Demonstration 7 On penitents

Aphrahat the Persian Sage (c. AD 270–345)

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APHRAATES ON PENITENTS

Translated by Frank H. Hallock. Nashotah House, Nashotah, Wisconsin. (The following Homily, issued in 336-337 A.D., is especially valuable for its advanced teaching on the administration of penance and on pastoral care; there is nothing in either Greek or Latin Patristic literature of an equally early date which is quite so precise on either of these subjects). 1. Of all those who are begotten, who have put on a body, there is only One innocent, that is our Lord Jesus Christ; just as He bore witness concerning Himself, for He said: "I have overcome the world" (S. John 16: 33). And the prophet also bore witness con-cerning Him: "He did not iniquity, neither was guile found in His mouth" (Mal. 2: 6). And the blessed Apostle said: "He who had not known sin made Himself sin in our behalf" (2 Cor. 5; 21). And how did He make Himself sin? if not because of His taking sin, when He Himself had not committed it, and His nailing it on His cross. Again the Apostle said: "There are many who run in the race course, but one received the crown (1 Cor. 9: 24). Furthermore, there is no other of the sons of Adam who, descending into the contest, has not been smitten and beaten; for sin has reigned from (the time) that Adam transgressed against the commandment; and from the many it (sin) had beaten, and the many it had smitten, and the many it had killed, there was not a man from the many (that) it had not destroyed, until our Saviour came, and took it, and nailed it on His cross. And even when it was nailed on the cross there was (still) its sting, and it will sting many until the end, and (then) its sting will be broken.

2. For all diseases there are medicines, and there will be healing when a skilled physician shall have found them. And for those who have been smitten in our conflict there is the medicine of penitence, and those who apply it to their wounds are healed. O physicians! disciples of our wise Physician, take to yourselves this remedy, that by it ye may heal the wounds of the sick. For warriors who are smitten in battle at the hands of one who is fighting with them, when they have found for themselves a skillful physician, give themselves over to him for their healing, that he may make whole the parts where they have been wounded. And when a physician heals him who has been smitten in battle, he receives gifts and honor from the king. So, beloved, he who is laboring in our conflict, and his enemy comes against him and smites him, it is fitting to give to him the medicine of penitence, when the repentance of him who has been smitten has become great. For God does not reject the penitent,

for Ezekiel the prophet said: "I take no delight in the death which the sinner dieth, but that he may turn from his evil way and live" (33:11).

3. For he who is wounded in battle is not ashamed to give himself into the hands of a skillful physician in order that he may overcome that which befell him (in) battle; and the king does not reject him who has been healed, but numbers and considers him with his army. So the man whom Satan has smitten ought not to be ashamed to confess his sin, and depart from it, and entreat for himself the medicine of penitence. For gangrene comes to the wound of him who is ashamed to show it, and harm comes to his whole body; and he who is not ashamed has his wound healed, and again returns to go down into the conflict. And he who becomes gangrenous is not able to be healed, and may not put on again the arms which he laid aside. So for him who has been conquered in our conflict there is this way that he may be healed, when he shall say "I have sinned", and shall entreat penitence. And he who is ashamed is not able to be healed, because he does not wish to make known to the physician who receives two pennies (perhaps an allusion to S. Luke 10:35) his wounds, that by his means all the places where he has been smitten may be healed.

4. And to you physicians also, disciples of our illustrious Physician, it is fitting that you should not withhold healing from him who needs healing. Whosoever shows his wound to you, give to him the medicine of penitence; and whosoever is ashamed to show his disease, ye shall exhort him not to conceal from you, and when he has revealed to you do not publish it, lest by means of it the innocent also should be considered as debtors by enemies and those who hate (them). The line of battle where the slain are falling is considered by their enemies the weakest of them all. And when those who are smitten are found among them, those who have not been smitten bind up their wounds, and there is no revealing of their condition to the enemy. But if it is made known to everyone about them the whole army bears a bad name; and also the king, the leader of the army, is angry with those who exposed his army, and they are smitten with wounds which are worse than those of the ones who were smitten in battle.

5. But if those who have been smitten are not willing to show their wounds the physicians are not liable to any blame, because they did not heal the infirm who have been smitten. And if those who have been smitten are desiring to hide their wounds, they will not again be able to wear arms on account of the gangrene contracted in their bodies. And while there is gangrene in them, and they attempt to wear arms, when they are going down to engage in conflict, their arms will become hot upon them, and their wounds will become corrupt and putrified, and they will be killed. And when the corpses of those who have hidden from them their wounds are found, then all the shame of those who have concealed the wounds of their smiting is laughed at; and their corpses also will not be committed to a grave, and they will be regarded as fools, and evil, and ignorant.

6. And also the one who showing his wound has been healed is careful of the place which has been healed that he may not be struck in it a second time. For the healing of him who has been smitten a second time will be difficult for a skilled physician, for the wound which is

in the scar will not have been healed completely; and also, although it may be healed again, he will not be able to wear arms, and when he shall venture to wear arms he will be taking to himself a kind of condemnation. 7. O you who have put on the arms of Christ! learn the arts of war, lest ye be conquered and thrown down in the battle. Our enemy is cunning and skillful, but his arms are weaker than ours. Therefore it is right for us to engage (in battle) with him, and to take away his arms, being vigilant in sleep; for he is not visible to us when he is fighting with us. We turn unto Him who sees him, that He may take him away from us.

8. Also I counsel you who have been smitten that ye be not ashamed to say : "We have fallen in the battle." Receive the medicine which is without price, and repent, and live, before ye are slain. Also I remind you physicians of that which is written in the Scriptures of our wise Physician, that He does not forbid repentance. For when Adam had sinned He called him to repentance when He said to him: "Adam, where art thou?" (Gen. 3: 8). And he, hiding his sin from Him who beholds the heart, laid the blame upon Eve who had deceived him. And because he did not confess his sin death was decreed against him and against all his offspring. And Cain also was full of guile, and sacrifice was not accepted from him; and He gave to him (a place) of repentance, and he did not accept. For He said to him: "if thou hadst done well I would have accepted thy sacrifice; but thou hast not done well and thy sin will accompany thee" (Gen. 4: 7). And in the guile of his heart he slew his brother and was accursed, "and he was trembling and wandering on the earth" (Gen. 4: 12). And also to the generation in the days of Noah he gave one hundred and twenty years for repentance; and they were not willing to repent and, one hundred years being completed, He destroyed them.

9. See also, beloved, how much better this is when a man confesses and turns away from his iniquity. Our God does not reject the penitent. For the Ninevites increased their sins, and they received the preaching of Jonah when he declared an overthrow against them, and they repented, and God was moved with compassion towards them. And the sons of Israel also when they increased their sins, and He proclaimed repentance to them, and they did not receive it; for He called to them by Jeremiah and said: "Repent, (become) penitent sons, and I will heal your penitence. Again He proclaimed in the ears of Jerusalem and said: "Return unto Me, a penitent daughter". Again He said unto the sons of Israel: "Return and be restored from your evil ways, and from the wickedness of your works. And thus He said to the people: "If thou return unto Me, I will restore thee, and thou shalt stand before Me. And again He spoke thus and reproached them: "I have said, Return unto Me, inhabitant (fem. of Israel with all thy heart, and she has not returned" (these are all loose quotations from Jere. 3 and 4:1). Again He took up a parable against them and reminded them of that which is written in the law, and He wished that the law might speak falsely for the sake of their repentance. For He said:

"When a man takes a wife and she shall go forth from him and shall be unto another man, and if the other man who took her shall die or shall dismiss her, and she shall return unto

her first husband, it will not be possible for her first husband to take her again after she has been polluted; and if he shall take her, behold that land will surely be polluted. And now also I have taken thee, Jerusalem, to Myself, and thou hast become Mine, and thou hast gone from Me, and thou hast departed, and thou hast committed fornication with stones and trees. Now return unto Me, and I will receive thee, and in thy repentance I will loose the law" (Jere. 3: 1 sqq., and Dt. 24: 13 sqq., both loosely).

10. Be ye not afraid, O penitents, lest the hope which is written in the Scriptures be cut off; for it is fitting for the Spirit of God thus to warn, for a fearful warning is set in Ezekiel the prophet when He said to him: "If all his days a man shall do judgment and righteousness, and at the end of his days he shall do iniquity, in his iniquity he shall die. And if a man shall do iniquity all his days, and he shall repent and do judgment and righteousness, his soul shall live" (Ezek. 33: 18-19). By this one word He has warned the righteous that he should not sin and lose his course; and He gave hope to the wicked that he should turn from his iniquity and live. Again He said to Ezekiel: "Although I cut off the hope of the unrighteous, thou shalt surely warn him; also when I encourage the righteous, set thou fear before him that he may be warned" (abridged thought of Ezek. 33: 7-9). When I say to the sinner: "Thou shalt surely die; and thou dost not warn him, the sinner shall die in his iniquity, and is blood will I require from thy hand" (Ezek. 3: 18), because thou didst not warn him. "And if thou warn the sinner, the sinner shall live whom thou shalt warn, and thou shalt save thy soul. And when thou shalt say to the righteous:

thou shalt surely live, and there shall be confidence to him concerning this, it was fitting for thee to warn him lest he be exalted and sin; and he who has been warned shall live, and thou shalt save thy soul" (Ezek. 3: 17-21 loosely). Give heed again, penitents, to the hand which is stretched forth and the calling to repentance, for He spoke also by Jeremiah the prophet and gave repentance. For thus He said: "If I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to cause it to perish; and that nation turn from its iniquity, I will turn away from it the evil which I had decreed against it. And if I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to plant and to build, and there shall be confidence in it concerning this, and it do that which is evil in My sight, I also will turn from it the good which I had promised concerning it" (Jere. 18: 7-10), and in its iniquity and in its sins I will cause it to perish.

11. Hear again also ye who hold the keys of the gates of heaven and open the gates to the penitent, believe that which the blessed Apostle hath said: "If a man from among you shall be troubled by sin, ye who are in the spirit, restore ye him in a spirit of gentleness; and be ye cautious lest perhaps ye also be tempted" (Gal. 6: 1). For the Apostle was afraid and warned them, for he said concerning himself: "Lest I who have preached to others should myself become reprobate" (r Cor. 9: 27). He who from among you is troubled by sin, do not hold him as an enemy, but be ye counsellors and admonishers to him as of a brother; for he whom ye have separated from among you has been swallowed up by Satan. Again he said:

”We who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak (Rom. 15: 1). Again he said: ”He who is lame should not be cast down, but should be healed” (Heb. 12: 13).

12. I say to you also, penitents, that ye should not withhold from your souls this counsel which is given for yourhealing. For he has said in the Scriptures: ”He who confesseth his sins and passeth away from them, God will be moved with compassion in his behalf” (Prov. 28: 13). Behold the son who has squandered his goods, and when he returned unto his father he rejoiced over him, and received him, and killed for him the fatted ox, and his father was glad over his return. And he called his friends also that they might rejoice with him; and his father embraced him and covered him with kisses and said: ”this my son was dead and is alive; he was lost and has been found (S. Luke 15: 32). And his father did not find fault with him about the goods which he had squandered. 13. And our Lord encouraged the penitents and said: ”I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (S. Luke 5:32). And again He said: ”There shall be joy in heaven over onesinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who are not needing repentance ” (S. Luke 15:7). The shepherd in concerned about that sheep who is lost from all the flock more than (about) those who have not wandered. For Christ died because of sinners, not because of the righteous, as He said by the prophet: ”He bore the sins of many” (Isa. 53:12). And the Apostle said: ”If while we were sinners God was reconciled with us by the death of His Son, how much more abundantly now in His reconciliation shall we live by His life” (Rom. 5:10).

14. God forgives him who confesses his sins. For when David had sinned, Nathan the prophet came unto him and made known to him his sin and the punishment which he should receive. Then David confessed and said: ”I have sinned.” The prophet said to him: ”The Lord also hath put away thy sin because thou last confessed” (2 Sam. 12: 13). And when he prayed he spoke thus: ”Against thee only have I sinned, and done evil things before Thee” (Ps. 51: 4). And again he entreated God and said: ”Lead not Thy servant into judgment, for in Thy sight no man living is justified” (Ps. 143: 2). And Solomon also spake thus: ”Who can say, Thou hast made my heart clean, and I have been cleansed from sins” (Prov. 20: 9)? And also in the law it is written that Moses prayed before God and said: ”Thou forgivest iniquity and sin, and surely Thou dost not justify” (Ex. 34:7; Num. 14:18 loosely). And also when he wished that his people might be blotted out on account of their sins Moses spoke thus, when he entreated and supplicated and said: ”Forgive Thy people its transgression, as Thou hast forgiven them from Egypt and up to to-day”. And God said to him: ”I forgive them according to Thy word” (Num. 14:19-20).

15. O ye who are entreating penitence, be ye like unto Aaron the chief of the priests who, when he had caused the people to sin by the calf, confessed about his sin and his Lord forgave him. And also David, the chief of the kings of Israel, confessed about his transgression, and it was forgiven him. And also Simon, the chief of the disciples, when he denied, (saying) that Christ hath never seen me, and he cursed and swore, ”I do not know Him” (S. Mt. 26: 74) and when repentance came to him he multiplied tears in his weeping; our Lord received

him, and made him the foundation, and called him Peter, the edification of the Church. 16. Be ye not foolish as Adam who was ashamed to confess his sin. And also be ye not likened to Cain who, when he was accused of killing his brother, said: "I do not know where Abel is, for I am not his keeper" (Gen. 4: 9). And be ye not lifted up on high in the mind in the likeness of the corrupt generation, and do not add iniquity to iniquity and increase your sins, thinking yourselves to be innocent while ye are debtors. Hearken to your first fathers who, even when they were righteous, subjected themselves to humiliation. For Abraham said: "I am dust and ashes" (Gen 18:27), and he held himself lowly as a thing of small consequence. And also David said: "The days of men are as a vapor" (Ps. 144: 4). And Solomon spoke and admonished: "If the righteous shall scarcely be saved where shall the sinners and the impious be found" (Prov. 11:31; cf. 1 S.Peter 4: 18)?

17. I beseech thee, beloved by the mercies of God, not on account of that which I have written unto thee of God who does not reject the penitent, that thou do not let go thy fortitude and become lacking in repentance. To the needy only is repentance given. Therefore let this be (a care) to thee that there may not be need for repentance. This hand is stretched forth to sinners, and the righteous do not seek it. For alms are given to the poor, and the rich have no need for them. They give to the man who has been stripped by robbers, who is ashamed, that he may be clothed, that he may cover his shame. Do not lose that which thou be wearied in seeking it again, or (uncertain) whether thou canst find it again or not. And even when thou hast found much it is not like thy own possession; for he who has sinned and repented is not equal to him who has kept himself far from sin. Thou shouldest be loving the higher part and keeping far from that which is inferior; by thine arms the good should be fought for, lest thou be smitten in the battle, that thou mayest not have need for seeking a remedy, and be wearied in going the way to the house of the physician. And when thou art perfectly healed these scars will be recognized.

Do not be confident that there will be healing for thee, and give thyself the name of one who is humble, but be greater by means of repentance. He who has torn his garment needs (a patch) upon it that it may be filled up, and even though it has been well sewn everyone discerns it. And he who breaks down a hedge built for him by toil, even though it be well (re-) built, it is called broken. And he whose house thieves break though, it has been laid open from within and the hole is recognized, and by great toil some of that which was lost may be regained. And he who cuts down his fruit tree, it will be a long time until it grows up again (lit. changes) and gives fruit. And he who opens up his drinking fountain, labors and toils until he closes it, and when it is well closed he fears lest, perhaps, the waters increasing, it should ruined. And he who gathers the flower of his vineyard at its season is deprived of the fruit of grapes. And there are blushes on the face of him who steals, and he toils and labors until the penalty his remitted to him. And he who throws down his work in a vineyard receives (his) pay and, his head bowed down, is unable to ask for more. And he who subdues the power of his youth will rejoice in his old age.

And he who does not drink of stolen waters will be refreshed at the fountain of life (N. B. The argument of this section is far from clear).

18. O ye who have been called to the conflict, hear the sound of the trumpet and be of good cheer. And also I speak to you, bearers of the trumpets, priests, doctors and wise men, assemble and say to all the people: "He who fears let him turn away from the conflict, lest he break the heart of his brethren, even as his heart (is broken). And he who has planted a vineyard let him return to his husbandry, lest being anxious about it he fail in the battle. And he who has married a wife and wishes to take her, let him return and rejoice with his wife. And he who has built a house let him return to it, lest perhaps he be mindful of his house and does not fight perfectly". Conflict is seemly only for those that, setting their faces to (those things which are) before them, are not mindful of anything which is behind them. For their treasures are before them, and all that which they plunder is their own, and they receive their profit from that which they win. Therefore, I speak to you, sounders of the trumpets, when ye have finished admonishing look to those who are turning back, and care for those who are remaining, and lead down to the waters of probation those who are assembling themselves for battle. Everyone who is strong the waters will prove, and those who are slothful will be separated thenceforth.

19. Hear then, beloved, this mystery which Gideon foresaw and showed figuratively. When he assembled the people for battle, the scribes, the fulfillers of the law, he admonished (according to) the words which I have written above unto thee; then many people with drew from the army, and when those who were left were chosen for battle, "the Lord said to Gideon, lead them down to the water and there prove them. He who laps up the water with his tongue (Jud. 7: 5) is eager and courageous to go forth to battle; "and he who falls down upon his belly to drink the water" is faint (hearted) and afraid to go forth to battle. Great, then, is this mystery, beloved, which Gideon foresaw, and it shows a type of baptism, and the mystery of the conflict, and an example of anchorites. For he foresaw and warned the people from the first by the probation of the water. Also when he tried them by the water from the ten thousand only three hundred men were chosen to wage war. This also agrees with the word of our Lord, who said: "many are called, few are chosen" (S. Mt. 22: 14).

20. For this reason it is fitting for the sounders of trumpets, the preachers of the Church, to warn all (who are in) the covenant of God before baptism, and to those who choose for themselves virginity and holiness, young men and virgins and those (wishing to. become) holy; and for the preachers to warn them and say: "He who sets his heart upon the natural state of fellowship (i.e. in matrimony), let him become united before baptism lest, perhaps, he fall in the conflict and be killed. And he who is afraid of this part of the struggle let him turn back lest, perhaps, he break the heart of his brethren as well as his own heart. And he who loves possessions let him turn back from the army lest, perhaps, when the battle shall prevail against him he should remember his possessions and turn back to them, for there is disgrace to him who turns back from the conflict". And he who does not offer himself, and does not yet put on arms, is not blamed if he turns back; but everyone who has offered

himself and put on arms is derided if he turns back from the conflict. It is fitting to him to empty himself for the strife, for he may not be mindful of anything which is behind and turn back to it.

21. And when they have preached and delivered their message and warned all (who are in) the covenant of God, they will bring to the waters of baptism those who have been chosen for the conflict and have been tried. And after baptism they will take heed to those who are strong and to those who are weak; it is fitting to encourage the strong and, furthermore, they should openly turn back from the conflict those who are faint (hearted) and weak, lest when hardship approach them they should hide their arms and flee and be overcome. For He said to Gideon: ”Lead down to the water” those who present themselves. And when he had brought the people down to the water ”the Lord said to Gideon, all those who lap the water as a dog laps with his tongue” shall go with thee to battle. ”And all those who throw themselves down to drink water shall not go with thee to battle. Great is this mystery, beloved, which he provided and showed (as) His sign to Gideon. For He said to him: ”Everyone who laps the water as a dog laps is fit to go to battle.

And from every living creature which has been created there is not one which loves his master and keeps watch over him by day and by night as does a dog, and even when his master beats him severely he does not depart from him, and when he goes forth to the hunt with his master and a powerful lion meets his master he delivers himself over to death instead or his master. So are those strong who have been put to the test by the water; they follow their Master as the dogs, and they delivert themselves over to death for Him, and carry on His struggle valiant ly, and keep watch over Him by day and by night, and they roar like the dogs while they meditate upon the law day and night (cf. Heb. Ps. 1: 2), and they love the Lord, and they lick His wounds when they receive His Body, and they set Him before their eyes, and they lick Him with their tongues as a dog licks his master. And those who do not meditate upon the law are called ”dumb dogs, who are not able to bark” (Isa. 56: 10); and all those who are not eager to last are called ”greedy dogs, not knowing how to be satisfied” (Isa. 56:11). And those who are eager to seek mercies receive the bread of children, and they cast it to them (cf. S. Mt. 15: 26).

22. And again the Lord said to Gideon: ”Those who fall down to drink water shall not go with thee to battle, lest they fall down and be conquered in battle.” For those who falling down drank the water slothfully foreshowed a mystery. Wherefore, beloved, it is necessary for the ones who fall in the conflict not to be made like to these slothful ones, lest they turn back from the struggle and become a reproach to all their comrades.

23. Hear also, beloved this word lest, since I have persuaded thee from the Scriptures that God does not reject penitents, thou trust to thyself and venture to sin; and lest on account of what I have spoken to thee (any one) become remiss and be smitten (because) he does not seek repentance. For thus it is fitting for him to remain in sadness all his days, lest he become proud and condemnation be upon him. The servant who offends against his master changes his garment that his master may be reconciled to him, comes before (him), and

makes himself obscure in his presence, that perhaps he may receive him. And when his master perceives that he is faithful to him, he forgives him his offence and is reconciled to him. For if he say to his master, "I have offended against thee," his master would show mercy to him; but if when he has offended he should say to his master, "I have not sinned, "he would add to the anger of his master against him. Remember, beloved, the son who squandered his goods, and when he confessed to his father he forgave him his wrongdoings. And also the woman who had multiplied wrongdoings, when she came to the Lord He forgave her many sins and had mercy upon her. And Zacchaeus the publican was also a sinner, and he confessed his sins and the Lord forgave him. And also our Saviour spoke thus: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (S. Lk. 5: 32).

For the Lord died for sinners, and His comming was not in vain. And also the Apostle said about himself: "I was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and a reviler (1 S. Tim. 1: 13), and God had mercy upon me. Again he spoke thus: "Christ died in our behalf" (1 Thess. 5: 9-10). For from the whole flock its Lord seeks the sheep which is lost, and finds it, and rejoices over it. And there is joy to the watchers of heaven when a sinner turns back from his iniquity. "For it is not the will of the Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (S. Mt. 18: 14), who have sinned and who have sought repentance for themselves. "For the Lord came not that He might call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Whosoever is sick among you we bear his sufferings, and whosoever offends we are afflicted in his behalf.

24. For when sickness comes to one of our members we occupy ourselves with his wound until he is made whole; and when one of our members is glorified the whole body shines and is beautiful; and when sickness comes to one of our members fever burdens the whole body. "Every one who shall cause one of these little ones to offend shall fall into the sea with the mill stone of an ass on his neck" (S. Mt. 18: 6). And he who rejoices over the evil of his brother shall soon be crushed himself. And he who treads with his foot upon his brother shall not be spared. For the wound of the scoffer there is no healing, and the sins of the mockers shall not be forgiven. For he who digs a pit shall fall into it; and he who rolls away a stone it shall return upon him. And he who stumbles and falls let him not say, every man is like me; and let not the rich man who draws near to poverty say, all the rich are like unto me, for if his prayer is heard who is there that will supply his loss?

25. All these things I have written unto thee, beloved, because in our age there are those who themselves choose to become solitaries, sons of a covenant, and religious. And we have engaged in conflict against our adversary, and our adversary is fighting against us that he may lead us back to the nature from which in our freedom we have separated ourselves. And there are some of us who are vanquished and swallowed up, and when those who are vanquished justify themselves and, even though we know their sins, confirm themselves in that thought and do not wish to draw near to repentance, they, on account of their shame, die the second death, and are not mindful of Him who searches the consciences. And again there is one who confesses his sin, and penitence is not given to him. O master of the house of Christ, give penitence to thy fellow man, and remember that the Lord did not reject

the penitent. Tares are sown in the field, and the Master of the seed does not permit His servants to purge the tares from among the wheat until the time of harvest. A net is spread in the sea, and the fish are not chosen until it is drawn to the top. Servants receive hire from their masters, and his master will judge the slothful servant. The wheat and the chaff are mingled together, and the Lord of the threshing-floor separates and cleanses (them). There are many who are called to the marriage feast, and His Lord casts out him who has not garments into the darkness. The wise and the foolish are standing together, and the Lord of the bride-chamber knows who shall enter.

26. O shepherds, disciples of the Lord, feed the flock and lead (it) well! Strengthen the sick, support the weak, bind up the broken, make whole the lame, and take heed to the fattened ones for the Lord of the flock. Be not likened unto an unskilled and foolish shepherd, who in his foolishness is not able to feed the flock, and whose arm is dried up, and whose eye has been blinded, because he said: ”dying, let it die; and perishing, let it perish, and the flesh that is left shall be eaten by its companions ”. And when the Chief of the shepherds comes He will condemn the unskilled and foolish shepherd who has not cared well for his fellow servants. And he who has shepherded the flock and led (it) well shall be called ”a good and skillful servant” (cf. S. Mt. 25: 21), who has presented the flock to the Shepherd while it was intact. O watchers, watch well, and admonish all the people concerning the sword, lest it come and take away the soul. For that soul is taken away in its sins, and its blood will be required from your hands. But if the soul is taken away after admonition, that soul will be taken away in its own sins, and ye will not be trodden down. O fattened flock, do not smite the weak, lest ye be condemned in judgment by our great Shepherd when He shall come.

27. Receive this exhortation, beloved, which conducts the penitents and admonishes the righteous. This is a world of grace, and until it is finished there is repentance in it. The time approaches in which grace vanishes and justice reigns; and in that time there is no repentance and justice rests tranquilly, because grace in its strength has prevailed. And when the time of justice approaches grace is unwilling to receive penitents, because a limit is set (at) the departure (from this life), thenceforth there is not again repentance. Read, beloved, and learn, and know, and perceive, for in regard to this every man is needing in part; for there are many who are running in the race course, and the victor receives for himself the crown, and every man according to his labor shall receive his reward. The demonstration concerning penitents is completed

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Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator’s own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.