Commentary on Jonah

Jerome (c. AD 347–420)

SermonIndex.net / Church Fathers

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Introduction

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Prologue

About three years have now passed since I first started writing the commentaries on the five Prophets, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Haggai. Detained by another work, I was not able to finish what I had undertaken. For I was writing a book on famous men and two volumes against Jovinian, an apology and an essay on 'the best way to translate', which was addressed to Pammachius, two books to or about Nepotian, and other works which it would be lengthy to recount. Therefore I retake up my commentaries with Jonah after such a long absence. Jonah, a type of Saviour, who prefiguring the resurrection of the Lord by spending "three days and three nights in the belly of a whale" [Mt. 12:40], was able to attain the first ardour so that we might deserve the arrival of the Holy Spirit to us. If indeed Jonah is to be translated as 'dove', and if the dove can be seen as the Holy Spirit, then we can also interpret the Dove as signifying the dove's entrance into us. I know that some classical authors, both Latin and Greek, have spoken much about this book, and through all of their Questions have less enlightened than obscured the ideas, so that in effect their interpretation needs to be interpreted and with the result that the reader comes away feeling less sure of the meaning than beforehand.

I am not saying this to criticise these great minds, to abase others in order to extol myself, but rather because it is the place of the commentator to clarify in short and clearly what is obscure; they should be less concerned with displaying their eloquence than with explaining the meaning of the author. We ask therefore where else the prophet Jonah appears in the Holy Scriptures apart from this book and the allusion made to him by the Lord in the Gospels [Mt. 12:39, Luke 11:30]. And if I am not mistaken he is mentioned in the book of Kings in this way: "in the fifth year of Amasiah, the son of Joash, King of Judah, began to rule the son of Jeroboam son of Joash King of Israel in Samaria, for forty-one years. He did much wickedness before the Lord and did not distance himself from all the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. He re-established the frontier of Israel in Samaria from the entrance of Emathia to the Sea of Solitude, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which was spoken by the mouth of his servant Jonah, son of Amittai the prophet,

from Gath which is in Ofer. [4 Kings 14:23-25] The Hebrews recount that he was the son of the widow of Sarepta, incited by the prophet Elijah;

his mother later said to him, ”I know now that you are indeed a man of God, and that the word of God is truly in your mouth” [3 Kings 17:24]; on account of this the child was called Truth. For Amittai in Hebrew can be rendered ’truth’ in our language, and because Elijah spoke true, he who was encouraged was called the son of Truth. And Gath is located two miles from Sepphoris, which is now called Diocaesarea, when you are travelling to Tiberia: there is a small castle where his tomb can be seen. Others, however, prefer to place his birth and tomb near Diospolis, which is in Lydia. They do not see that when he writes ’Ofer’, this is to distinguish Gath from other towns of this name that can be seen now near to Eleutheropolis or Diospolis. The book of Tobit, though not in the canon, is all the same used by the men of the Church, and it mentions Jonah when Tobit says to his son, ”my son, I am old and ready to leave this life. Take your sons and go to Media, my son. For I know what the prophet Jonah has said about Nineveh: she will be destroyed” [Tob. 14:3]. And, indeed, according to the Hebrew and Greek historians, Herodotus in particular, we read that Nineveh was destroyed in the time of King Josiah according to the Hebrews, and King Astyage of the Medians. From this we understand that in the past Jonah predicted that the Ninivites would repent and seek pardon;

but afterwards, as they persisted in their sins,they brought the judgement of God upon themselves. The Hebrew tradition is that Hosea, Amos, Isaiah and Jonah prophesied at the same time. This is historical tradition. Not forgetting the others of course: the venerable Pope Chromatius, who took great pains to recount to the Saviour the story of the prophet: he flees, he sleeps, he is thrown into the sea, he is swallowed by a whale, thrown back onto the shore and prays for repentance. And saddened by the safety of this town of many people, he finds comfort in the shade of a fig tree. There he is reproached by God for having taken more care of a green vine which had dried up, than of such a great number of men, and the other details I will try to explain in this volume. But to grasp the complete meaning of the prophet in this short preface there is no better interpretation than that which inspired the prophets and which marked out the lines of the truth of the future for its servants. He therefore speaks to the Jews who do not believe his words and are ignorant of Christ, the son of God: ”the men of Nineveh will rise up at the time of judgement with that generation and they will condemn it, for they repented as Jonah required, and here there is more than Jonah! [Mt. 12:41]. The generation of the Jews is condemned, while the world has faith and Nineveh repents, Israel the disbeliever dies.

The Jews have the books themselves, we have the Lord of books; they hold the prophets, we have an understanding of the prophets; ”the letter kills them”, ”the spirit makes us live” [2 Cor. 3:6]; with them Barabbas the robber is released, for us Christ the Son of God is freed.

Chapter 1

Verses 1-2. ”Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. Apart from that which the Septuagint translates as, ”the noise of their wickedness has risen up even to me”, it has translated the rest similarly. Jonah is sent to the gentiles to condemn Israel, because Nineveh had to repent, but the Israelites still persisted in their sin. And when God says, ”their wickedness has come up to me”, or ”the noise of their wickedness…” it is exactly the text of Genesis: ”the noise of Sodom and of Gomorrah is very loud” [Gen. 18:20], and to Cain: ”the blood of your brother cries to me from the earth” [Gen. 4:10]. According to tropology the Lord, our Jonah, that is to say ’dove’ or ’suffering’, (he is given both meaning, either because the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove and stays with him [Mark. 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32-33], or because he has suffered for our wounds, wept for Jerusalem [Luke 19:41], and because we have been cured by his malice [Is. 53:5]) is truly the son of Truth, for God is Truth [John 14:6]. He is sent to Nineveh the beautiful, that is to the world, where there is nothing more beautiful to our eyes than flesh. In Greek the idea of adornment is in the word cosmos.

And when everything had been completed, each one by one, it was said, ”and God saw that it was good” [Gen. 1:10]. It is to Nineveh that he goes, the great city, so that although Israel has not wanted to listen, the whole world of peoples will hear God’s word. And this is because their wickedness has gone up to God. For although God had made the most beautiful house for man who was devoted to serving his creator, man deprived himself of this by his own will; from childhood his heart fixed upon wickedness [Gen. 8:21; 6:5]. He turned his face to the heaven [Ps. 72:9] and constructed a tower of pride [Gen 11]. He deserves then God to come down to him so that he may be able to rise to heaven by the destruction of repentance, he that did not succeed by the swell of pride.

Verse 3a. ”But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. The Septuagint here is similar. The prophet knows by an inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that the repentance of the people is the destruction of the Jews. In this situation it is not that he is trying to save Nineveh, but that moreover he does not want to see it destroyed. In another place Moses prays for his people: ”if you can spare them this sin, spare them; if not, erase me from your book that you have written” [Ex. 32:31-32]; to this prayer, Israel was

saved and Moses was not erased from the Book: even better the Lord indeed profited from his servant by sparing his other servants. For when God says, ”release me”, he shows that he can be held. This is similar to what the apostle says: ”I wished to be anathema for my brothers who are Israelites according to their flesh” [Rom. 9:3]. Not that he desires to die however, for whom to live is Christ and to die is a profit [Phil. 1:21]; but he deserves life more when he wants to save others.

Besides, seeing the other prophets sent to the lost flocks of the house of Israel [Mt. 10:6] to incite the people to repent, and Balaam [Num. 23.24] the divine author of a prophecy about the deliverance of the Israelite people, Jonah feels himself punished by being chosen alone to speak against the Assyrians, the enemies of Israel, in the foreign capital where idolatry and ignorance of God still ruled. And what is more he feared that in spite of his prophesying they would still not be converted to repent, and that Israel would not be completely abandoned. For he knew by this Spirit which had entrusted him with the role of hero among the gentiles, that once the nations had come together in belief, then Israel would surely perish. And he feared that whatever was to happen in the future would not happen in his time. Thus Jonah does as Cain does: he flees from the face of the Lord [Gen. 4:16] and wants to flee to Tarshish, which Josephus interprets as that Tarsus of Cilicia, but changes the first letter. This can also be seen in the book of the Paralipomenon [2 Chron. 20:36-37], which says that there is a place in India which is called the same. According to the Hebrews Tarshish means more generally ’sea’, according to this passage: ”by a fierce wind you will break the ships of Tarshish! [Ps. 47:8], or the ships of the sea. And in Isaiah: ”cry out, O ships of Tarshish! [Is. 23:1,14].

I remember that I have already spoken about this several years ago in a letter to Marcella. The prophet did not intent to flee to such a place, but throwing himself into the sea, he just wants to go anywhere. And this is more pertinent when talking of a fugitive or one who is afraid, that he does not choose carefully where he wants to flee to, but just jumps at the first opportunity to take to the seas. We can also say this: he thought that God was ”known” only ”in Judea”, ”and in Israel his name is great” [Ps. 75:2]. After he had seen that God was also in the waves he confesses and declares: ”I am a Hebrew and I fear the Lord of heaven” [Jonah 1:9], who made the sea and the dry land. But if he had made the sea and the dry earth, why believe when you leave the land that you can escape the creator of the sea on the sea? At the same time when he sees the others sailors saved and converted, he learns that all the wickedness of Nineveh can be saved and converted by a similar confession. We can say too about our Lord and Saviour that he abandoned his home and country: at the incarnation he fled in some manner the heavens for Tarshish, the sea of that age, according to what is written in another place: ”here is the sea, great and wide; there are numerous beings, animals great and small;

there the boats come in and go out, and this dragon that you created to be crushed” [Ps. 103:25-6]. And he says too in his passion, ”Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by! [Mt. 26:39], lest at the unified complaints of the people, saying, ”Crucify him, crucify him!

[Luke 23:21], and "we have no king except Caesar" [John 19:15], the crowd of people should enter all together; and lest the branches of the olive-tree should be broken, and in their place the shoots of the wild olive should grow [Rom. 11:17-25]. He had such honour and love of his country in light of the choice of the patriarchs and of the promise of Abraham, that he said on the cross, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do" [Luke 23:34]. Or even since Tarshish can be translated as 'the contemplation of joy', the prophet, coming to Joppa, whose name means 'beautiful', hastens to hurry towards the joy and to rejoice in the pleasure of rest, to give himself completely over of contemplation. For he thinks that it is better to rejoice in beauty and in the variety of knowledge than to save the other people by letting that people die, from whom Christ would have been born.

Verse 3b. "And went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. LXX: "and he went up to Joppa, and he found a boat going to Tarshish; after paying his fare he went on board to sail with them to Tarshish, far from the face of the Lord. Joppa is a port of Judea [2 Chron. 2:16], and it has been seen in the book of Kingdoms [i.e. 'Kings'] and of the Paralipomenon. It was there that the King Hiram of Tyr transported wood from Liban by raft, then they were taken by chariot by road to Jerusalem. In this place even to this day rocks can be seen on the shore on which the chained Andromeda was saved by Perseus. The learned reader will know the story. And in light of the nature of the countryside, it is said quite rightly that the prophet came from a direction that is mountainous and precipitous, and went down to Joppa in the plain. He found there a ship that was moored and he went upon the sea. He paid his fare or the price of embarking, that is of his journey, according to the Hebrew, or the fare for himself, as the Septuagint has translated it.

"and he went down into it" as the Hebrew itself says, (for iered in Hebrew is translated as 'went down'), for in his flight he took great care to find a hiding place. Or "he goes up", as it is written in the Vulgate edition, for going where the boat is going, thinking that he has escaped if he has left Judea. But our Lord is also at the edge of the shore of Judea, which is called 'very beautiful' because since he was in Judea, he did not want to take the bread of sons to give it to dogs. [Mt. 15:26] But because he had come for the lost flocks of the house of Israel [Mt. 10:6] he paid the price to those who transport him. Thus he who at first wants to heal his people, saves the inhabitants of the sea, and through great winds and storms, (that is his suffering and the reproof of the cross) he is plunged into Hell and saves those whom had not noticed by appearing to sleep on the boat [Mt. 8:24-5]. The wise reader will not want to try to make tropology and history concur. For the Apostle refers Agar and Sara [Gal. 4:22-31] to the two Testaments, and all the same we are not able to interpret everything that is recounted in this story in a tropological way.

And when explaining about Adam and Eve to the Ephesians, he says, "this is why man leaves his mother and father to join with a wife, and both will become one flesh. [Gen. 2:24] There is a great mystery: I mean Christ and the Church. [Eph. 5:31-2] Are we then first to

refer the beginning of Genesis, the creation of the world, the formation of mankind, to Christ and to the Church under the pretext that the Apostle has used regarding this text? Let us admit what is written here: "thus man will leave his father" [Gen. 2:24], we can apply this to Christ by saying that he left God his Father in heaven to unite the people of the world in the Church. But how can we interpret what follows, "his mother"? Unless perhaps we are to say that he left heavenly Jerusalem, that mother of saints, and other ideas that are more complicated? And this too is written by the same Apostle: "they were drinking from a spiritual rock which was accompanying them, and this rock was Christ" [I Cor. 10:4], but let us not try to relate the entire book of Exodus to Christ. For what can we say? That this stone was hit by Moses not just once, but twice [Ex. 17:6; Num. 20:11], that the waters flowed [Ps. 77:20] and that the floods were filled up. Are we to regard the entire story of this passage in this case as allegory?

Is it nor rather that each passage ought to receive a spiritual meaning according to the diversity of history? Therefore just as these texts each in this way have their interpretations and do not entail the same allegory in their context, so the prophet will not be able to be taken completely to the Lord without difficulty for the interpreter. And if it is said in the Gospel, "O wicked and adulterous generation, that she asks for a sign? As a sign she will only have the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah spent three days and three night in the belly of a fish, so the son of man will spend three days and three nights in the bosom of the earth" [Mt. 12:39-40]. The remainder of this account does not concern Christ to the same extent. Indeed wherever this reading can be said to apply without discrepancy, we also try to make it fit.

Verse 4. "But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken." LXX: "and the Lord induced a great wind over the sea and a great storm was over the sea, and the boat threatened to break up." The flight of the prophet can be related to man in general, who, forsaking the commands of God, flees from his face and goes out into the world. But in consequence a storm of wickedness and the shipwreck of the entire world are sent against him, and he is made to pay attention to God and to return to that which he had fled. From this we can understand that what appears to be advantageous to mankind, turns into their downfall by God's will. And not only is their aid no use to those whom it is offered, but even those who offer it are destroyed. Therefore we read that the Assyrians conquered Egypt because she helped Israel against the will of the Lord [Is. 20:3-6]. The boat is in danger because it has taken on board a dangerous passenger. The waves are aroused by the wind, a storm begins over a calm sea. When God is opposed nothing is safe.

Verse 5a. "Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them." LXX: "and the sailors were afraid and each one cried out to his God and they threw the boat's cargo into the sea to lighten the boat". They believe that the ship with its normal cargo is too heavy, and do not understand that all the weight comes from the fleeing prophet. The sailors are afraid,

each one cries out to his God. They do not know the truth, but they do not forget providence, and with a false religion they know that there is something to pray to. They cast their cargo into the sea so that the ship might cross the immensity of the waves more lightly. But for Israel, neither prosperity nor wickedness can lead her back to know God. Christ weeps for the people, but He has dry eyes.

Verse 5b. "But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep." LXX: "Now Jonah went down to the heart of the boat and slept and snored". According to the history of this passage it describes the peace of the spirit of the prophet. He is troubled by the storm, or by the dangers; he just keeps the same manner of spirit when the storm is imminent, as when the weather is calm. The others though cry out to their gods, and cast the cargo overboard: each man to his own. But Jonah is so peaceful, so calm, his spirit is so at rest that he goes down to the heart of the ship to enjoy a peaceful sleep. Indeed we can also say: he knows he is a fugitive and a sinner, because he has not obeyed the commands of the Lord. It is because all the other men do not know why there is a storm that Jonah knows that he alone is the cause of it. This is why he goes down to the interior of the ship and hides himself sadly, so that he does not see the waves, like the avengers of God, rise up against him. And if he sleeps, this is not necessarily a sign of his security, but of worry. For we read that the apostles gave in to sleep on account of great sadness at the sight of the Lord's suffering [Luke 22:45]. For if we interpret the sleep of the prophet as a sign, his terrible torture, they represent a man who has fallen asleep from the drug of his wickedness: not only has he fled from God but moreover he ignores the wrath of God as his spirit is clouded by a sort of madness. He sleeps therefore in a kind of false security and his deep sleep sounds out through his nostrils.

Verse 6. "So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest you, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not." LXX: "and the helmsman come to him and he said to him, what are you doing sleeping? Get up, and call upon your God. If he can find a way to save us then we may not die. It is natural that each one has more confidence in someone else when they feel themselves to be in such danger. This is why the helmsman or captain, who should have been encouraging the frightened crewmembers, but saw the seriousness of the danger, woke and reprimanded the sleeper for his thoughtless security and asked him to pray to his God immediately. He shared everyone's danger, and therefore he had to pray along with everyone else. According to tropology there are many men sailing with Jonah, who each have their own God and hasten towards the 'contemplation of joy'. But when Jonah has been discovered by chance and his death has appeased the all-encompassing storm and made calm the waters, then the one God is revered and spiritual victims are sacrificed, which according to the text were not found when they were amongst the waves.

Verse 7. "And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. LXX: 'and they said to each other: come, let us draw lots to see who it is that has brought this

wickedness upon us. And they drew lots, and the lot fell to Jonah.' They knew the ways of the sea and knew the causes of the storms and winds in such weather. Without a doubt they had seen the waves rise up as usual, and as they must have seen many times before, but they must never before have found the person to blame for the shipwreck, and through him tried to avoid certain danger. We should not be driven by this example to believe in fate, or to believe that this text should be connected to that of the Acts of the Apostles where Matthias is chosen by lot [Acts 1:26], because personal privileges do not make common law. For just as an old lady speaks up for the condemning of Balaam [Num. 22:28], as Pharaoh [Gen. 41] and Nebuchadnezzar [Dan. 2], in their own judgement, knew the future through dreams and yet do not see that there is a divine judgement in this, like Caiaphas prophesies unknowing, that it is better for one to die for all [John 11:50; 18:14]:

just as this fugitive is betrayed by fate, not by the powers of the fates, above all the powers of the pagan fates, but by the will of hi who controlled uncertain fate. With regard to the meaning of the expression ”to know by whom this wickedness had come upon us”, we ought to take 'wickedness' as a synonym of affliction, of disaster, as in this passage: ”every day his wickedness was enough” [Mt. 6:34], and in the prophet Amos: ”is there wickedness in a town without God being the author? [Amos 3:6]. And in Isaiah: ”It is I the Lord, who make goodness and wickedness” [Isaiah 45:7]. But in other places too wickedness can be seen to be the opposite of virtue, as in the passage of our prophet that we have read above: ”the cry of their wickedness went up to me” [Jonah 1:1].

Verse 8. ”Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray you, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence do you come? what is thy country? and of what people art you?” LXX: 'and they said to him, 'tell us how this wickedness has come upon us: what is your occupation, where do you come from, where you are going to, from which country, and which people you are from?' '. Fate had shown him to them: they force him to admit why such a great storm, or for what reason divine wrath had come against them. Tell us, they say, where this wickedness comes from, which has come upon us, what work you do, from what land, from what people you flee, and where you are going to so quickly? Let us note the brevity here that is also seen in Virgil [Aen. 8:112]: young men, what cause has brought you to try out unknown ways? Where are you going? He says. Your people? From which land? Do you bring war or peace? This questioning brings his identity, his country, his journey, the town he comes from, so that the reason for the wickedness can be known.

Verse 9. ”And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. LXX: 'and he replied: I am a worshipper of the Lord, and I revere God of the heavens who made the sea and the dry land'. He did not say, 'I am a Jew', the name given to the people after the schism between the ten and two tribes [3 Kings. 12:19; 14:21], but 'I am a Hebrew', that is to say perates [Grk. 'a pilgrim and traveller'] , passing by as Abraham who was able to say: ”I am a guest and a traveller as all my fathers” [Ps. 38:13], and about whom it is written in another psalm: ”they passed from one nation to another, from one realm to another people” [Ps. 104:13]. Moses says, ”I will

go so that I might see this great vision. [Ex. 3] I fear the Lord God of the heavens, not the gods that you have invoked and who cannot save us, but the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. The sea that I flee to, the earth that I flee from. And appropriately the land is not just called land, but rather dry land so that it contrasts with the sea. In short here he mentions the creator of the universe who is the Lord of heaven, earth, and sea. But one question begs to be asked:

how do they know that he speaks the truth? 'I fear the Lord God of heaven', since he has not done what this God has actually commanded him to do. The reply would surely be that the sinners themselves would fear God, and that it is appropriate for servants of the Lord not to love, but to fear. Here however you can see fear in the cult according to the meaning of those who were listening and until now knew not God.

Verse 10. "Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why have you done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. LXX: 'Then the men were very afraid and said to him, "why have you done this? for the men knew that he had fled from the face of the Lord, since he had told them.' The chronological order is reversed here, for you could have said there was no reason to fear because of his declaration: "I am a Hebrew and I fear the Lord God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land". Immediately we are told why they were afraid: because he had told them that he was fleeing the presence of the Lord without having carried out his commands. Then they make excuses and say, "why did you do this?", and this means, "if you fear God, why did you do this? If this God that you revere is so powerful according to you, then how can you believe that you will be able to escape him?". They are seized by a great fear, for they realise that he is holy, and from a holy nation (having set out from Joppa they must have known the privilege of the Hebrew people), yet nonetheless they are not able to hide the fugitive. For he who flees may be powerful, but he who seeks is all the more powerful.

They do not dare to hand him over to the Lord, yet they cannot hide him. They reprehend blame, and avow their fear. They pray to Jonah to give himself up for the sin he has committed. Or indeed, when they say, "why have you done this?", they are not inciting him, but questioning, wanting to know the cause of his flight, the flight of a servant from his master, of a son from his father, of a man from his God. They ask, therefore, what is this great mystery that makes you flee from the land and seek the seas, leave your country and set out for foreign lands?

Verse 11. "Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto you, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous." LXX: 'then they said to him, what should we do with you, so that the sea is calm for us? For the sea was surging its waves more and more'. It is because of you, you say, that the winds, the waves, the sea and swells have been unleashed. You have revealed the cause of this wickedness, now tell us how to stop it. The sea swells against us, and we know that a God is angry because we took you on board. If we have sinned by taking you in, then what can we do so that the Lord does not become angrier? "What should we do with you?" that is to say: "shall we kill you?" but

you are faithful to the Lord. Are we to protect you? But you flee from Him. All we have to do is carry out whatever you command, all you have to do is give the command that the sea be calm, for now its wildness attests the wrath of the creator. The narrator also adds the reason for this question. The sea, he says, was continually increasing in wildness. It was swelling, in the known way; it was swelling for the revenge of its Lord; it was swelling, following the fleeing prophet. And at every moment it was becoming more and more wild, and to the delaying sailors' eyes it rose in greater waves to show that it would not put off for long the creator's revenge.

Verse 12. "And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. LXX: 'and he said to them, take me and throw me into the sea, and the sea will become calm for you. For I know well that it is on account of me that these great waves are against you.' It is against me that the thunder sounds, it seeks me, it threatens to shipwreck you in order to reach me. It will seize me so that my death might let you live. For I know this, he says. This great storm is on my account. And I am not unaware that this is my punishment, this confusion of the elements, this trouble of the world. This wrath is for me, but you are going to be the victims of a shipwreck. The waves themselves command you to throw me into the sea. And since I will have felt the full effect of the storm you will be in calm seas again. We must note here the greatness of spirit of our fugitive: he is not evasive, he does not hide or deny his guilt, but having confessed his flight he accepts his punishment willingly. He would rather die so that the other sailors do not perish on account of him, and so that he does not add murder to desertion. That's it for the story.

But we are also not unaware of the wild winds, which the Lord orders in the Gospel to quiet, that the ship in danger in which Jonah was sleeping, and that the raised sea which is reprimanded: "silence, and calm down" [Mk. 4:39], refer to the Lord the Saviour and to the Church in peril, or even to Christ awaking the apostles, and they themselves leaving their sufferings behind throw him somehow headlong into the waves. Our Jonah says, "for I know that it is on account of me that this great storm is upon you", for the winds are watching me journey to Tarshish with you, that is travel to the contemplation of joy to lead you with me to goodness so that wherever I am, so is the Father and you will be there too [John 14:3; 17:27]. This is why this anger rumbles, why the world which is in wickedness [1 John 5:19] groans. It is in this way that the elements are disturbed. Death wants to devour me so that you may be killed as well: she does not see that as she took food in a net, my death will cause her death. Take me and throw me into the sea. For we do not have to run away from death, but receive it with open arms when it takes us from others. Thus, in the persecutions it is not allowed to kill oneself, unless chastity is in danger, but one must put ones neck to the executioner.

Go, he says, calm the winds, pour libations on the sea: the storm which savages against you on account of me will be calmed by my death.

Verse 13. ”Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.” LXX: ’and the sailors strive to turn the ship to dry land but they cannot, for the sea swelled up against them’. The prophet has pronounced sentence against himself; but the sailors do not dare touch him because they have learned that he is a follower of God. They were striving to return to the dry land, to get out of this danger; they refused to shed blood, preferring rather to die than kill. O how changed are they now! The people that had served God [Deut. 10:12] saying, ”crucify him, crucify him” [Lk. 23:21]. They are ordered to kill him: the sea is raging, the storm commands this, and they forget their own danger and only think to save another. Therefore the phrase of the Septuagint is appropriate: parebiazonto, they wanted to use all their force and conquer nature so as not to offend the prophet of God. If the sailors rowed to regain the land, it was because they believed they could deliver the ship from danger without realising what Jonah, who ought to have suffered, had said. All the while Jonah was in the sea the ship sat safely in the water.

Verse 14. ”Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech you, O LORD, we beseech you, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you. LXX: ’and they cried to the Lord and said, but no, Lord, let us not die to let this man live. Lay not innocent blood upon us. For O Lord you have done as you wished.’ The sailors’ faith is strong: they are all in danger of losing their lives, and yet pray for the lives of another. They know well that spiritual death is worse than natural death of the body. Do not lay innocent blood upon us, they say. They take the Lord as witness not to visit them for what they are about to do, and say something like this: ’we do not want to kill your prophet, but he himself has proclaimed your wrath, and the storm shows us that you have done what you wished, O Lord. Your wish is accomplished by our doing’. This seems to be the confession of Pilate, as he washes his hands and says, ”I am clean of the blood of this man” [Mt. 27:24]. The gentiles do not want Christ to die, and affirm that it is innocent blood. And the Jew say, ”let his blood fall upon us again and on our son” [Mt. 27:25].

This is why when they raise their hands to the sky, they will not be heard, for they are full of blood. For your will has been done, Lord. We welcomed the passenger, and the whirlwind began, the winds blew and the sea swelled in waves. The fugitive was brought by fate, and tells what we must do: all of this, Lord, is the effect of your will. Yes, Lord, your will has been done. In this way the Saviour speaks in the Psalm, ”Lord, I wanted to do your will” [Ps. 39:9].

Verse 15. ”So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.” LXX: ’and they took Jonah and they threw him into the sea, and the sea became ceased from its agitation’. He did not say, they grabbed him and threw him but they raised him up as if they were carrying him with respect and honour, and they threw him into the sea without him struggling, but rather he went willingly. And the sea ceased because it had found the man it was searching for. Just as when you pursue a fugitive, and running, catch

up with him, then stop to grab hold of him; so too the sea was wild without Jonah, and then when it had in its lap what it desired it rejoiced in having him and cherished him, and the calm returned by this joy. If we consider before the suffering of Christ, the confessions of the world, the contrary winds of different opinions, the ship and all human kind, that is all creation to be in danger, then, after the suffering of Christ there is the calm of faith, the peace of the world, universal safety, conversion to God, and we will see how after Jonah has been thrown overboard the sea ceases from its raging.

Verse 16. "Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows." LXX: similar. Before the anger of the Lord the sailors implored their gods under the effect of their fear; after his anger they fear the Lord, that is they revere and worship Him. They do not worship Him in the usual way, as we have seen in the beginning, but with "a great fear", according to that which is said: "from all their spirit and all their heart and all their soul" [Deut. 6:5; Mt. 22:37]. And they sacrificed victims that indeed, to take this literally, they were not able to have out at sea. But this is because sacrifice to God is a troubled spirit. [Ps. 50:19] And it is said in another place: "offer to God a sacrifice of praise, acquit your vows to the Highest." [Ps. 49:14] And again: "we acquit ourselves to you of our vows that we have promised". [Hos. 14:3] This is how they offer a sacrifice in the middle of the sea, and they promise others vowing never to be far from Him whom they have begun to revere and worship. They were seized by a great fear for they recognised from the calm sea and the disappearing storm that the prophet had spoken true. Jonah at sea, a fugitive and shipwrecked, once dead saves the ship in the waves, saves the pagans who had been beforehand divided in different beliefs by the wickedness of the world. And Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, and Joel, who prophesied at the same time did not manage to convert the people in Judea. This shows that the shipwreck could only be saved by the death of the fugitive.

Verse 17a. "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah." LXX: 'and the Lord ordered a great fish to swallow Jonah'. The Lord commanded death and the underworld to receive the prophet. To the eager jaws of death he seemed a prey: she had such joy in swallowing him, and such sadness in spitting him out. Thus happened what is written in Hosea: "I will be your death, O Death! I will be your bite, Hell!" [Hos. 13:14]. In the Hebrew we read "a great fish", which the Septuagint and the Lord in the Gospel call a whale, to explain the matter in short. For the Hebrew says dag gadol that we translate as 'a big fish'. Evidently this means a whale. We must note too that where he awaited death, he found his salvation. And when it says, "he had prepared", this is even right at the beginning of creation, the animal which is mentioned in the psalm: "this dragon which you have created to play with him" [Ps. 103:26]. Or even he makes a fish come near to the ship to take in its belly Jonah who has been thrown over board, and to provide his rescue not his death. So he who felt the wrath of God in the boat was to feel his benevolence in his death.

Verse 17b. "And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." LXX: 'and Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights'. The Lord shows in

the Gospel the symbolism of this passage [Mt. 12:40], and it is superfluous to say in the same terms or even in other terms what he who has suffered has already said. But we ask ourselves this: how was he three days and three nights in the belly of the earth. Some scholars take the view according to paraskeuen, because of the solar eclipse from the sixth to the ninth hour when night followed day, this would be two days and nights, and adding the Sabbath, believe that we should count this as three days and three nights. But I prefer to understand this by reason of synecdoche, seeing the whole as a part: where he is dead in paraskeuen [Lk. 23:54], let us count one day and one night; two with the Sabbath; the third night which arises from the day of the Lord, let us take that as the beginning of the next day, for, in Genesis [Genesis 1:5-8] the night is not of the preceding day, but of the following day, that is to say the beginning of the next day, not the end of the previous. To understand this better I will say it more simply: if a man leaves his house at nine and the next day he arrives at his other house at three. And if I say that he has been two days in travelling, I will not be reprimanded as a liar, because he has not used all the hours of two days, but only a part for his journey. Nonetheless this seems to me to be the interpretation. If someone does not agree with this, and he can explain the meaning in a clearer way, then we should follow his interpretation.

Chapter 2

Verse 1. ”Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish’s belly. LXX: similar. If Jonah is compared to the Lord, and his time of three days and three nights in the belly of the whale is a sign of the suffering of the Saviour, his prayer also ought to be a kind of prayer of the Saviour. Some people, I don’t doubt, will find it difficult to believe that a man can spend three days and three nights in the belly of a whale, especially after a shipwreck. These people can either be religious or not. But if they have faith, they will believe this all the more: how three children thrown into a furnace of hot fire were so well protected that their clothes were not even singed [Dan. 3:94/27]; how the sea drew back on itself into two sides and held itself up like a wall to offer a route for the people who wanted to pass [Ex. 14:22-29]; how with all human moderation the anger of a lion that had been increased by hunger was taken by fear at the sight of his prey, and didn’t want to touch it [Dan. 6:23]; and even other such miracles. If they do not have faith, let them read the fifteen books of Ovid’s Metamorphoses, and all Greek and Latin history. Therein they will see Daphne changed into a bay-tree, or the sister of Phaeton changed into poplars;

how Jupiter the highest god, was transformed into a swan, flowed in gold and became a raging bull, and other adventures where the ugliness of the stories attest the holiness of the divinity. They believe in these stories and say that everything is possible for one god. And while they believe these ugly stories and defend the absolute power of a god, they do not attribute this same power to honest deeds. With regard to these words: ’then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God out of the belly of the fish and said…’ we understand that feeling that he is safe in the belly of the whale he does not despair of divine mercy and concentrates wholly on praying. For God, who had said, ”I am with him in his distress” [Ps. 90:15], and when he calls to me, I will reply, ”I am here. [Is. 58:9], came to his aid and he whose prayer had been answered was then able to say, ”in distress you have made me greater” [Ps. 4:2].

Verse 2. ”And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and you heard my voice.” LXX: similar except: ’from the belly of hell I threw out my cries’. He does not say, ”I cry”, but ”I cried”. He does not pray for the future, but gives thanks for the past. That shows us that from the moment he is thrown into the sea and sees the whale, that great bulk, that immense mouth which opened wide to swallow him, he remembered God and cried out, either by the waves giving passage for

his cry, or by a feeling from the depths of his heart, according to that which the apostle says: "crying in your hearts" [Col. 3:16]: "Abba! Father" [Rom. 8:15]. He cried to him who alone knew the hearts of men and said to Moses, "why do you cry out to me?" [Ex. 14:15], while the Scriptures remember that Moses had never cried out before this speech. This is the text that we read in the first psalm of the steps: "I cried to the Lord in my distress and he replied to me." [Ps. 119:1] By the "belly of hell" we understand the stomach of a whale of such great size that it took the place of hell. But this can better be referred to the person of Christ, who under the name of David, sings in the psalm: "you will not leave my spirit in hell, and you will not allow your saint to see putrefaction" [Ps. 15:10], living in hell free among the dead.

Verse 3a. "For you had cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about. LXX: 'you cast me into the deep of the heart from the sea, and the waves surrounded me'. The interpretation of the person of Jonah is not difficult: from the moment when he was closed in the stomach of the whale and found himself at the deepest and middle of the sea, he was surrounded by waves. For the Lord, the Saviour, prefiguring psalm 68 in which he says, "I am enshrouded in the deep mud where there is no ground. I have come to the deepest part of the sea and the storm engulfs me" [Ps. 68:3]. It is said of him in another psalm: "but you, you have rejected, despised and disquieted your Christ; you have cursed the covenant of your master, you have dishonoured his sacred place on earth, you have destroyed all its walls" [Ps. 88:39-41], and so on. For in this comparison of divine blessing and that place about which is written, "his home is in sacred peace" [Ps. 75:3], all habitation on earth is full of waves, full of storms. And the "heart of the sea" means hell, for which we read in the Gospel, "in the heart of the earth" [Mt. 12:40]. For just as the heart is at the middle of animal, so we say that hell is in the middle of the earth.

Or according to anagoge he recalls that he is "in the heart of the sea", that is in the middle of temptations. However, although he has been among the bitter waters and been tempted by all things without sin, he has not felt the bitter waters, but has been surrounded by the waves about which we read elsewhere, "an impetuous wave rejoices in the city of God" [Ps. 45:5]. Others drank the salty waves; myself, surrounded by temptation, I endured sweeter currents. And do not think what the Lord says now is impious: "you have cast me into the deep", who says in the psalm, "for they have followed him that you smote" [Ps. 68:27], according to the phrase which in Zechariah is spoken by the Father: "I will smite the shepherd, and the flocks will be scattered" [Zechariah 13:7].

Verse 3b. "All thy billows and thy waves passed over me." LXX: 'all your whirlwinds and your waves passed over me'. No one can doubt that the swelling waves of the sea encompassed Jonah, that there was fierce thunder in the storm. But we ask how all the whirlwinds, billows and the waves of God encompassed the Saviour. "The life of men on earth is temptation" [Job 7:1], or as there is in the Hebrew, "a military service", for we serve here to be crowned elsewhere. There is no man who can sustain all the temptations, except him who has been tempted by all, in our image, except sin [Heb. 4:15]. This is why it is said in

Corinthians, ”no temptation will take you, I hope, unless it is human. God is faithful, he will not let you try beyond your ability, but he will produce an exit that you may hold on to.” [1 Cor. 10 ,13] And like all persecutions and all wicked things that happen to us they do not happen without the will of God, we speak of whirlwinds and waves of God, which have not crushed Jesus, but have come down upon him with a simple threat of shipwreck which does not happen. Thus all persecutions and whirlwinds which tortured mankind and broke all the ships have passed thundering on my head. And myself, I have sustained storms and broken whirlwinds which were raging, to allow others to sail more easily.

Verse 4. ”Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; LXX: ’I said, I am cast far from your sight’. Before I cried out from the depths of my distress and before you heard me, me who had taken the position of slave and imitated its weakness, I said, ”I am cast out of your sight”. When I was with you enjoying your light and you, light, being light, I did not say ”I am cast out”. But once at the bottom of the sea and surrounded by the flesh of a man, I say: ”I am cast out of your sight”. I said this as a man. And as God being in that condition I did not think of my equality with you, because I wanted to raise mankind to you, so that wherever I am with you they are there as well and those who have believed in me and in you, I say: yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. LXX: ’do you not think I will be able to see your holy temple again?’. To express the Greek ara, the Vulgate edition’s ’do you think’ can be interpreted as ’therefore’, like the last conclusion of the proposition, of the assumption and of the confirmation and syllogism, not in the uncertainty of someone who hesitates but in the confidence of someone who affirms. This has been translated by, ”yet I will look again on your holy temple”, according to that which is said in another psalm by the spokesperson of Christ:

”Lord, I have loved beauty of your house and the tabernacle where your glory lives” [Ps. 25:8], and the passage of the Gospel in which it says, ”Father, glorify me with you by that glory which I had before the world existed” [John 17:5]. And the Father replied to heaven: ”I have glorified him, and I shall glorify him” [John 12:28]. Or even because he says, ”the Father is in me, and I am in Him” [John 10:38; 14:10.11; 17:21], for the temple of the Father is the Son, thus the temple of the Son is the Father. He Himself said, ”I left my Father and have come” [John 16:28], and ”the word was with God and the word was God” [John 1:1]. Or even the Saviour, the one and the same, asks as man and promises as God, and he is sure of the right that was always his. For the person of Jonah you can clearly see that with a feeling of desire and confidence, at the bottom of the sea, he wished to see the temple of the Lord, and with a prophetic spirit he found himself elsewhere and thought of other things.

Verse 5a. ”The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about,” LXX: ’the water ran about me up to my spirit; the last depth closed around me’. These waters, near to the deep, which cycle and slide about the earth, which drag much mud with them, tend to kill not the body but the soul, for they are friendly to the body and warmed by its desires. This is why, according to that which I have said above, the Lord says in the psalm, ”save me, Lord, because the waters have penetrated even to my soul” [Ps.

68:2], and in another passage, ”my soul has passed a torrent” [Ps. 123:5], and, ”let not the well press its mouth on me” [Ps. 68:16], let hell not imprison me! Let it not refuse me an exit! I freely made the descent; so let me make the ascent back again freely. I became a captive voluntarily, I ought to free the captives so that this verse is fulfilled: ”ascending into the higher parts he led the captives” [Eph. 4:8]. For those who were beforehand captives in death, he brought them to life again. We must heed certain wicked forces in the deep, or the specific powers in torture and supplication; demons, in the Gospel, ask not to be forced to go to them [Mt. 8:30; Mk. 5:10; Lk. 8:31]. This is why ”the darkness was over the deep” [Gen. 1,2]. Sometimes the deep is taken to mean the sacraments in a deeper sense, the judgements of God: ”the judgements of the Lord are a great abyss” [Ps. 35:7], and ”the deep cries out to the deep in a cry of your cataracts.” [Ps. 41:8]

Verse 5b-6a. ”the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever:” LXX: ’my head has penetrated to the base of mountains; I descended to into the earth whose bars are eternal bonds’. No one doubts that the ocean covered Jonah’s head, that he went down to the roots of mountains and came to the depths of the earth by which as bars and columns by the will of God the earthly sphere is supported. This earth about which is said elsewhere, ”I consolidated her columns” [Ps. 74:4]. With regard to the Lord Saviour, according to the two editions, this seems to me to be what is meant. His heart and his head, that is the spirit that he thought worthy to take with a body for our safety, went down to the base of the mountains which were covered by waves; they were restrained by the will of God, the deep covered them, they were parted by the majesty of God. His spirit then went down into hell, into those places to which in the last of the mud, the spirits of sinners were held, so too the psalmist says: ”they will go down to the depths of the earth, they will be the lot of wolves” [Ps. 62:10.11]. These are the bars of the earth and like the locks of a final prison and tortures, which do not let the captive spirits out of hell. This is why the Septuagint has translated this is a pertinent way: ”eternal bonds”, that is, wanting to keep in all those whom it had once captured. But our Lord, about which we read these lines of Cyrus in Isaiah: ”I will break the bronze bars, I will crack the iron bars” [Is. 45:2], He went down to the roots of the mountains, and was enclosed by eternal bars to free all the prisoners.

Verse 6b. ”yet have you brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. LXX: ’and from corruption my life comes up to me, O Lord my God.’ He says rightly ”you have brought up” or ”let my life come up from corruption”, because it had descended to corruption in hell. This is what the apostles interpret in the fifteenth psalm as prophetic speech of the Lord: ”for you will not leave my spirit in hell, and you will not permit your holiness to see the corruption” [Ps. 15:10], given that David is dead and has been buried, but the Saviour’s flesh has not known corruption. Others understand that compared to celestial blessing and to the Word of God the body of man is corruption itself, for ”it is sown in corruption” [1 Cor. 15:42], and in the psalm one hundred and two, the meaning is applied to a righteous man: ”he who cures all illnesses, who has brought his life back from death” [Ps. 102:3.4]. This is why the Apostle says, ”O wicked man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of

death? [Rom. 7:24]. It is called ”the body of death”, or ”body of misery”. These people take the text in the sense of their heresy, to see an Antichrist in the place of Christ, and to take the Churches in order to feed a fat stomach and discuss contrary to the flesh living in the flesh.

But we, we know that the body taken from the pure Virgin was not the corruption of Christ, but his temple. If we pass then to the thought of the Apostle in Corinthians, where there is the question of a spiritual body, we would say, in removing any appearance of chicanery, that the same body, the same flesh rises again, which has been buried and placed in the soil; but the only thing that changes is the glory, not nature. ”for this corruptible being must cover incorruptibility, this mortal being must clothe immortality. [1 Cor. 15:53] When he says ”this being” it is almost as if one showed the body by pinching it between two fingers: in which we are born, in which we die, that those who are guilty fear to receive as punishment, that virginity awaits in recompense, that the adulterer fears in punishment. For Jonah, this is how we can understand it: he who would have had to corrupt himself physiologically in the belly of the whale, and get by on the food of beasts and survive by drinking from the veins and arteries, still managed to remain safe and sound. And when he says, ”Lord my God”, this is a feeling of flattery: he thinks that God, who is common to all, is also common to him, and feels he is his own because of the greatness of his benevolence.

Verse 7a. ”When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD.” LXX: ’when my spirit failed in me, I remembered the Lord’. Although I hoped for no aid, he says, the memory of the Lord saved me, according to this passage: ”I remembered the Lord and I rejoiced” [Ps. 76:4], and in another passage, ”I remembered former days and I remembered the days of eternity” [Ps. 76:6]. I had lost all hope of finding a way out: my body was so frail in the intestines of the whale that I could not hope for my life. And so, everything that seemed impossible I found to be surpassed by the thought of the Lord. I saw myself imprisoned in the intestines of the whale, and all my hope was the Lord. From this we can learn that, according to the Septuagint, at the time when our spirit fails us, it is wrenched from its union with the body, and we ought not to turn our thoughts from Him who inside and outside our body is the Lord. For the Saviour the interpretation is not very difficult because he said, ”my spirit is sad to die” [Mt. 26:38; Mk. 14:34], and ”My Father, if it is possible let this cup pass me by” [Mt. 26:39], and, ”I place my spirit in your hands” [Ps. 30:6; Lk. 23:46], and other passages which are similar to this. And my prayer came in unto you, into thine holy temple. LXX: similar. In my distress I remembered the Lord so and my prayer came in to heaven from the depths of the sea and from the roots of the mountains, and came to your holy temple where you reside in eternal beatitude. This new kind of speech should be noted here: a prayer made for a prayer. Jonah asks that his prayer rise up to the temple of God. He wishes like the Pope that in his body the people should be freed.

Verse 8. ”They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.” LXX: ’those that keep mistaken vanities lose their mercy’. By nature God is merciful and ready by his mildness to save those whom he can’t save by justice. But because of our vices we lose the mercy

which is reserved for us and is offered to us. Jonah did not say, ”those who make vanities”, for ”vanity of vanities, all is vanity” [Eccl. 1:1], not to have an air of condemning everyone, and of refusing mercy to all mankind, but ”those who keep vanities” or the lie ”those who have come to love their heart” [Ps. 72:7], who are not happy with doing, but who keep their vanities as if they cherished them, thinking they have found some kind of treasure. Note too the greatness of the prophet’s spirit: at the bottom of the sea, surrounded by an eternal night in the intestines of a great beast he is not thoughtful of his danger, but philosophises on the question of nature. ”they will lose” he says ”their mercy”. Although mercy is offended and we can understand that it is God Himself: for ”God is merciful and good, patient and full of pity” [Ps. 144:8], yet mercy does not abandon those who keep their vanities, she does not curse them, but waits for them to return, while they intentionally abandon the mercy which is before them, offered to them. This can also be prophesised for the Lord on the subject of the infidelity of the Jews, who think themselves to observe the precepts of mankind [Mk. 7:7] and the commandments of the Pharisees, this is vanity and a lie, and they have abandoned God who always had pity for them.

Verse 9. ”But I will sacrifice unto you with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.” LXX: ’but I will sacrifice to you with the voice of praise and the action of thanksgiving. I will pay all that I have vowed to you, Lord, in salutation.’ Those who keep their vanities have abandoned their mercy. But I who have been eaten for the sake of the safety of the multitude, will offer you sacrifices with the voice of praise and thanksgiving, offering myself. For ”Christ, our Easter, has been sacrificed” [1 Cor. 5:7]. A as a true Pope and lamb he offers himself for us. And I will give thanks to you, saying, ”I bless you Father, lord of heaven and earth” [Mt. 11:25], and I will keep those vows to the Lord that I made for the safety of others, so that all that ” you have given me never dies” [John 6:39; 10:28; 17:12]. We see what the Lord promised in his suffering for our safety: let us not make Jesus a liar [1 John 1:10], and let us be pure, delivered from all the uncleanness of sins so that he offers us to God the Father as the victims he had promised.

Verse 10. ”And the LORD spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.” LXX: ’and he ordered the whale to vomit Jonah out onto the dry land’. That which we read above as being about Jonah, the Lord prayed for in the stomach of the whale about which Job speaks in an unclear way: ”let he who curses this day curse him, he who will capture the great whale” [Job. 3:8 LXX]. The great whale, the deep and hell are then ordered to give back the Lord to the dry earth; thus he who had died to free those detained by the chains of death, can lead with him many others towards life. With regard to the expression ’vomited’ we must take this to be said in a very emphatic way, to mean that triumphant life has emerged from the deepest and most impenetrable parts of death.

Chapter 3

Verses 1-2. ”And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid you.” LXX: ’and the message of God came to Jonah a second time, saying, arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and preach there this message that I have told you’. He did not say to the prophet, ”why have you not done what you were ordered to do?.” But the punishment of the shipwreck and his drowning are enough for him to understand the Lord, the liberator, whom he hadn’t known to be ordering. Moreover it is superfluous to see his wounds as those of a false servant of God, once he has been smitten, for such a punishment is less of a correction than a reproof. And our Lord is sent to Nineveh a second time after his resurrection: he who had fled by whatever means beforehand when he said, ”My Father, if it is possible let this cup pass me by” [Mt. 26:39], and who had not wanted to give bread of children to dogs, now the children have cried out, ”crucify him, crucify him! we have no king except Caesar” [Lk. 23:21; John 19:15], he makes his way towards Nineveh of his own accord to preach after his resurrection that he underwent as he was ordered to do before his suffering. The command is given, he hears it, he refuses, then he is forced to want, and the second time he carries out the will of the Father: all of this is connected to man and to the ”form of a slave” [Phil. 2:7], to whom such expressions are appropriate.

Verse 3. ”So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey. [And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey]” LXX: ’so Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was a city of godly size, around three days in journey. Jonah began to enter the city, about one day’s travel.’ Jonah immediately carries out the command that he has been given. Nineveh to which the prophet was journeying, was a great city, which it took around three days’ journey to circle. But he remembers the command he has been given and the recent shipwreck and makes the normal journey of three days in one day. However, there are some people who believe that he simply proclaimed his message in a third of the city, and that his speech quickly was made known to the other inhabitants. And our Lord is said to arise and speak of his own accord after being in hell, and announces the word of the Lord when he sends the apostles to baptise those who were in Nineveh in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit [Mt. 28:19]. So there are the three days of journey! And this sacrament of mankind’s safety is ”a journey of one day”, that is it is finished by the

proclamation of one sole God. Jonah preaches not so much to the apostles but more by the method of the apostles.

He himself says, ”and I will be with you always until the end of the world” [Mt. 28:20]. There is no doubt that Nineveh was a city of godly magnitude because the world and all things have existed through God and because without Him nothing would ever have existed. [John 1:3] Note too that he has not said, ”of three days and three nights” or ”of one day and of one night”, but simply ”and of three days”, and ”of one day”, to show that in the sacrament of the Trinity and of the confession of one sole God there is no darkness.

Verse 4. ”[And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey], and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” LXX: ’he proclaimed and said, another three days and Nineveh will be destroyed”. The umber three written in the Septuagint does not agree with the penitence, and I am quite astonished at this translation, for in Hebrew neither the letters or syllables or accents or the word show any common element. For three is said, salos and forty arbaim. Moreover the prophet who was sent from Judea to the Assyrians was to claim after such a journey penitence worthy of his prediction to cure with a long-present dressing his old and putrid wounds. Moreover the number forty is appropriate to sinners, to hunger, to prayer, to sackcloth, to tears and to perseverance in prayer. In this way Moses fasted for forty days on mount Sinai [Ex. 34:28; Deut. 9:18] and Elijah fleeing Jezebel [3 Kings. 19:8] is presented to us as having fasted for forty days after having told Israel about the famine [3 Kings. 17:1], when the anger of God was upon them. And the Lord Himself, the true Jonah who is sent to preach to the world fasts for forty days [Mt. 4:2]. And he leaves us as hereditary fasting to prepare our spirits, by this number of forty, as the food of his body. ”he cried out”: the Gospel shows this expression more fully: ”standing, he cried out in the temple: if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and he shall drink” [John 7:37], for all speech of the Saviour is called a cry because he speaks about weighty subjects.

Verse 5. ”So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.” LXX: similar. Nineveh believed but Israel did not believe; the foreskin believed, but circumcision remained without faith. First of all the men of Nineveh believed who had arrived at the age of Christ [Eph. 4:13]: they announced a fast and dressed in sackcloth, from the greatest to the smallest of them. This regime and clothing is very worthy of penitence, so that those who had offended God through their indulgence or lust appeased him by condemning all that they had previously offended with. Sackcloth and fasting are the weapons of penitence, the rescue of sinners. First of all fasting, then sackcloth; first of all what is not seen, then what is visible; the one is always shown to God, the other sometimes to man. And if it were necessary to remove one from the two then I would rather keep fasting without sackcloth than have sackcloth without fasting. Elder men give the example which pertains to youths: for no one is without sin; and if his life only lasted one day, the years of his life would still be counted [Job 14:5. LX]. For if the stars are not pure before God, they are still more so than a worm or putrefaction, and

those who are held by the sin of Adam, the great offender. Note here too the order, which is well written: God commands the prophet, the prophet proclaims to the city. First of all the men believe, announce fasting, and then everyone puts on sackcloth. The men do not announce the putting on of sackcloth, but only the fasting. All the same, with reason, those to whom penitence has been proscribed wear sackcloth and fast so that empty stomach and mourning clothes give the Lord more of an opportunity to remit.

Verses 6-9. "For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? LXX: 'the message reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, took off his robe and covered himself with sackcloth, and he sat down upon the earth. And by the order of the king and his nobles it was announced throughout Nineveh, saying, it is forbidden for any man or beast or oxen or sheep to eat anything, to drink any water. Men and beasts were covered in sackcloth and cried out to the Lord mightily. Let each one turn away from his wicked practises and from the unfairness that was in his hands, saying, who knows if God will turn and repent, if he will not abandon the fierceness of his wrath so that we might not die?'.

I know certain men for whom the king of Nineveh, (who is the last to hear the proclamation and who descends from his throne, and forgoes the ornaments of his former vices and dressed in sackcloth sits on the ground, he is not content with his own conversion, preaches penitence to others with his leaders, saying, "let the men and beasts, big and small of size, be tortured by hunger, let them put on sackcloth, condemn their former sins and betake themselves without reservation to penitence! is the symbol of the devil, who at the end of the world, (because no spiritual creature that is made reasoning by God will perish), will descend from his pride and do penitence and will be restored to his former position. To support this opinion they use this example of Daniel in which Nebuchadnezzar after seven years of penitence is returned to his former reign. [Dan. 4:24, 29, 33] But because this idea is not in the Holy Scripture and since it completely destroys the fear of God, (for men will slide easily into vices if they believe that even the devil, the creator of wickedness and the source of all sins, can be saved if he does penitence), we must eradicate this from our spirits. Let us remember though that the sinners in the Gospel are sent to the eternal fire [Mt. 25:41], which is prepared for the devil and his angels, about whom is said, "their worm will not die and their fire will not be extinguished" [Is. 66:24].

All the same we know that God is mild, and we sinners do not enjoy his cruelty, but we read, "the Lord is kindly and righteous, and our God will be merciful" [Ps. 114:5]. The justice of God is surrounded by mercy, and it is by this route that he proceeds to judgement: he spares

to judge, he judges to be merciful. ”Mercy and Truth are to be found in our path; Justice and Peace are to be embraced” [Ps. 84:11]. Moreover if all spiritual creatures are equal and if they raise themselves up by their virtues to heaven, or by their vices take themselves to the depths, then after a long circuit and infinite centuries, if all are returned to their original state with the same worthiness to all conflicting, what difference will there be between the virgin and the prostitute? What distinction will there be between the mother of the Lord and (it is wicked to say) the victims of public pleasures? Will Gabriel be like the devil? Will the apostles be as demons? Will the prophets be as pseudoprophets? Martyrs as their persecutors? Imagine all that you will, increase by two-fold the years and the time, take infinite time for torture: if the end for all is the same, all the past is then nothing, for what is of importance to us is not what we are at any given moment, but what we will be forever more.

I am not forgetting what is often said to argue against this point, preparing hope for oneself and some kind of safety with the devil. But this is not the appropriate time to write at length against the opinion of the wicked and against the synphragma of the devil from those who teach one thing in private only to deny it in public. It is enough for me to have shown what I believe this passage signifies, and as is appropriate in a commentary, to remark briefly who the king of Nineveh is, he who is the last to hear the word of God. Just how much eloquence and secular knowledge are worth to mankind can be seen in Demosthenes, Cicero, Plato, Xenophon, Theophrastus, Aristotle and the other philosophers and orators who are considered kings and their precepts are not taken as the work of mortals but as oracles of the gods. About which Plato says, happy are those states where philosophers rule, or if kings are philosophers. How difficult it is for such men to believe in God! I am neglecting though those examples from daily life, and pass over the stories of pagans and content myself with the text of the apostle who writes in Corinthians, saying, ”look, brothers, to your vocation, among you. For there are not many who are wise about their flesh, nor many powerful, or noble. But there is much madness in the world, and this is what God has chosen to confuse wise men.

That which is weak in the world, this is what God has chosen to confuse strength, and that which is in the world without good birth this is what God has chosen…” [1 Cor. 1:26-8] and again he says, ”I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will reprove the knowledge of those who know. [Is. 29:14; 1 Cor. 1:19] And: ”see that no one robs you, through philosophy, this is a vain seduction” [Col. 2:8]. From this the predication of Christ is clear, the kings of the world hear last; then they put down the clamour of eloquence and the beautiful appearance of words, they abandon themselves completely to all simplicity and rusticity, and return to the ways of peasants, sitting in the dirt and destroying what they had formerly said was good before. Let us take as an example the benevolent Cyprian: who is firstly the champion of idolatry, and had such a reputation of good speaking that he taught the art of rhetoric at Carthage. He finishes by listening to the speech of Jonah, is converted to repent and gains such courage as to preach about Christ in public and lays his neck under the sword for him. For sure we know that the King of Nineveh descended from his throne,

exchanged his red gown for sackcloth, his perfumes for mud, and cleanness for uncleanness-not uncleanness of meanings but of his words.

In the same way in Jeremiah it is said about Babylon that "Babylon is a golden chalice which makes all the earth drunk" [Jer. 51:7]. Which man has not been made drunk by secular eloquence? Whose spirit has not been shot through by the composition of words and by the brightness of his elegant speech? Those powerful, noble and rich have great difficulty in believing in God; then how much more so for the masters of speech! Their spirit is blinded by riches, wealth, abundance, they are prevented by their sins and cannot see their virtues; they judge the simplicity of the Holy Scripture not on the majesty of its meanings, but out of the baseness of its words. But when they who have previously taught wickedness are converted to repent and start to teach what is good then we will see the people of Nineveh converted with a single proclamation, and the speech that we read in Isaiah will come true: "is a people thus born in one go?". [Is. 66:8. LX] Men and animals are covered with sackcloth, crying out to the Lord, this is to be understood by the same meaning as this: that those who have reason and those who do not, the wise and the simple repent according to that phrase said elsewhere: "You will save men and the animals O Lord" [Ps. 35:7].

It is possible however to interpret differently the animals covered in sackcloth, especially according to those passages in which we read, "the sun and moon will be dressed in sackcloth" [Joel 2:10], and in another passage, "I will cover the heavens with sackcloth". [Is. 50:3] This will be the clothing of mourning, the worry and sadness that are designated metaphorically by sackcloth. And this phrase: "who knows if God will turn and pardon? places us in uncertainty and doubt. Thus men in hypothetical cleanness repent with more intent and arouse even more God's mercy.

Verse 10. "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not." LXX: 'God saw their works since they turned from their wicked ways. And God repented for their wickedness that he had said he would do to them and he did not do it.' According to the two meanings of this passage God is threatening the town of Assyria and threatens the people of the world every day so that they repent: if they convert then he will change his judgement, and it will be changed by the conversion of the people. Jeremiah and Ezekiel explain this more clearly: the Lord has not fulfilled the good that he has promised to do if the good turn to sinners; nor the wickedness that he threatened the wicked if they return to safety. Thus now God sees their works, since they turn from their wicked way. But he did not hear those vain promises that Israel was in the custom of making: "all that God has said, we shall do" [Ex. 24:3.7], but he sees the works. And because he prefers a sinner's repentance rather than his death [Ez. 33:11.] he willingly changes his sentence because he has seen a change in the works. Or rather God has continued in his proposition, since he wanted to pity right from the beginning. No one in fact who desires to punish, threatens what he will actually do. The word 'wickedness' as we have noted above, can be taken to mean supplication or torture, not that God could think to do nothing on account of the wickedness.

Chapter 4

Verse 1-2a. ”But it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was very angry. [And he prayed unto the LORD, and said]” LXX: ’Jonah was saddened by a great sadness, and he was confounded. And he prayed to the Lord, and he said’. Seeing the crowd of gentiles enter [Rom. 11:25], and that fulfils what is written in Deuteronomy: ”they annoyed me with these gods who are not gods, so I will annoy them with a people that is not one; I shall anger them like a foolish nation” [Deut. 32:21]. He despairs of Israel’s safety and is hit by a great suffering which breaks out in words. He shows the signs of his suffering and more or less says this: ’I have been the only one of the prophets chosen to announce my people’s ruin to them through the safety of others.’ Thus he is not sad that the crowd of gentiles should be saved, as some people believe, but it is the destruction of Israel. Moreover our Lord wept for Jerusalem and refused to take bread away from the children to give to the dogs [Mt. 15:26; Mk. 7:27]. And the apostles preach firstly to Israel, and Paul wishes to be anathema for his brothers who are Israelites [Act. 13:46] and have adoption, glory, alliance, promises and law, and from whom the patriarchs come, and from them too according to the flesh came Christ. [Rom. 9:3-5] But suffering in vain, which is interpreted as the word Jonah, he is smitten by suffering, and ’the spirit is sad until death’ [Mt. 26:38; Mk. 14:34]. For lest the people of the Jews should die, he has suffered as much as he was in power. The name of the sufferer also is appropriate to the story, since it signifies the toil of the prophet, weighed down by the miseries of his journey and the shipwreck.

Verses 2-3. ”[And he prayed unto the LORD, and said], I pray you, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that you are a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and you repent of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech you, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. LXX: ’O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still in my country? This is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish. For I know that you are rich in mercy and are kind, patient, and full of compassion, and ready to repent for the evils that you promised. But now all-powerful Lord, take my spirit, because it is better for me to die than to live.’ What I have interpreted as ’I pray you’ and which the Septuagint has translated as ’O indeed’ [[Gr. ’w dh’]] is read as anna in Hebrew, which seems to me to express the prayer with a kind of coaxing . For when he had said quite justly that he wanted to flee his prayer accuses the Lord of injustice in a certain manner, and he tempers his complaints by a suppliant and

rhetorical speech. Was this not what I said when I was in my country? I knew that you would do this. I am not unaware that you are merciful:

this is why I refused to denounce you as harsh and cruel. Therefore I wanted to flee to Tarshish, to be free to think, and I preferred the quiet and rest on the sea of this age. I abandoned my home and left my inheritance, I left your lap and came here. If I had said that you are merciful, gentle, that you pardon wickedness, no one would have repented. If I had denounced you as a cruel God only fit to judge, I should have know that such is not your nature. In this dilemma I preferred to flee, rather than to deceive the repenters with mildness, or to preach things about you that you are not. "Therefore Lord take my spirit for death is better for me than life. [3 Kings 19:4] "Take my spirit which has been sad even until death. [Mt. 26:38; Mk. 14:34] "Take my spirit. I place my spirit in your hands. [Ps. 30:6; Lk. 23:46] I was not able to save the whole nation of Israel by living, but I will die and the whole world will be saved. The story is clear and regarding the prophet's character, we can note as has often been said before that he is saddened and wants to die so that Israel should not be destroyed for ever after the conversion of such a multitude of gentiles.

Verse 4. "Then said the LORD, Do you well to be angry?" LXX: 'The Lord replied to Jonah, are you so much afflicted?' The Hebrew word hara lach can be translated as 'are you annoyed?' and are you afflicted?'. And each one pertains to the prophet and to the Lord: either he is annoyed and fears appearing a liar to the inhabitants of Nineveh, or he is afflicted, knowing that Israel is going to be destroyed. And with reason God does not say to him: 'you are wrong to get angry' or 'to be afflicted', not wanting to reprehend one suffering, nor does he say, 'you have reason to be angry or afflicted', so as not to contradict his former sentence. But he asks him whether he is angry or afflicted so that he replies the causes of his anger or suffering, or even, if he remains quiet, so that God's truth can be proved by his silence.

Verse 5. "So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. LXX: similar. Cain who initiated civilisation by fratricide and homicide in killing his brother was the first to build a city, and he gave it the name of his son Enoch. [Gen. 4:17] This is why the prophet Hosea declares, "I am God, and not a man, amongst you I am a saint, and I will not come into the city". [Os. 11:9] For the Lord, says the psalmist, is the charge of "the transition of the dead" [Ps. 67:21]. This is why one of this cities of refuge is called Ramoth [Deut. 4:43], which is translated as 'vision of death'. Therefore quite justly anyone who is a fugitive and on account of his sins does not merit living in Jerusalem lives in the city of death and is across the waves of the Jordan, which signifies 'descent'. The dove, or the suffering, comes out from such a town and lives in the east whence the sun rises. And it is there in his tent, where having contemplated every hour that passes, he hears what is going to happen to this city. Before Nineveh was saved and before the gourd dried up, before the Gospel of Christ becomes famous and the prophecy of Zechariah is realised:

”here is a man whose name is East” [Zac. 6:12], Jonah was under his shelter. And nor had Truth come, about which the apostle of the Gospel says: ”God is truth” [John 3:33; 14:6; 1 John 5:6], and he adds elegantly, ”and he made there a shelter” near to Nineveh. He makes it himself, for no inhabitant of Nineveh of that age would have been able to live with the prophet, and he was seated under the shade in the attitude of a judge or if you like, constrained by his majesty, ”having pulled in vigorously his reins” [Prov. 31:17], so that his robe did not fall upon his feet and upon us who are low down, but was held together by a straighter belt. More precisely with regard to what he says, ”to see what would happen to the city”, this uses the accustomed usage of recourse to Scriptures to preach to God about human feelings.

Verse 6. ”And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. LXX: ’and the Lord commanded a gourd to grow up over the head of Jonah to form a shade to protect him from his evils. And Jonah was very glad of the gourd indeed. In this place a certain Canterius from the ancient family of Cornelii, (or as he himself says from the lineage of Asinius Pollion), has accused me recently, it seems, of sacrilege for having translated ’ivy’ instead of ’gourd’. Apparently he feared that if ivy were taken instead of gourds that there would not be anything to drink in his secret place and his shade. And justly on the veins of this gourd, which are called saucomariae in general, it is customary to paint the image of the Apostles from which this individual has borrowed his name, which is not his own. If it is this easy to change ones name, (after having been the Cornelii, seditious consuls, they renamed themselves Paul Emile consuls), I ask myself why in surprise I should not be allowed to translate ivy instead of gourd. But let us return to more serious matters. For gourd or ivy in Hebrew we read qiqaion, which is also written qiqaia in the Syriac and Punic languages.

It is a type of shrub or sapling with wide leaves like a vine, and which casts a large shadow and is supported by a trunk and often is found growing in Palestine especially in sandy areas. It is interesting to note that if the seed is cast on the ground it germinates quickly and in a few days it can be seen to have grown from a seedling to a bush. For my part when I was translating the prophets I wanted to just transliterate the Hebrew word seeing that Latin has no word for this kind of tree. But I feared that the men of letters would find in this some argument, imagining those animals of India or the mountains of Boeotia or even other marvels of this type. I have also followed the example of the former translators who translated it as ivy, in Greek chissos, because they had no other word to use. let us now look carefully at the story, and having looked at the mythical meaning then go on to study each word individually. The gourd and the ivy creep along the ground by their nature, and if they have no restraints or ladders as support they do not try to climb. How is it possible then that a gourd could grow up without the prophet knowing in one night to provide shade, if its nature is not to climb unless it has some supports, reeds or pegs to hold on to?

Although the gourd, offering a miracle in its sudden appearance, and showing the power of God in the protection of a leafy shade, was only following its own nature. Even this though can refer to the person of the Lord Saviour, let us not completely abandon our gourd on account of our philocholochunthon, so that we remember that passage of Isaiah, which says, ”and the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, or as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. [Is. 1:8] And because we do not find a gourd mentioned elsewhere in the Scriptures let us say then that where the cucumber grows gourds usually grow too. And Israel is compared to this kind of plant because, at a certain time, it protected Jonah with its shadow whilst he was waiting the conversion of the gentiles and made him feel greatly happy. It made more a shady shelter for him rather than a house, and that suggests a roof of some kind but not having the foundations of a house. Moreover the gourd, our little bush, which grows quickly and dries quickly, could be compared to Israel, pushing its little roots into the ground and trying to raise itself up, but is not able to equal the height of cedars [Ps. 79:11] and cypress trees [Is. 37:24; Zac. 11:2] of God. It seems to me that one could interpret the locusts that were food for John similarly, who said symbolising Israel, ”It must grow but I must die” [John 3:30].

The locust, a small animal with weak wings managing to rise up from the ground but not able to fly very high so that it is better called a reptile yet not similar either to birds.

Verses 7-8. ”But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, it is better for me to die than to live. LXX: ’and God commanded a worm early the next morning, which smote the gourd that it withered. When the sun had risen the Lord immediately commanded a hot and burning wind. The sun hit upon Jonah’s head in his distress and suddenly became very exhausted and he said, it is better for me to die than to live.’ Before the sun of justice [Mal. 4:2] rose the shade was verdant and Israel was not dry. But after it rose, and when the darkness of Nineveh had been dispersed by its light, a worm obtained for the first light of the next day smote the gourd, (the worm, which is mentioned in the title to psalm twenty-one: ”in honour of the morning incarnation”, and which was born from the earth without any seed, can say, ’I am a worm and not a man’ [Ps. 21:7]. And Jonah, abandoned by God’s aid, loses all his strength. The Lord ordered a hot and burning wind, which was prophesied by Hosea: ”the Lord will bring a wind out of the desert, which will dry up the rivers and abandon his fountain” [Hos. 13:15].

And Jonah began to get hot and once again he wants to die in the baptism of Israel to receive in this basin the moisture which he lost in his refusal to do God’s word. This is why Peter speaks to the Jews who are parched, saying, ”Repent, and let each of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for payment for your sins, so that you might receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” [Act. 2:38]. There are those for whom the worm and the burning wind represent the Roman generals who, after the resurrection of Christ, completely destroyed Israel.

Verse 9. ”And God said to Jonah, Do you well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.” LXX: ’and the Lord God said to Jonah, are you so afflicted for a gourd? He replied, ’I am very afflicted even to the point of death’. When he was asked about the repentance of the inhabitants of Nineveh and the safety of the city of the gentiles, ’do you well to be angry?’, the prophet replied nothing, yet justified God’s question by his silence. For he knew that God is kind, merciful, patient, and full of pity [Ex. 34:6; Ps 102:8], pardoning wickedness and he did not feel sad for the safety of the gentiles; but once the gourd, (Israel) had dried up, when he is asked, ’do you well to be angry for the gourd?’, he replies with assurance, ’I do well to be angry and to suffer even unto death. I did not want to save one only to see the others perish, to gain foreigners only to lose my own’. And in truth up until this day Christ weeps for Jerusalem and he weeps until death; not his own death, but that of the Jews, so that they die refusing and rise up again confessing the Son of God.

Verses 10-11. ”Then said the LORD, You have had pity on the gourd, for the which you have not laboured, neither made it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle? LXX: ’and the Lord said, ’you wanted to keep safe a gourd which has done you no wickedness, that you have not cared for, which was born in one night and died in one night. But should I not spare Nineveh the great city in which live over three thousand people who are unknowing of their right and their left, and an equal number of cattle?’ It is too difficult to explain how according to tropology this is said to the Son of man: ’you worry for a gourd that has done you no harm, that you did not plant’ [John 1:3], since all has been done by him and with him absent nothing has been done. This is why someone interpreting this passage and wanting to resolve the question which he asked himself, fell into blasphemy. For, if we look at the text of the Gospel, which says, ”why do you call me good? Nothing is good except God himself. [Mk. 10:18] He interprets the Father as good and places the Son one place lower, in a comparison with one who is perfectly and completely good.

And he has not seen that this opinion made him fall into the heresy of Marcion, who proposes a God that is uniquely good, with another for judging and for creating, rather than the opinion of Arius who proposed a superior Father and an inferior Son yet admits the Son as creator. We must be indulgent therefore for that which we are about to say, and our attempts ought to be encouraged with good criticism and prayer, rather than declaimed by an argumentative audience. Criticism and declamation are easy for those who are most ignorant, but one must be learned and know the labours of workers to stretch out ones hand to those weaker or to show the way to those who are lost. Our Lord and Saviour did not work for Israel as for the people of the gentiles. In this instance Israel declares in faith, ”Look these many years do I serve you, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, you have killed for him the fatted calf. [Lk. 15:29-32] And in spite of all he is not reprimanded by the Father, but he

says to him kindly, ”Son, you art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again;

and was lost, and is found. The fat calf has been slaughtered for the people of the gentiles, and its precious blood has been spread about, about which Paul to the Hebrews (9 and 10) explains in great detail. And David in the psalm says, ”the brother does not redeem, man will redeem” [Ps. 48:8]. Christ decided that this people would be great and he died so that they might live; he went down to the underworld so that this people might rise up to heaven. For Israel there is no comparable toil. This is why he is jealous of his young brother, seeing that after having spent his fortune on his prostitutes and pimps, he receives the ring and the robe and recovers his former dignity. The phrase ’which was born in one night’ can be applied to the time just before the arrival of Christ, who was the light of the world [John 8:12;9:5], about which is said, ”the night has passed, and the day is near” [Rom. 13:12]. And this people died in one night when the sun of righteousness [Mal. 4:2] set for them, and they lost the word of God. The city of Nineveh which is great and very beautiful, prefigures the Church in which there is a greater number of inhabitants than the ten tribes of Israel: this is what the rest of the twelve baskets in the desert represent [Mat. 14:20; Mk. 6:43; Lk. 9:17; John 6:13].

”they do not know the difference between their right and their left”, either on account of their innocence and their simplicity (to show first childhood and let it be known what the number of those is who have reached an older age, when the very young are so numerous), or even, (because the city was great, and ”in a great house there are not only golden and silver objects but also some made of wood and pottery” [2. Tim. 2:20]) because there was a great crowd that needed to repent and was ignorant of the difference between good and bad, between their right and left. And there is a great number of animals and of men who do not possess the faculty of reason and who can be compared to mad animals to whom they are similar. [Ps. 48:21.]

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.