

Confessions - Book Xiii - Chapter Xix

by St. Augustine

Transcript

24. But, first, \ "wash yourselves and make you clean; put away iniquity from your souls and from before my eyes\"[595]--so that \ "the dry land\" may appear. \ "Learn to do well, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow,\"[596] that the earth may bring forth the green herb for food and fruit-bearing trees. \ "And come, let us reason together, saith the Lord\"[597]--that there may be lights in the firmament of heaven and that they may shine upon the earth.

There was that rich man who asked of the good Teacher what he should do to attain eternal life. Let the good Teacher (whom the rich man thought a man and nothing more) give him an answer--he is good for he is God. Let him answer him that, if he would enter into life, he must keep the commandments: let him put away from himself the bitterness of malice and wickedness; let him not kill, nor commit adultery, nor steal, nor bear false witness[598]--that \ "the dry land\" may appear and bring forth the honoring of fathers and mothers and the love of neighbor. \ "All these,\" he replied, \ "I have kept.\" Where do so many thorns come from, if the earth is really fruitful? uproot the brier patch of avarice; \ "sell what you have, and be filled with fruit by giving to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and follow\" the Lord if you would be perfect and joined with those in whose midst he speaketh wisdom--who know how to give rightly to the day and to the night--and you will also understand, so that for you also there may be lights in the firmament of heaven--which will not be there, however, unless your heart is there also. And your heart will not be there unless your treasure is there,[599] as you have heard from the good Teacher. But \ "the barren earth\"[600] was grieved, and the briers choked the word.[601]

25. But you, O elect people, set in the firmament of the world,[602] who have forsaken all that you may follow the Lord: follow him now, and confound the mighty! Follow him, O beautiful feet,[603] and shine in the firmament, that the heavens may declare his glory, dividing the light of the perfect ones[604]--though not yet so perfect as the angels--from the darkness of the little ones--who are nevertheless not utterly despised. Shine over all the earth, and let the day be lighted by the sun, utter the Word of wisdom to the day (\ "day unto day utters speech\"[605]) and let the night, lighted by the moon, display the Word of knowledge to the night. The moon and the stars give light for the night; the night does not put them out, and they illumine in its proper mode. For lo, it is as if God were saying, \ "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven\": and suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as if it were a rushing mighty wind, and there appeared cloven tongues of fire, and they sat on each of them.[606] And then they were made to be lights in the firmament of heaven, having the Word of life. Run to and fro everywhere, you holy fires, you lovely fires, for you are the light of the world and you are not to be hid under a peck measure.[607] He to whom you cleave is raised on high, and he hath raised you on high. Run to and fro;

make yourselves known among all the nations!

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