

Epistle 4

by Cyprian of Carthage

Cyprian exhorts his clergy to maintain unity, ensure the needs of prisoners and the poor are met, and manage visitation to prisoners with caution.

Scripture: Proverbs 15:22, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Galatians 6:2, Philippians 2:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:13

Topics: "Church Unity", "Pastoral Care"

Description

Cyprian of Carthage, in his letter to the presbyters and deacons, emphasizes the importance of unity in his absence, urging them to fulfill their duties diligently and with discipline. He stresses the need to provide for prisoners, the poor, and to maintain peace among the people, cautioning against overwhelming crowds visiting the imprisoned confessors. Cyprian advises a balanced approach to avoid potential conflicts and ensure continued access to those in need.

Transcript

TO THE PRESBYTERS AND DEACONS.

ARGUMENT.--CYPRIAN EXHORTS HIS CLERGY FROM HIS PLACE OF RETIREMENT, THAT IN HIS ABSENCE THEY SHOULD BE UNITED; THAT NOTHING SHOULD BE WANTING TO PRISONERS OR TO THE REST OF THE POOR; AND FURTHER, THAT THEY SHOULD KEEP THE PEOPLE IN QUIET, LEST, IF THEY SHOULD RUSH IN CROWDS TO VISIT THE MARTYRS IN PRISON, THIS PRIVILEGE SHOULD AT LENGTH BE FORBIDDEN THEM. A.D. 250.

1. Cyprian to the presbyters and deacons, his beloved brethren, greeting. Being by the grace of God in safety, dearest brethren, I salute you, rejoicing that I am informed of the prosperity of all things in respect of your safety also; and as the condition of the place does not permit me to be with you now, I beg you, by your faith and your religion, to discharge there both your own office and mine, that there may be nothing wanting either to discipline or diligence. In respect of means, moreover, for meeting the expenses, whether for those who, having confessed their Lord with a glorious voice, have been put in prison, or for those who are labouring in poverty and want, and still stand fast in the Lord, I entreat that nothing be wanting, since the whole of the small sum which was collected there was distributed among the clergy for cases of that kind, that many might have means whence they could assist the necessities and burthens of individuals.

2. I beg also that there may be no lack, on your parts, of wisdom and carefulness to preserve peace. For although from their affection the brethren are eager to approach and to visit those good confessors, on whom by their glorious beginnings the divine consideration has already shed a brightness, yet I think that this eagerness must be cautiously indulged, and not in crowds,--not in numbers collected together at once', lest from this very thing ill-will be aroused, and the means of access be denied, and thus, while we insatiably wish for all, we lose all. Take counsel, therefore, and see that this may be more safely managed with moderation, so that the presbyters also, who there offer with the confessors, may one by one take turns with the deacons individually; because, by thus changing the persons and varying the people that come together, suspicion is diminished. For, meek and humble in all things, as befits the servants of God, we ought to accommodate ourselves to the times, and to provide for quietness, and to have regard to the people. I bid you, brethren, beloved and dearly longed-for, always heartily farewell; and have me in remembrance. Greet all the brotherhood. Victor the deacon, and those who are with me, greet you. Farewell!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/cyprian-of-carthage/epistle-4/>

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