

Confessions - Book Xiii - Chapter Xviii

by St. Augustine

Transcript

22. Thus, O Lord, thus I beseech thee: let it happen as thou hast prepared it, as thou givest joy and the capacity for joy. Let truth spring up out of the earth, and let righteousness look down from heaven,[583] and let there be lights in the firmament.[584]

Let us break our bread with the hungry, let us bring the shelterless poor to our house; let us clothe the naked, and never despise those of our own flesh.[585] See from the fruits which spring forth from the earth how good it is. Thus let our temporal light break forth, and let us from even this lower level of fruitful action come to the joy of contemplation and hold on high the Word of Life. And let us at length appear like "lights in the world,"[586] cleaving to the firmament of thy Scripture.

For in it thou makest it plain to us how we may distinguish between things intelligible and things tangible, as if between the day and the night--and to distinguish between souls who give themselves to things of the mind and others absorbed in things of sense. Thus it is that now thou art not alone in the secret of thy judgment as thou wast before the firmament was made, and before thou didst divide between the light and the darkness. But now also thy spiritual children, placed and ranked in this same firmament--thy grace being thus manifest throughout the world--may shed light upon the earth, and may divide between the day and night, and may be for the signs of the times[587]; because old things have passed away, and, lo, all things are become new[588]; and because our salvation is nearer than when we believed; and because "the night is far spent and the day is at hand"[589]; and because "thou crownest the year with blessing,"[590] sending the laborers into thy harvest, in which others have labored in the sowing and sending laborers also to make new sowings whose harvest shall not be until the end of time. Thus thou dost grant the prayers of him who seeks, and thou dost bless the years of the righteous man. But thou art always the Selfsame, and in thy years which fail not thou preparest a granary for our transient years. For by an eternal design thou spreadest the heavenly blessings on the earth in their proper seasons.

23. For "to one there is given by thy Spirit the word of wisdom"[591] (which resembles the greater light--which is for those whose delight is in the clear light of truth--as the light which is given for the ruling of the day[592]). But to another the word of knowledge is given by the same Spirit (as it were, the "lesser light"); to another, faith; to another, the gift of healing; to another, the power of working miracles; to another, the gift of prophecy; to another, the discerning of spirits; to another, other kinds of tongues--and all these gifts may be compared to "the stars." For in them all the one and selfsame Spirit is at work, dividing to every man his own portion, as He wills, and making stars to appear in their bright splendor for the profit of souls. But the word of knowledge, scientia, in which is contained all the mysteries[593] which

change in their seasons like the moon; and all the other promises of gifts, which when counted are like the stars--all of these fall short of that splendor of Wisdom in which the day rejoices and are only for the ruling of the night. Yet they are necessary for those to whom thy most prudent servant could not speak as to the spiritually mature, but only as if to carnal men--even though he could speak wisdom among the perfect.[594] Still the natural man--as a babe in Christ, and a drinker of milk, until he is strong enough for solid meat, and his eye is able to look into the sun--do not leave him in a lightless night. Instead, let him be satisfied with the light of the moon and the stars. In thy book thou dost discuss these things with us wisely, our God--in thy book, which is thy \"firmament\"--in order that we may be able to view all things in admiring contemplation, although thus far we must do so through signs and seasons and in days and years.

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