginity](#), or perpetual continence, the setting forth of which was undertaken in this discourse? To whom I make answer in the first place, what I mentioned above, that the [glory](#) of that greater good is greater from the fact that, in order to obtain it, the good of married life is surmounted, not the [sin](#) of marriage shunned. Otherwise it would be enough for perpetual continence, not to be specially praised, but only not to be blamed: if it were maintained on this account, because it was a crime to wed. In the next place, because it is not by human judgment, but by authority of Divine Scripture, that men must be exhorted unto so excellent a gift, we must plead not in a common-place manner, or merely by the way, that [divine Scripture](#) itself seem not to any one in any matter to have lied. For they discourage rather than exhort [holy virgins](#), who compel them to continue so by passing sentence on marriage. For whence can they feel sure that that is [true](#), which is written, "And he, who gives her not in marriage, does better:" if they think that false, which yet is written close above, "Both he, who gives his virgin, does well?" But, if they shall without all [doubt](#) have [believed](#) Scripture speaking of the good of marriage, confirmed by the same most [true](#) authority of the divine oracle, they will hasten beyond unto their own better part with glowing and confident eagerness. Wherefore we have already spoken enough for the business which we have taken in hand, and, so far as we could, have shown, that neither

that saying of the Apostle, "But I think that this is [good](#) by reason of the present necessity," is so to be understood, as though in this life [holy virgins](#) are better than faithful [women](#) married, but are equal in the [kingdom of heaven](#), and in a future life: nor that other, where he says of such as wed, "But such shall have tribulation of the flesh, but I spare you;" is to be so understood, as though he chose rather to be silent on, than to speak of, the [sin](#) and condemnation of marriage. Forsooth two [errors](#), contrary the one to the other, have, through not understanding them, taken hold of each one of these two sentences. For that concerning the present necessity they interpret in their own favor, who contend to equal such as wed to such as wed not: but this, where it is said, "But I spare you," they who presume to condemn such as wed. But we, according to the [faith](#) and sound doctrine of [holy Scriptures](#), both say that marriage is no [sin](#), and yet set its good not only below virginal, but also below widowed continence; and say that the present necessity of married [persons](#) is an hindrance to their desert, not indeed unto life [eternal](#), but unto an excellent [glory](#) and [honor](#), which is reserved for perpetual continence: and that at this time marriage is not expedient save for such as contain not; and that on the tribulation of the flesh, which comes from the affection of the flesh, without which marriages of incontinent [persons](#) cannot be, the Apostle neither wished to be silent, as forewarning what was [true](#), nor to unfold more fully, as sparing man's weakness.

22. And now by plainest witnesses of [divine Scriptures](#), such as according to the small measure of our memory we shall be able to remember, let it more clearly appear, that, not on account of the present life of this world, but on account of that future life which is promised in the [kingdom of heaven](#), we are to choose perpetual continence. But who but must observe this in that which the same Apostle says a little after, "Whoso is without a wife has thought of the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord: but whoso is joined in marriage has thought of the things of the world, how to please his wife. And a [woman](#) unmarried and a [virgin](#) is divided; she that is unmarried is careful about the things of the Lord, to be [holy](#) both in body and spirit: but she that is married is careful about the things of the world, how to please her husband." Certainly he says not, has thought of the things of a state without care in this world, to pass her time without weightier troubles; nor does he say that a [woman](#) unmarried and a [virgin](#) is divided, that is, distinguished, and separated from her who is married, for this end, that the unmarried [woman](#) be without care in this life, in order to avoid temporal troubles, which the married [woman](#) is not free from: but, "She has thought," says he, "of the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord; and is careful about the things of the Lord, to be [holy](#) both in body and spirit." Unless to such a degree, perchance, each be foolishly contentious, as to essay to assert, that it is not on account of the [kingdom of heaven](#), but on account of this present world, that we wish to "please the Lord," or that it is on account of this present life, not on account of life [eternal](#), that they are "[holy](#) both in body and spirit." To [believe](#) this, what else is it, than to be more miserable than all [men](#)? For so the Apostle says, "If in this life only we are hoping in [Christ](#), we are more miserable than all [men](#)." What? is he who breaks his bread to the hungry, if he do it only on account of this life, a fool; and shall he be [prudent](#), who chastens his own body even unto continence, whereby he has no intercourse even in marriage, if it shall profit him nought in the [kingdom of heaven](#)?

23. Lastly, let us hear the Lord Himself delivering most plain judgment on this matter. For, upon His speaking after a divine and fearful manner concerning husband and wife not separating, save on account of fornication, His [disciples](#) said to Him, "If the case be such with a wife, it is not good to marry." To whom He says, "Not all receive this saying. For there are eunuchs who were so born: but there are others who were made by men: and there are eunuchs, who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the [kingdom of heaven](#): whoso can receive, let him receive." What could be said more [true](#), what more clear? Christ says, the Truth says, the Power and Wisdom of God says, that they, who of [pious](#) purpose have contained from marrying a wife, make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the [kingdom of heaven](#): and against this, human vanity with impious rashness contends, that they, who do so, shun only the present necessity of the troubles of married life, but in the [kingdom of heaven](#) have no more than others.

24. But concerning what eunuchs speaks God by the [prophet](#) Isaiah, unto whom He says that He will give in His house and in His wall a place by name, much better than of sons and daughters, save concerning these, who make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the [kingdom of heaven](#)? For for these, whose bodily organ is without strength, so that they cannot beget, (such as are the eunuchs of rich men and of kings,) it is surely enough, when they become [Christians](#), and keep the commands of [God](#), yet have this purpose, that, if they could, they would have wives, to be made equal to the rest of the faithful in the house of [God](#), who are married, who bring up in the [fear](#) of God a [family](#) which they have lawfully and chastely gotten, teaching their sons to set their hope on [God](#); but not to receive a *better* place than of sons and daughters. For it is not of [virtue](#) of the [soul](#), but of necessity of the flesh, that they marry not wives. Let who will contend that the Prophet foretold this of those eunuchs who have suffered mutilation of body; that even also helps the [cause](#) which we have undertaken. For God has not preferred these eunuchs to such as have no place in His house, but assuredly to those who keep the [desert](#) of married life in begetting sons. For, when He says, "I will give unto them a place much better;" He shows that one is also given unto the married, but much inferior. Therefore, to allow that in the house of God there will be the eunuchs after the flesh spoken of above, who were not in the People of [Israel](#): because we see that these also themselves, whereas they become not [Jews](#), yet become [Christians](#): and that the Prophet spoke not of them, who through purpose of continence seeking not marriage, make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the [kingdom of heaven](#): is any one so madly opposed to the [truth](#) as to [believe](#) that eunuchs made so in the flesh have a better place than married [persons](#) in the house of [God](#), and to contend that [persons](#) being of [pious](#) purpose continent, chastening the body even unto contempt of marriage, making themselves eunuchs, not in the body, but in the very root of concupiscence, practising an heavenly and angelic life in an earthly mortal state, are on a level with the deserts of the married; and, being a [Christian](#), to gainsay Christ when He praises those who have made themselves eunuchs, not for the sake of this world, but for the sake of the [kingdom of heaven](#), affirming that this is of use for the present life, not for a future? What else remains for these, save to assert that the [kingdom of heaven](#) itself pertains unto this temporal life, wherein we now are? For why should not blind presumption advance even to this [madness](#)? And what more full of phrensy than this assertion? For, although at times the [Church](#), even that which is at this time, is called the [kingdom of heaven](#); certainly it is so called for this end, because it is being gathered

together for a future and [eternal](#) life. Although, therefore, it have the promise of the present, and of a future life, yet in all its good works it looks not to "the things that are seen, but to what are not seen. For what are seen are temporal; but what are not seen, are [eternal](#)."

25. Nor indeed has the [Holy Spirit](#) failed to speak what should be of open and unshaken avail against these men, most shamelessly and madly obstinate, and should repel their assault, as of wild beasts, from His sheep-fold, by defences that may not be stormed. For, after He had said concerning eunuchs, "I will give unto them in My house and in My wall a named place, much better than of sons and daughters;" lest any too carnal should think that there was any thing temporal to be hoped for in these words, straightway He added, "An [eternal](#) name I will give unto them, nor shall it ever fail:" as though He should say, Why do you draw back, impious blindness? Why do you draw back? Why do you pour the clouds of your perverseness over the clear (sky) of [truth](#)? Why in so great light of Scriptures do you seek after darkness from out which to lay snares? Why do you promise temporal advantage only to [holy persons](#) exercising continence? "An [eternal](#) name I will give unto them:" why, where [persons](#) keep from all sexual intercourse, and also in the very fact that they abstain from these, have thought of the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord, do you essay to refer them unto earthly advantage? "An [eternal](#) name I will give unto them." Why contend you that the [kingdom of heaven](#), for the sake of which [holy](#) eunuchs have made themselves eunuchs, is to be understood in this life only? "An [eternal](#) name I will give unto them." And if haply in this place you endeavor to take the word itself [eternal](#) in the sense of lasting for a long time, I add, I heap up, I tread in, "nor shall it ever fail." What more seek you? What more say you? This [eternal](#) name, whatever it be, unto the eunuchs of [God](#), which assuredly signifies a certain peculiar and excellent [glory](#), shall not be in common with many, although set in the same kingdom, and in the same house. For on this account also, perhaps, it is called a name, that it distinguishes those, to whom it is given, from the rest.

26. What then, say they, is the meaning of that penny, which is given in payment to all alike when the work of the vineyard is ended? whether it be to those who have labored from the first hour, or to those who have labored one hour? What assuredly does it signify, but something, which all shall have in common, such as is life [eternal](#) itself, the [kingdom of heaven](#) itself, where shall be all, whom [God](#) has [predestinated](#), called, justified, [glorified](#)? "For it behoves that this corruptible put on incorruption, and this mortal put on [immortality](#)." This is that penny, wages for all. Yet "star differs from star in [glory](#); so also the resurrection of the dead." These are the different merits of the Saints. For, if by that penny the heaven were signified, have not all the stars in common to be in the heaven? And yet, "There is one [glory](#) of the sun, another [glory](#) of the moon, another of the stars." If that penny were taken for health of body, have not all the members, when we are well, health in common; and, should this health continue even unto death, is it not in all alike and equally? And yet, "[God](#) has set the members, each one of them, in the body, as He would;" that neither the whole be an eye, nor the whole hearing, nor the whole smelling: and, whatever else there is, it has its own property, although it have health equally with all. Thus because life [eternal](#) itself shall be alike to all, an equal penny was assigned to all; but, because in that life [eternal](#) itself the lights of merits shall shine

with a distinction, there are "many mansions" in the house of the Father: and, by this means, in the penny not unlike, one lives not longer than another; but in the many mansions, one is [honored](#) with greater brightness than another.

27. Therefore go on, Saints of [God](#), boys and girls, males and [females](#), unmarried men, and [women](#); go on and persevere unto the end. Praise more sweetly the Lord, Whom ye think on more richly: hope more happily in Him, Whom ye serve more instantly: [love](#) more ardently Him, whom you please more attentively. With loins girded, and lamps burning, wait for the Lord, when He comes from the marriage. You shall bring unto the marriage of the Lamb a new song, which you shall sing on your harps. Not surely such as the whole earth sings, unto which it is said, "Sing unto the Lord a new song; sing unto the Lord, the whole earth": but such as no one shall be able to utter but you. For thus there saw you in the Apocalypse a certain one beloved above others by the Lamb, who had been wont to lie on His breast, and who used to drink in, and burst forth, the [Word of God](#) above wonders of heaven. He saw you twelve times twelve thousand of [holy](#) harpers, of undefiled [virginity](#) in body, of inviolate [truth](#) in heart; and he wrote of you, that you follow the Lamb whithersoever He shall go. Where think we that This Lamb goes, where no one either dares or is able to follow save you? Where think we that He goes? Into what glades and meadows? Where, I think, the grass are joys; not vain joys of this world, lying madnesses; nor joys such as shall be in the kingdom of God itself, for the rest that are not [virgins](#); but distinct from the portion of joys of all the rest. Joy of the [virgins](#) of [Christ](#), of [Christ](#), in [Christ](#), with Christ, after Christ, through Christ, for Christ. The joys peculiar to the [virgins](#) of [Christ](#), are not the same as of such as are not [virgins](#), although of [Christ](#). For there are to different [persons](#) different joys, but to none such. Go (enter) into these, follow the Lamb, because the Flesh of the Lamb also is assuredly virgin. For this He retained in Himself when grown up, which He took not away from His Mother by His conception and birth. Follow Him, as you deserve, in [virginity](#) of heart and flesh, wheresoever He shall have gone. For what is it to follow, but to imitate? Because "Christ has suffered for us," leaving us an example, as says the Apostle Peter, "that we should follow His steps." Him each one follows in that, wherein he imitates Him: not so far forth as He is the only [Son of God](#), by Whom all things were made; but so far forth as, the [Son of Man](#), He set forth in Himself, what behoved for us to imitate. And many things in Him are set forth for all to imitate: but [virginity](#) of the flesh not for all; for they have not what to do in order to be [virgins](#), in whom it has been already brought to pass that they be not [virgins](#).

28. Therefore let the rest of the faithful, who have lost [virginity](#), follow the Lamb, not whithersoever He shall have gone, but so far as ever they shall have been able. But they are able every where, save when He walks in the [grace](#) of [virginity](#). "Blessed are the poor in spirit;" imitate Him, Who, whereas "He was rich, was made poor for your sakes." "Blessed are the meek;" imitate Him, Who said, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart." "Blessed are they that mourn;" imitate Him, Who "wept over" Jerusalem. "Blessed are they, who hunger and thirst after righteousness;" imitate Him, Who said, "My meat is to do the [will](#) of Him Who sent Me." "Blessed are the merciful;" imitate Him, Who came to the help of him who was wounded by [robbers](#), and who lay in the way half-dead and despaired of. "Blessed are the pure in heart;" imitate Him, "Who did no [sin](#),

neither was guile found in His mouth." "Blessed are the peace-makers;" imitate Him, Who said on behalf of His persecutors, "Father, forgive them, for they [know](#) not what they do." "Blessed are they, who suffer [persecution](#) for righteousness sake;" imitate Him, Who "suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you follow His steps." These things, whoso imitate, in these they follow the Lamb. But surely even married [persons](#) may go in those steps, although not setting their foot perfectly in the same print, yet walking in the same paths.

29. But, lo, That Lamb goes by a Virgin road, how shall they go after Him, who have lost what there is no way for them to recover? Do ye, therefore, do ye go after Him, His [virgins](#); do ye thither also go after Him, in that on this one account whithersoever He shall have gone, you follow Him: for unto any other gift whatsoever of [holiness](#), whereby to follow Him, we can exhort married [persons](#), save this which they have lost beyond power of recovery. Do ye, therefore, follow Him, by holding with perseverance what you have vowed with ardor. Go when you can, that the good of [virginity](#) perish not from you, unto which you can do nothing, in order that it may return. The rest of the multitude of the faithful will see you, which cannot unto this follow the Lamb; it will see you, it will not [envy](#) you: and by rejoicing together with you, what it has not in itself, it will have in you. For that new song also, which is your own, it will not be able to utter; but it will not be unable to hear, and to be delighted with your so excellent good: but ye, who shall both utter and hear, in that what you shall say, this you shall hear of yourselves, will exult with greater [happiness](#), and reign with greater [joy](#). But they will have no sorrow on account of your greater [joy](#), to whom this shall be wanting. Forsooth That Lamb, Whom you shall follow whithersoever He shall have gone, will not desert those who cannot follow Him, where you can. Almighty is the Lamb, of Whom we speak. He both will go before you, and will not depart from them, when God shall be all in all. And they, who shall have less, shall not turn away in dislike from you: for, where there is no envying, difference exists with concord. Take to you, then, have trust, be strong, continue, you who vow and pay unto the Lord your God vows of perpetual continence, not for the sake of this present world, but for the sake of the kingdom of [Heaven](#).

30. You also who have not yet made this vow, who are able to receive it, receive it. Run with perseverance, that you may obtain. Take ye each his [sacrifices](#), and enter ye into the courts of the Lord, not of necessity, having power over your own will. For not as, "You shall not commit [adultery](#), You shall not kill," can it so be said, You shall not wed. The former are demanded, the latter are offered. If the latter are done, they are praised: unless the former are done, they are condemned. In the former the Lord commands us what is due; but in the latter, if you shall have spent any thing more, on His return He will repay you. Think of (whatever that be) within His wall "a place named, much better than of sons and of daughters." Think of "an [eternal](#) name" there. Who unfolds of what kind that name shall be? Yet, whatever it shall be, it shall be [eternal](#). By believing and hoping and loving this, you have been able, not to shun marriage, as forbidden, but to fly past it, as allowed.

31. Whence the greatness of this service, unto the undertaking of which we have according to our strength exhorted, the more excellent and divine it is, the more does it

warn our anxiety, to say something not only concerning most [glorious chastity](#), but also concerning safest humility. When then such as make profession of perpetual [chastity](#), comparing themselves with married [persons](#), shall have discovered, that, according to the [Scriptures](#), the others are below both in work and wages, both in vow and reward, let what is written straightway come into their [mind](#), "By how much you are great, by so much [humble](#) yourself in all things: and you shall find favor before God." The measure of humility for each has been given from the measure of his greatness itself: unto which [pride](#) is full of danger, which lays the greater wait against [persons](#) the greater they be. On this follows envying, as a daughter in her train; forsooth [pride](#) straightway gives birth to her, nor is she ever without such a daughter and companion. By which two [evils](#), that is, [pride](#) and envying, is the [devil](#) (a [devil](#)). Therefore it is against [pride](#), the mother of envying, that the whole [Christian](#) discipline chiefly [wars](#). For this teaches humility, whereby both to gain and to keep charity; of which after that it had been said, "Charity envies not;" as though we were asking the reason, how it comes to pass that it envies not, he straightway added, "is not puffed up;" as though he should say, on this account it has not envying, in that neither has it [pride](#). Therefore the Teacher of humility, Christ, first "emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, made in the likeness of [men](#), and found in fashion as a [man](#), He humbled Himself, made [obedient](#) even unto death, even the death of the Cross." But His teaching itself, how carefully it suggests humility, and how earnest and instant it is in commanding this, who can easily unfold, and bring together all witnesses for [proof](#) of this matter? This let him essay to do, or do, whosoever shall wish to write a separate treatise on humility; but of this present work the end proposed is different, and it has been undertaken on a matter so great, as that it has chiefly to guard against [pride](#).

32. Wherefore a few witnesses, which the Lord deigns to suggest to my [mind](#), I proceed to mention, from out the teaching of Christ concerning humility, such as perhaps may be enough for my purpose. His discourse, the first which He delivered to His [disciples](#) at greater length, began from this. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of [Heaven](#)." And these without all controversy we take to be [humble](#). The [faith](#) of that Centurion He on this account chiefly praised, and said that He had not found in [Israel](#) so great [faith](#), because he [believed](#) with so great humility as to say, "I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof." Whence also Matthew for no other reason said that he "came" unto Jesus, (whereas Luke most plainly signifies that he came not unto Him himself, but sent his friends,) save that by his most faithful humility he himself came unto Him more than they whom he sent. Whence also is that of the Prophet, "The Lord is very high, and has respect unto things that are lowly: but what are very high He notes afar off;" assuredly as not coming unto Him. Whence also He says to that [woman](#) of Canaan, "O [woman](#), great is your [faith](#); be it done unto you as you will;" whom above He had called a dog, and had made answer that the bread of the sons was not to be cast to her. And this she taking with humility had said, "Even so, Lord; for the dogs also eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." And thus what by continual crying she obtained not, by [humble](#) confession she earned. Hence also those two are set forth [praying](#) in the Temple, the one a [Pharisee](#), and the other a Publican, for the sake of those who seem to themselves just and despise the rest of [men](#), and the confession of [sins](#) is set before the reckoning up of merits. And assuredly the [Pharisee](#) was rendering thanks unto

God by reason of those things wherein he was greatly self-satisfied. "I render thanks to You," says he, "that I am not even as the rest of [men](#), [unjust](#), extortioners, adulterers, even as also this [publican](#). I fast twice in the week, I give [tithes](#) of all things whatsoever I possess. But the Publican was standing afar off, not daring to lift up his eyes to [Heaven](#), but beating his breast, saying, God be merciful unto me a sinner." But there follows the divine judgment, "Verily I say unto you, the Publican went down from the Temple justified more than that [Pharisee](#)." Then the [cause](#) is shown, why this is just; "Forasmuch as he who exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoso [humbles](#) himself shall be exalted." Therefore it may come to pass, that each one both shun real [evils](#), and reflect on real goods in himself, and render thanks for these unto "the Father of lights, from Whom comes down every best gift, and every perfect gift," and yet be rejected by reason of the [sin](#) of haughtiness, if through [pride](#), even in his thought alone, which is before [God](#), he insult other sinners, and specially when confessing their [sins](#) in [prayer](#), unto whom is due not upbraiding with arrogance, but pity without despair. What is it that, when His [disciples](#) were questioning among themselves, who of them should be greater, He set a little child before their eyes, saying, "Unless you shall be as this child, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of [Heaven](#)?" Did He not chiefly commend humility, and set in it the [desert](#) of greatness? Or when unto the sons of Zebedee desiring to be at His side in lofty seats He so made answer, as that they should rather think of having to drink the Cup of His Passion, wherein He humbled Himself even unto death, even the death of the Cross, than with [proud](#) desire demand to be preferred to the rest; what did He show, save, that He would be a bestower of exaltation upon them, who should first follow Him as a teacher of humility? And now, in that, when about to go forth unto His Passion, He washed the feet of His [disciples](#), and most openly taught them to do for their fellow-[disciples](#) and fellow-servants this, which He their Lord and Master had done for them; how greatly did He commend humility? And in order to commend this He chose also that time, wherein they were looking on Him, as immediately about to die, with great longing; assuredly about to retain in their memory this especially, which their Master, Whom they were to imitate, had pointed out to them as the last thing. But He did this at that time, which surely He could have done on other days also before, wherein He had been conversant with them; at which time if it were done, this same would indeed be delivered, but certainly would not be so received.

33. Whereas, then, all [Christians](#) have to guard humility, forasmuch as it is from Christ that they are called [Christians](#), Whose [Gospel](#) no one considers with care, but that he discovers Him to be a Teacher of humility; specially is it becoming that they be followers and keepers of this [virtue](#), who excel the rest of men in any great good, in order that they may have a great care of that, which I set down in the beginning, "By how much you are great, by so much [humble](#) yourself in all things, and you shall find [grace](#) before God." Wherefore, because perpetual Continence and specially [virginity](#), is a great good in the Saints of [God](#), they must with all watchfulness beware, that it be not corrupted with [pride](#).

34. [Paul](#) the Apostle censures [evil](#) unmarried [women](#), curious and prating, and says that this fault comes of idleness. "But at the same time," says he, "being idle they learn to go about to houses: but not only idle, but curious also and prating, speaking what they ought not." Of these he had said above, "But younger [widows](#) avoid; for when they have past

their time in delights, they wish to wed in Christ; having condemnation, in that they have made void their first [faith](#):" that is, have not continued in that, which they had vowed at the first. And yet he says not, they marry, but "they wish to marry." For many of them are recalled from marrying, not by [love](#) of a noble purpose, but by [fear](#) of open shame, which also itself comes of [pride](#), whereby [persons](#) [fear](#) to displease men more than God. These, therefore, who wish to marry, and do not marry on this account, because they cannot with impunity, who would do better to marry than to be burned, that is, than to be laid waste in their very [conscience](#) by the hidden flame of [lust](#), who repent of their profession, and who feel their confession irksome; unless they correct and set right their heart, and by the [fear](#) of God again overcome their [lust](#), must be accounted among the dead; whether they pass their time in delights, whence the Apostle says, "But she who passes her time in delights, living, is dead;" or whether in labors and [fastings](#), which are useless where there is no correction of the heart, and serve rather for display than amendment. I do not, for my part, impose on such a great regard for humility, in whom [pride](#) itself is confounded, and bloodstained by wound of [conscience](#). Nor on such as are drunken, or [covetous](#), or who are lying in any other kind whatever of damnable disease, at the same time that they have profession of bodily continence, and through perverse manners are at variance with their own name, do I impose this great anxiety about [pious](#) humility: unless haply in these [evils](#) they shall dare even to make a display of themselves, unto whom it is not enough, that the punishments of these are deferred. Nor am I treating of these, in whom there is a certain aim of pleasing, either by more elegant dress than the necessity of so great profession demands, or by remarkable manner of binding the head, whether by bosses of hair swelling forth, or by coverings so yielding, that the fine network below appears: unto these we must give precepts, not as yet concerning humility, but concerning [chastity](#) itself, or virgin modesty. Give me one who makes profession of perpetual continence, and who is free from these, and all such faults and spots of conduct; for this one I [fear](#) [pride](#), for this so great good I am in alarm from the swelling of arrogance. The more there is in any one on account of which to be self-pleased, the more I [fear](#), lest, by pleasing self, he please not Him, Who "resists the [proud](#), but unto the [humble](#) gives [grace](#)."

35. Certainly we are to contemplate in Christ Himself, the chief instruction and pattern of virginal purity. What further precept then concerning humility shall I give to the continent, than what He says to all, "Learn of Me, in that I am meek and lowly of heart?" when He had made mention above of His greatness, and, wishing to show this very thing, how great He was, and how little He had been made for our sakes, says, "I confess to You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, in that You have hidden these things from the wise and [prudent](#), and hast revealed them unto little children. Even so, O Father, in that so it has been pleasing before You. All things have been delivered unto Me of My Father: and no one [knows](#) the [Son](#), save the Father; and no one [knows](#) the [Father](#), save the [Son](#), and he to whom the Son shall have willed to reveal Him. Come unto Me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, in that I am meek and lowly of heart." He, He, unto Whom the Father has delivered all things, and Whom no one [knows](#) but the [Father](#), and Who alone, (and he, unto whom He shall have willed to reveal Him), [knows](#) the [Father](#), says not, "Learn of Me" to make the world, or to raise the dead, but, "in that I am meek and lowly of heart." O saving teaching? O Teacher and Lord of mortals, unto whom death was pledged and passed on

in the cup of [pride](#), He would not teach what Himself was not, He would not bid what Himself did not. I see You, O good Jesu, with the eyes of [faith](#), which You have opened for me, as in an assembly of the [human race](#), crying out and saying, "Come unto Me, and learn of Me." What, I beseech You, through Whom all things were made, O [Son of God](#), and the Same Who was made among all things, O [Son of Man](#): to learn what of You, come we to You? "For that I am meek," says He, "and lowly of heart." Is it to this that all the treasures of wisdom and [knowledge](#) hidden in You are brought, that we learn this of You as a great thing, that You are "meek and lowly of heart?" Is it so great a thing to be little, that it could not at all be learned unless it were brought to pass by You, Who art so great? So indeed it is. For by no other way is there found out rest for the [soul](#), save when the unquiet swelling has been dispersed, whereby it was great unto itself, when it was not sound unto You.

36. Let them hear You, and let them come to You, and let them learn of You to be meek and lowly, who seek Your Mercy and Truth, by living unto You, unto You, not unto themselves. Let him hear this, laboring and laden, who is weighed down by his burthen, so as not to dare to lift up his eyes to heaven, that sinner beating his breast, and drawing near from afar. Let him hear, the centurion, not worthy that You should enter under his roof. Let him hear, Zaccheus, chief of [publicans](#), restoring fourfold the gains of damnable [sins](#). Let her hear, the [woman](#) in the city a sinner, by so much the more full of tears at Your feet, the more alien she had been from Your steps. Let them hear, the harlots and [publicans](#), who enter into the [kingdom of heaven](#) before the [Scribes](#) and [Pharisees](#). Let them hear, every kind of such ones, feasting with whom were cast in Your teeth as a charge, forsooth, as though by whole [persons](#) who sought not a physician, whereas You came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. All these, when they are converted unto You, easily grow meek, and are humbled before You, mindful of their own most unrighteous life, and of Your most indulgent mercy, in that, "where [sin](#) has abounded, [grace](#) has abounded more."

37. But regard the troops of [virgins](#), [holy](#) boys and girls: this kind has been trained up in Your Church: there for You it has been budding from its mother's breasts; for Your Name it has loosed its tongue to speak, Your Name, as through the milk of its infancy, it has had poured in and has sucked, no one of this number can say, "I, who before was a blasphemer, and persecutor, and injurious, but I obtained mercy, in that I did in being [ignorant](#), in unbelief." Yea more, that, which You did not command, but only set forth, for such as would, to seize, saying, "Whoso can receive, let him receive;" they have seized, they have vowed, and, for the sake of the [kingdom of heaven](#), not for that You threatened, but for that You exhorted, they have made themselves eunuchs. To these cry out, let these hear You, in that You are "meek and lowly of heart." Let these, by how much they are great, by so much [humble](#) themselves in all things, that they may find [grace](#) before You. They are just: but they are not, are they, such as Thou, justifying the ungodly? They are chaste: but them in [sins](#) their mothers nurtured in their wombs. They are [holy](#), but You are also Holy of Holies. They are [virgins](#), but they are not also born of [virgins](#). They are wholly chaste both in spirit and in flesh: but they are not the Word made flesh. And yet let them learn, not from those unto whom Thou forgiest [sins](#), but

from You Yourself, The Lamb of God Who takest away the [sins](#) of the world, in that You are "meek and lowly of heart."

38. I send you not, [soul](#) that art religiously chaste, that hast not given the reins to fleshly appetite even so far as to allowed marriage, that hast not indulged your body about to depart even to the begetting one to succeed you, that hast sustained aloft your earthly members, afloat to accustom them to heaven; I send you not, in order that you may learn humility, unto [publicans](#) and sinners, who yet enter into the [kingdom of heaven](#) before the [proud](#): I send you not to these: for they, who have been set free from the gulf of uncleanness, are unworthy that undefiled [virginity](#) be sent to them to take pattern from. I send you unto the King of [Heaven](#), unto Him, by Whom men were created, and Who was created among [men](#) for the sake of men; unto Him, Who is fair of beauty above the sons of [men](#), and despised by the sons of men on behalf of the sons of men: unto Him, Who, ruling the [immortal angels](#), disdained not to do service unto mortals. Him, at any rate, not unrighteousness, but charity, made [humble](#); "Charity, which rivals not, is not puffed up, seeks not her own;" forasmuch as "Christ also pleased not Himself, but, as it is written of Him, The reproaches of such as reproached You have fallen upon Me." Go then, come unto Him, and learn, in that He is "meek and lowly of heart." You shall not go unto him, who dared not by reason of the burden of unrighteousness to lift up his eyes to heaven, but unto Him, Who by the weight of charity came down from heaven. You shall not go unto her, who watered with tears the feet of her Lord, seeking forgiveness of heavy [sins](#); but you shall go unto Him, Who, granting forgiveness of all [sins](#), washed the feet of His own [disciples](#). I [know](#) the dignity of your [virginity](#); I propose not to you to imitate the Publican humbly accusing his own faults; but I [fear](#) for the [Pharisee](#) proudly boasting of his own merits. I say not, Be such as she, of whom it was said, "There are forgiven unto her many [sins](#), in that she has loved much;" but I [fear](#) lest, as thinking that you have little forgiven to you, you [love](#) little.

39. I [fear](#), I say, greatly for you, lest, when you boast that you will follow the Lamb wheresoever He shall have gone, you be unable by reason of swelling [pride](#) to follow Him through strait ways. It is [good](#) for you, O virgin [soul](#), that thus, as you are a [virgin](#), thus altogether keeping in your heart that you have been born again, keeping in your flesh that you have been born, you yet conceive of the [fear](#) of the Lord, and give birth to the spirit of [salvation](#). "Fear," indeed, "there is not in charity, but perfect charity," as it is written, "casts out [fear](#):" but [fear](#) of [men](#), not of God: [fear](#) of temporal [evils](#), not of the Divine Judgment at the last. "Be not high-minded, but [fear](#)." Love the goodness of [God](#); [fear](#) His severity: neither suffers you to be [proud](#). For by loving you [fear](#), lest you grievously offend One Who is loved and loves. For what more grievous offense, than that by [pride](#) you displease Him, Who for your sake has been displeasing to the [proud](#)? And where ought there to be more that "chaste [fear](#) abiding for ever and ever," than in you, who hast no thought of the things of this world, how to please a wedded partner; but of the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord? That other [fear](#) is not in charity, but this chaste [fear](#) quits not charity. If you [love](#) not, [fear](#) lest you perish; if you [love](#), [fear](#) lest you displease. That [fear](#) charity casts out, with this it runs within. The [Apostle Paul](#) also says, "For we have not received the spirit of bondage again to [fear](#); but we have received the spirit of adoption of sons, wherein we cry, Abba, Father." I [believe](#) that he speaks of that

[fear](#), which had been given in the [Old Testament](#), lest the temporal goods should be lost, which God had promised unto those not yet sons under [grace](#), but as yet slaves under the law. There is also the [fear](#) of [eternal fire](#), to serve God in order to avoid which is assuredly not yet of perfect charity. For the desire of the reward is one thing, the [fear](#) of punishment another. They are different sayings, "Whither shall I go away from Your Spirit, and from Your face whither shall I flee?" and, "One thing I have sought of the Lord, this I will seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord through all the days of my life, that I may consider the delight of the Lord, that I be protected in His temple:" and, "Turn not away Your face from me:" and, "My [soul](#) longs and faints unto the courts of the Lord." Those sayings let him have had, who dared not to lift up his eyes to heaven; and she who was watering with tears His feet, in order to obtain pardon for her grievous [sins](#); but these do you have, who art careful about the things of the Lord, to be [holy](#) both in body and spirit. With those sayings there companies [fear](#) which has torment, which perfect charity casts forth; but with these sayings there companies chaste [fear](#) of the Lord, that abides for ever and ever. And to both kinds it must be said, "Be not high-minded, but [fear](#);" that man neither of defense of his [sins](#), nor of presumption of righteousness set himself up. For [Paul](#) also himself, who says, "For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to [fear](#);" yet, [fear](#) being a companion of charity, says, "With [fear](#) and much trembling was I towards you:" and that saying, which I have mentioned, that the engrafted wild olive tree be not [proud](#) against the broken branches of the olive tree, himself made use of, saying, "Be not high-minded, but [fear](#);" himself admonishing all the members of Christ in general, says, "With [fear](#) and trembling work out your own [salvation](#); for it is God Who works in you both to will and to do, according to His good pleasure;" that it seem not to pertain unto the [Old Testament](#) what is written, "Serve the Lord in [fear](#), and [rejoice](#) unto Him with trembling."

40. And what members of the [holy](#) body, which is the [Church](#), ought more to take care, that upon them the [holy](#) Spirit may rest, than such as profess virginal [holiness](#)? But how does He rest, where He finds not His own place? what else than an humbled heart, to fill, not to leap back from; to raise up, not to weigh down? whereas it has been most plainly said, "On whom shall rest My Spirit? On him that is [humble](#) and quiet, and trembles at My words." Already you live righteously, already you live piously, you live chastely, holily, with virginal purity; as yet, however, you live here, and are you not humbled at hearing, "What, is not human life upon earth a trial?" Doth it not drive you back from over-confident arrogance, "Woe unto the world because of offenses?" Do you not tremble, lest you be accounted among the many, whose "[love](#) waxes cold, because that iniquity abounds?" Do you not smite your breast, when you hear?"Wherefore, whoso thinks that he stands, let him see to it lest he fall?" Amid these divine warnings and human dangers, do we yet find it so hard to persuade [holy virgins](#) to humility?

41. Or are we indeed to [believe](#) that it is for any other reason, that God suffers to be mixed up with the number of your profession, many, both men and [women](#), about to fall, than that by the fall of these your [fear](#) may be increased, whereby to repress [pride](#); which God so [hates](#), as that against this one thing The Highest humbled Himself? Unless haply, in [truth](#), you shall therefore [fear](#) less, and be more puffed up, so as to [love](#) little Him, Who has loved you so much, as to give up Himself for you, because He has forgiven you

little, living, forsooth from childhood, religiously, piously, with [pious chastity](#), with inviolate [virginity](#). As though in [truth](#) you ought not to [love](#) with much greater glow of affection Him, Who, whatsoever things He has forgiven unto sinners upon their being turned to Him, suffered you not to fall into them. Or indeed that [Pharisee](#), who therefore loved little, because he thought that little was forgiven him, was it for any other reason that he was blinded by this [error](#), than because being [ignorant](#) of the righteousness of [God](#), and seeking to establish his own, he had not been made subject unto the righteousness of God? But you, an elect race, and among the elect more elect, virgin choirs that follow the Lamb, even you "by [grace](#) have been saved through [faith](#); and this not of yourselves, but it is the gift of God: not of works, lest haply any be elated. For we are His workmanship, created in Jesus Christ in good works, which God has prepared, that in them we may walk." What therefore, by how much the more you are adorned by His gifts, shall you by so much the less [love](#) Him? May He Himself turn away so dreadful [madness](#)! Wherefore forasmuch as the Truth has spoken the [truth](#), that he, unto whom little is forgiven, loves little; do ye, in order that you may [love](#) with full glow of affection Him, Whom you are free to [love](#), being loosened from ties of marriage, account as altogether forgiven unto you, whatever of [evil](#), by His governance, you have not committed. For "your eyes ever unto the Lord, forasmuch as He shall pluck out of the net your feet," and, "Except the Lord shall have kept the city, in vain has he watched who keeps it." And speaking of Continenace itself the Apostle says, "But I would that all [men](#) were as I myself; but each one has his own proper gift from [God](#); one in this way, and another in that way." Who therefore bestows these gifts? Who distributes his own proper gifts unto each as He will? Forsooth [God](#), with Whom there is not unrighteousness, and by this means with what equity He makes some in this way, and others in that way, for man to [know](#) is either impossible or altogether hard: but that with equity He makes, it is not lawful to [doubt](#). "What," therefore, "have you, which you have not received?" And by what perversity do you less [love](#) Him, of Whom you have received more?

42. Wherefore let this be the first thought for the putting on of humility, that God's virgin think not that it is of herself that she is such, and not rather that this best "gift comes down from above from the Father of Lights, with Whom is no change nor shadow of motion." For thus she will not think that little has been forgiven her, so as for her to [love](#) little, and, being [ignorant](#) of the righteousness of [God](#), and wishing to establish her own, not to be made subject to the righteousness of [God](#). In which fault was that Simon who was surpassed by the [woman](#), unto whom many [sins](#) were forgiven, because she loved much. But she will have more cautious and [true](#) thoughts, that we are so to account all [sins](#) as though forgiven, from which God keeps us that we commit them not. Witnesses are those expressions of [pious prayers](#) in [holy Scriptures](#), whereby it is shown, that those very things, which are commanded by [God](#), are not done save by His Gift and help, Who commands. For there is a [falsehood](#) in the asking for them, if we could do them without the help of His [grace](#). What is there so generally and chiefly charged, as [obedience](#) whereby the Commandments of God are kept? And yet we find this wished for. "You," says he, "hast charged, that Your commandments be greatly kept." Then it follows, "O that my ways were directed to keep Your righteousnesses: then shall I not be confounded, while I look unto all Your commandments." That which he had set down above that God had commanded, that he wished might of himself be fulfilled. This is done assuredly, that

there be not [sin](#); but, if there has been [sin](#), the command is that one repent; lest by defense and excuse of [sin](#) he perish through [pride](#), who has done it, while he is unwilling that what he has done perish through repentance. This also is asked of [God](#), so that it may be understood that it is not done, save by His grant from Whom it is asked. "Set," says he, "O Lord, a watch to my mouth, and a door of continence around my lips: let not my heart turn away unto [evil](#) words, to make excuses in [sins](#), with men that work unrighteousness." If, therefore, both [obedience](#), whereby we keep His commandments, and repentance whereby we excuse not our [sins](#), are wished for and asked, it is plain that, when it is done, it is by His gift that it is possessed, by His help that it is fulfilled, yet more openly is it said by reason of [obedience](#), "By the Lord the steps of a man are directed, and He shall will His way:" and of repentance the Apostle says, "if haply God may grant unto them repentance."

43. Concerning continence also itself has it not been most openly said, "And when I [knew](#) that no one can be continent unless God give it, this also itself was a part of wisdom, to [know](#) whose gift it was?" But perhaps continence is the gift of [God](#), but wisdom man bestows upon himself, whereby to understand, that that gift is, not his own, but of [God](#). Yea, "The Lord makes wise the blind:" and, "The testimony of the Lord is faithful, it gives wisdom unto little ones:" and, "If any one want wisdom, let him ask of [God](#), Who gives unto all liberally, and upbraids not, and it shall be given to him." But it becomes [virgins](#) to be wise, that their lamps be not extinguished. How "wise," save "not having high thoughts, but consenting unto the lowly." For Wisdom Itself has said unto man, "Lo, [piety](#) is wisdom!" If therefore you have nothing, which you have not received, "Be not high-minded, but [fear](#)." And [love](#) not little, as though Him by Whom little has been forgiven to you; but, rather, [love](#) Him much, by Whom much has been given to you. For if he loves, unto whom it has been given not to repay: how much more ought he to [love](#), unto whom it has been given to possess. For both, whosoever continues chaste from the beginning, is ruled by Him; and whosoever is made chaste instead of unchaste, is corrected by Him; and whosoever is unchaste even unto the end, is abandoned by Him. But this He can do by secret counsel, by unrighteous He cannot: and perhaps it is for this end that it lies hid, that there may be more [fear](#), and less [pride](#).

44. Next let not man, now that he [knows](#) that by the [grace](#) of God he is what he is, fall into another snare of [pride](#), so as by lifting up himself for the very [grace](#) of God to despise the rest. By which fault that other [Pharisee](#) both gave thanks unto God for the goods which he had, and yet vaunted himself above the Publican confessing his [sins](#). What therefore should a [virgin](#) do, what should she think, that she vaunt not herself above those, men or [women](#), who have not this so great gift? For she ought not to feign humility, but to set it forth: for the feigning of humility is greater [pride](#). Wherefore Scripture wishing to show that humility ought to be [true](#), after having said, "By how much you are great, by so much [humble](#) yourself in all things," added soon after, "And you shall find [grace](#) before God:" assuredly where one could not [humble](#) one's self deceitfully.

45. Wherefore what shall we say? is there any thought which a [virgin](#) of God may [truly](#) have, by reason of which she dare not to set herself before a faithful [woman](#), not only a

widow, but even married? I say not a reprobate virgin; for who knows not that an obedient woman is to be set before a disobedient virgin? But where both are obedient unto the commands of God, shall she so tremble to prefer holy virginity even to chaste marriage, and continence to wedded life, the fruit an hundred-fold to go before the thirty-fold? Nay, let her not doubt to prefer this thing to that thing; yet let not this or that virgin, obeying and fearing God, dare to set herself before this or that woman, obeying and fearing God; otherwise she will not be humble, and "God resists the proud!" What, therefore, shall she have in her thoughts? Forsooth the hidden gifts of God, which nought save the questioning of trial makes known to each, even in himself. For, to pass over the rest, whence does a virgin know, although careful of the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord but that haply, by reason of some weakness of mind unknown to herself, she be not as yet ripe for martyrdom, whereas that woman, whom she rejoiced to set herself before, may already be able to drink the Cup of the Lord's humiliation, which He set before His disciples, to drink first, when enamored of high place? Whence, I say, does she know but that she herself be not as yet Thecla, that other be already Crispina. Certainly unless there be present trial, there takes place no proof of this gift.

46. But this is so great, that certain understand it to be the fruit an hundred-fold. For the authority of the Church bears a very conspicuous witness, in which it is known to the faithful in what place the Martyrs, in what place the holy nuns deceased, are rehearsed at the Sacraments of the Altar. But what the meaning is of that difference of fruitfulness, let them see to it, who understand these things better than we; whether the virginal life be in fruit an hundred-fold, in sixty-fold the widowed, in thirty-fold the married; or whether the hundred-fold fruitfulness be ascribed unto martyrdom, the sixty-fold unto continence, the thirty-fold unto marriage; or whether virginity, by the addition of martyrdom, fill up the hundred-fold, but when alone be in sixty-fold, but married persons bearing thirty-fold arrive at sixty-fold, in case they shall be martyrs; or whether, what seems to me more probable, forasmuch as the gifts of Divine grace are many, and one is greater and better than another, whence the Apostle says, "But emulate ye the better gifts;" we are to understand that they are more in number than to allow of being distributed under those different kinds. In the first place, that we set not widowed continence either as bearing no fruit, or set it but level with the desert of married charity, or equal it unto virgin glory; or think that the Crown of Martyrdom, either established in habit of mind, although proof of trial be wanting, or in actual making trial of suffering, be added unto either one of those these chastities, without any increase of fruitfulness. Next, when we set it down that many men and women so keep virginal chastity, as that yet they do not the things which the Lord says, "If you will to be perfect, go, sell all that you have, and give unto the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven: and come, follow me;" and dare not unite themselves to those dwelling together, among whom no one says that any thing is his own, but all things are unto them common; do we think that there is no addition of fruitfulness unto the virgins of God, when they do this? or that the virgins of God are without any fruit, although they do not this? Therefore there are many gifts, and some brighter and higher than others, each than each. And at times one is fruitful in fewer gifts, but better; another in lower gifts, but more. And in what manner they be either made equal one to another, or distinguished one from another, in receiving eternal honors, who of men would dare to pronounce? whereas yet it is plain both that those differences are

many, and that the better are profitable not for the present time, but for [eternity](#). But I judge that the Lord willed to make mention of three differences of fruitfulness, the rest He left to such as understand. For also another Evangelist has made mention only of the hundred-fold: we are not, therefore, are we, to think that he either rejected, or [knew](#) not of, the other two, but rather that he left them to be understood?

47. But, as I had begun to say, whether the fruit an hundred-fold be [virginity](#) dedicated to [God](#), or whether we are to understand that interval of fruitfulness in some other way, either such as we have made mention of, or such as we have not made mention of; yet no one, as I suppose, will have dared to prefer [virginity](#) to [martyrdom](#), and no one will have [doubted](#) that this latter gift is hidden, if trial to test it be wanting. A virgin, therefore, has a subject for thought, such as may be of profit to her for the keeping of humility, that she violate not that charity, which is above all gifts, without which assuredly whatever other gifts she shall have had, whether few or many, whether great or small, she is nothing. She has, I say, a subject for thought, that she be not puffed up, that she rival not; forsooth that she so make profession that the virginal good is much greater and better than the married good, as that yet she [know](#) not whether this or that married [woman](#) be not already able to suffer for [Christ](#), but herself as yet unable, and she herein spared, that her weakness is not put to the question by trial. "For [God](#)," says the Apostle, "is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tried above what you are able but will make with the trial a way out, that you may be able to bear it." Perhaps, therefore, those men or [women](#) keeping a way of married life praiseworthy in its kind, are already able, against an enemy forcing to unrighteousness, to contend even by tearing in pieces of bowels, and shedding of blood; but these men or [women](#), continent from childhood, and making themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of [Heaven](#), still are not as yet able to endure such, either for righteousness, or for [chastity](#) itself. For it is one thing, for [truth](#) and an [holy](#) purpose, not to consent unto one who would persuade and flatter, but another thing not to yield even to one who tortures and strikes. These lie hid in the powers and strength of [souls](#), by trial they are unfolded, by actual essay they come forth. In order, therefore, that each be not puffed up by reason of that, which he sees clearly that he can do, let him humbly consider that he [knows](#) not that there is perchance something more excellent which he cannot do, but that some, who neither have nor profess that of which he is lawfully self-conscious, are able to do this, which he himself cannot do. Thus will be kept, not by feigned but by [true](#) humility, "In [honor](#) preventing one another," and, "esteeming each the other higher than himself."

48. What now shall I say concerning the very carefulness and watchfulness against [sin](#)? "Who shall boast that he has a chaste heart? or who shall boast that he is clean from [sin](#)?" Holy [virginity](#) is indeed inviolate from the mother's womb; but "no one," says he, "is clean in Your sight, not even the infant whose life is of one day upon the earth." There is kept also in [faith](#) inviolate a certain virginal [chastity](#), whereby the [Church](#) is joined as a chaste virgin unto One Husband: but That One Husband has taught, not only the [faithful](#) who are virgin in mind and body, but all [Christians](#) altogether, from spiritual even unto carnal, from Apostles even unto the last penitents, as though from the height of heaven even unto the bounds of it, to [pray](#), and in the [prayer](#) itself has admonished them to say, "And forgive us our debts, even as we also forgive our debtors:" where, by this which we

seek, He shows what also we should remember that we are. For neither on behalf of those debts, which for our whole past life we trust have been forgiven unto us in Baptism through His peace, has He charged us to [pray](#), saying, "And forgive us our debts, even as we also forgive our debtors:" otherwise this were a [prayer](#) which Catechumens rather ought to [pray](#) up to the time of Baptism; but whereas it is what [baptized persons pray](#), rulers and people, pastors and flocks; it is sufficiently shown that in this life, the whole of which is a trial, no one ought to boast himself as though free from all [sins](#).

49. Wherefore also the [virgins](#) of God without blame indeed, "follow the Lamb whithersoever He shall have gone," both the cleansing of [sins](#) being perfected, and [virginity](#) being kept, which, were it lost, could not return: but, because that same Apocalypse itself, wherein such unto one such were revealed, in this also praises them, that "in their mouth there was not found a lie:" let them remember in this also to be [true](#), that they dare not say that they have not [sin](#). Forsooth the same John, who saw that, has said this, "If we shall have said that we have not [sin](#), we deceive our own selves, and the [truth](#) is not in us; but if we shall have confessed our faults, He is faithful and just, so as to forgive us our [sins](#), and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But if we shall have said that we have not [sinned](#), we shall make Him a liar, and His word shall not be in us." This surely is not said unto these or those, but unto all [Christians](#), wherein [virgins](#) also ought to recognize themselves. For thus they shall be without a lie, such as in the Apocalypse they appeared. And by this means so long as there is not as yet perfection in heavenly height, confession in lowliness makes them without blame.

50. But, again, lest by occasion of this sentence, any one should [sin](#) with deadly security, and should allow himself to be carried away, as though his [sins](#) were soon by easy confession to be blotted out, he straightway added, "My little children, these things have I written unto you, that you [sin](#) not; and, if one shall have [sinned](#), we have an Advocate with the [Father](#), Jesus Christ the righteous, and Himself is a propitiation of our [sins](#)." Let no one therefore depart from [sin](#) as though about to return to it, nor bind himself as it were by compact of alliance of this kind with unrighteousness, so as to take delight rather to confess it than to shun it. But, forasmuch as even upon such as are busy and on the watch not to [sin](#), there creep by stealth, in a certain way, from human weakness, [sins](#), however small, however few, yet not none; these same themselves become great and grievous, in case [pride](#) shall have added to them increase and weight: but by the Priest, Whom we have in the heavens, if by [pious](#) humility they be destroyed, they are with all ease cleansed.

51. But I contend not with those, who assert that a man can in this life live without any [sin](#): I contend not, I gainsay not. For perhaps we take measure of the great from out our own misery, and, comparing ourselves with ourselves, understand not. One thing I [know](#), that those great ones, such as we are not, such as we have not as yet made [proof](#) of, by how much they are great, by so much [humble](#) themselves in all things, that they may find [grace](#) before God. For, let them be how great soever they will, "there is no servant greater than his Lord, nor [disciple](#) greater than his master." And assuredly He is the Lord, Who says, "All things have been delivered unto Me of My Father;" and He is the Master, Who

says, "Come unto Me, all you who labor, and learn of Me;" and yet what learn we? "In that I am meek," says He, "and lowly of heart."

52. Here some one will say, This is now not to write of [virginity](#), but of humility. As though [truly](#) it were any kind of [virginity](#), and not that which is after [God](#), which we had undertaken to set forth. And this good, by how much I see it to be great, by so much I [fear](#) for it, lest it be lost, the thief [pride](#). Therefore there is none that guards the virginal good, save God Himself Who gave it: and God is Charity. The Guardian therefore of [virginity](#) is Charity: but the place of this Guardian is humility. There forsooth He dwells, Who said, that on the lowly and quiet, and that trembles at His words, His Spirit rests. What, therefore, have I done foreign from my purpose, if wishing the good, which I have praised, to be more securely guarded, I have taken care also to prepare a place for the Guardian? For I speak with confidence, nor have I any [fear](#) lest they be [angry](#) with me, whom I admonish with care to [fear](#) for themselves together with me. More easily do follow the Lamb, although not whithersoever He shall have gone, yet so far as they shall have had power, married [persons](#) who are [humble](#), than [virgins](#) who are [proud](#). For how does one follow Him, unto Whom one wills not to approach or how does one approach Him, unto Whom one comes not to learn, "in that I am meek and lowly of heart?" Wherefore those the Lamb leads following whithersoever He shall have gone, in whom first Himself shall have found where to lay His Head. For also a certain [proud](#) and crafty person had said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You whithersoever You shall have gone;" to whom He made answer, "Foxes have dens, and fowls of heaven nests: but the [Son of Man](#) has not where to lay His Head." By the term of foxes He reprov'd wily craftiness, and by the name of birds puffed-up arrogance, wherein He found not [pious](#) humility to rest in. And by this no where at all did he follow the Lord, who had promised that he would follow Him, not unto a certain point of progress, but altogether whithersoever He should have gone.

53. Wherefore this do ye, [virgins](#) of [God](#), this do ye: follow ye the Lamb, whithersoever He shall have gone. But first come unto Him, Whom you are to follow, and learn, in that He is meek and lowly of heart. Come ye in lowly wise unto the Lowly, if you [love](#): and depart not from Him, lest ye fall. For whoso fears to depart from Him asks and says, "Let there not come to me foot of [pride](#)." Go on in the way of loftiness with the foot of lowliness; Himself lifts up such as follow in lowly wise, Who thought it not a trouble to come down unto such as lay low. Commit ye His gifts unto Him to keep, "guard ye your strength unto Him." Whatever of [evil](#) through His guardianship ye commit not, account as forgiven unto you by Him: lest, thinking that you have little forgiven unto you, you [love](#) little, and with ruinous boasting despise the [publicans](#) beating their breasts. Concealing that strength of yours which has been tried beware, that you be not puffed up, because you have been able to bear something: but concerning that which has been untried [pray](#), that you be not tempted above that you are able to bear. Think that some are superior to you in secret, than whom you are openly better. When the [good](#) things of others, haply unknown to you, are kindly [believed](#) by you, your own that are [known](#) to you are not lessened by comparison, but strengthened by [love](#): and what haply as yet are wanting, are by so much the more easily given, by how much they are the more humbly desired. Let such among your number as persevere, afford to you an example: but let

such as fall increase your [fear](#). Love the one that you may imitate it; mourn over the other, that you be not puffed up. Do not ye establish your own righteousness; submit yourselves unto God Who justifies you. Pardon the [sins](#) of others, [pray](#) for your own: future [sins](#) shun by watching, past [sins](#) blot out by confessing.

54. Lo, already you are such, as that in the rest of your conduct also ye correspond with the [virginity](#) which you have professed and kept. Lo, already not only do ye abstain from murders, devilish [sacrifices](#) and abominations, thefts, rapines, frauds, [perjuries](#), drunkennesses, and all luxury and [avarice](#), hatreds, emulations, impieties, cruelties; but even those things, which either are, or are thought, lighter, are not found nor arise among you: not bold face, not wandering eyes, not unbridled tongue, not petulant laugh, not scurrilous jest, not unbecoming mien, not swelling or loose gait; already ye render not [evil](#) for [evil](#), nor curse for curse; already, lastly, you fulfill that measure of [love](#), that you lay down your lives for your brethren. Lo, already you are such, because also such ye ought to be. These, being added to [virginity](#), set forth an angelic life unto men, and the ways of heaven unto the earth. But, by how much you are great, whosoever of you are so great, "by so much [humble](#) yourselves in all things, that you may find [grace](#) before [God](#)," that He resist you not as [proud](#), that He [humble](#) you not as lifting up yourselves, that He lead you not through straits as being puffed up: although anxiety be unnecessary, that, where Charity glows, humility be not wanting.

55. If, therefore, you despise marriages of sons of [men](#), from which to beget sons of [men](#), [love](#) ye with your whole heart Him, Who is fair of form above the sons of men; you have leisure; your heart is free from marriage bonds. Gaze on the Beauty of your Lover: think of Him equal to the [Father](#), made subject also to His Mother: ruling even in the heavens, and serving upon the earth: creating all things, created among all things. That very thing, which in Him the [proud](#) mock at, gaze on, how fair it is: with inward eyes gaze on the wounds of Him hanging, the scars of Him rising again, the blood of Him dying, the price of him that believes, the gain of Him that redeems. Consider of how great value these are, weigh them in the scales of Charity; and whatever of [love](#) ye had to expend upon your marriages, pay back to Him.

56. It is well that He seeks your beauty within, where He has given unto you power to become daughters of God: He seeks not of you a fair flesh, but fair conduct, whereby to bridle also the flesh. He is not one unto Whom any one can lie concerning you, and make him rage through jealousy. See with how great security ye [love](#) Him, Whom ye [fear](#) not to offend by false suspicions. Husband and wife [love](#) each other, in that they see each other: and what they see not, that they [fear](#) between themselves: nor have they sure delight in what is visible, while in what is concealed they usually suspect what is not. You in Him, Whom ye see not with the eyes, and behold by [faith](#), neither have what is real to blame, nor [fear](#) lest haply ye offend Him by what is false. If therefore ye should owe great [love](#) to husbands, Him, for Whose sake ye would not have husbands, how greatly ought ye to [love](#)? Let Him be fixed in your whole heart, Who for you was fixed on the Cross: let Him possess in your [soul](#) all that, whatever it be, that you would not have occupied by marriage. It is not lawful for you to [love](#) little Him, for Whose sake you

have not loved even what were lawful. So loving Him Who is meek and lowly of heart, I have no [fear](#) for you of [pride](#).

57. Thus, after our small measure, we have spoken enough both of [sanctity](#), whereby you are properly called "sanctimoniales," and of humility, whereby whatever great name ye bear is kept. But more worthily let those Three Children, unto whom He, Whom they loved with full glow of heart, afforded refreshing in the fire, admonish you concerning this our little work, much more shortly indeed in number of words, but much more greatly in weight of authority, in the Hymn wherein God is [honored](#) by them. For joining humility unto [holiness](#) in such as praise [God](#), they have most plainly taught, that each, by how much he make any more [holy](#) profession, by so much do beware that he be not deceived by [pride](#). Wherefore do ye also praise Him, Who grants unto you, that in the midst of the flames of this world, although ye be not joined in marriage, yet ye be not burned: and [praying](#) also for us, "Bless ye the Lord, you [holy](#) and [humble](#) men of heart; utter an hymn, and exalt Him above all forever."