

Exposition on Psalm 128

by St. Augustine

The sermon emphasizes the importance of fearing the Lord, rejoicing in the blessings of Jerusalem, and seeing the good things of Jerusalem as a vision of peace that is available to us for all eternity.

Scripture: Genesis 1:22, Psalm 127:1, Psalm 128:1, Matthew 9:15, Matthew 12:48, Romans 12:12, 1 Corinthians 15:19

Topics: "Christian Unity", "Eternal Blessings"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the life and martyrdom of Felix, highlighting his happiness in despising the world for the sake of the Lord, and his ultimate reward of everlasting life. He emphasizes the unity of believers in Christ, where many are one, and the importance of fearing the Lord and walking in His ways. Augustine delves into the symbolism of Psalms 127, portraying the Church as the wife of Christ and believers as His children, urging them to be like olive-branches around the Lord's table. He encourages believers to focus on spiritual blessings and the eternal perspective, rather than earthly desires and temporal joys.

Transcript

1. Felix the Martyr, truly Felix, i.e. Happy both in his name and his crown, whose birthday this is, despised the world. Was he, because he feared the Lord, thence happy, thence blessed, because his wife was as a fruitful vine upon the earth, and his children stood around his table? All these blessings he has perfectly, but in the Body of Him who is here described; and, because he understood them in this sense, he scorned things present, that he might receive things future. You are aware, brethren, that he suffered not the death that other martyrs suffered. For he confessed, and was set aside for torments; on another day his body was discovered lifeless. They had closed the prison to his body, not to his spirit. The executioners found him gone; when they were preparing to torture, they spent their rage for nought. He was lying dead, without sense to them, that he might not be tortured; with sense with God, that he might be crowned. Whence was he also happy, brethren, not only in name, but in the reward of everlasting life, if he loved these things.

2. Blessed are all they that fear the Lord, and walk in His ways Psalm 127:1. He speaks to many; but since these many are one in Christ, in the next words he speaks in the singular: For you shall eat the labours of your fruits....When I speak of Christians in the plural, I understand one in the One Christ. You are therefore many, and you are one; we are many, and we are one. How are we many, and yet one? Because we cling unto Him whose members we are; and since our Head is in heaven, that His members may follow....Let us

therefore so hear this Psalm, as considering it to be spoken of Christ: and all of us who cling unto the Body of Christ, and have been made members of Christ, walk in the ways of the Lord; and let us fear the Lord with a chaste fear, with a fear that abides for ever....

3. You shall eat the labours of your fruits Psalm 127:2. And ye, O thou, you many who are One, You shall eat of the labours of your fruits. He seems to speak perversely to those who understand not: for he should have said, you shall eat the fruit of your labours. For many eat the fruit of their labours. They labour in the vineyard; they eat not the toil itself; but what arises from their labour they eat. They labour about trees that bear fruit: who would eat labours? But the fruit of these labours, the produce of these trees; it is this that delights the husbandman. What means, You shall eat the labours of your fruits? At present we have toils: the fruits will come afterwards. But since their labours themselves are not without joy, on account of the hope whereof we have a little before spoken, Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation; Romans 12:12 at present those very labours delight us, and make us joyful in hope. If therefore our toil has been what could be eaten, and could also delight us; what will be the fruit of our labour when eaten? They who went weeping on their way, scattering their seed, did eat their labours; with how much greater pleasure will they eat the fruits of their labours, who shall come again with joy, bearing their sheaves with them?...Blessed are you, and well shall it be with you. Blessed are you, is of the present: well shall it be with you, is of the future. When you eat the labours of your fruits, blessed are you; when you have reached the fruit of your labours, well shall it be with you. What has he said? For if it be well with you, you will be happy: and if you will be happy, you will also have all well with you. But there is a difference between hope and attainment. If hope be so sweet, how much sweeter will reality be?

4. Let us now come to the words, Your wife Psalm 127:3: it is said unto Christ. His wife, therefore, is the Church: His Church, His wife, we ourselves are. As a fruitful vineyard. But in whom is the vineyard fruitful? For we see many barren ones entering those walls; we see that many intemperate, usurious persons, slave dealers, enter these walls, and such as resort to fortune-tellers, go to enchanters and enchantresses when they have a headache. Is this the fruitfulness of the vine? Is this the fecundity of the wife? It is not. These are thorns, but the vineyard is not everywhere thorny. It has a certain fruitfulness, and is a fruitful vine; but in whom? Upon the sides of your house. Not all are called the sides of the house. For I ask what are the sides. What shall I say? Are they walls, strong stones, as it were? If he were speaking of this bodily tenement, we should perhaps understand this by sides. We mean by the sides of the house, those who cling unto Christ....

5. Your children. The wife and the children are the same. In these carnal marriages and wedlocks, the wife is one, the children other: in the Church, she who is the wife, is the children also. For the Apostles belonged to the Church, and were among the members of the Church. They were therefore in His wife, and were His wife according to their own portion which they held in His members. Why then is it said concerning them, When the Bridegroom shall be taken from them, then shall the children of the Bridegroom fast? Matthew 9:15 She who is the wife, then, is the children also. I speak a wonderful thing, my brethren. In the words of the Lord, we find the Church to be both His brethren, and His sisters, and His mother.. ..For Mary was among the sides of His House, and His relatives coming of the kindred of the Virgin Mary, who believed on Him, were among the sides of His House; not in respect of their carnal consanguinity, but inasmuch as they heard the Word of God, and obeyed it...He added; For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother. Matthew 12:48-50 Brother, perhaps, on account of the male sex whom the Church has: sister, on account of the women whom Christ has here in His members. How mother, save that Christ Himself is in those

Christians, whom the Church daily brings forth Christians through baptism? In those therefore in whom you understand the wife, in them you understand the mother, in them the children.

6. ...Such children ought therefore to be around the Lord's table, like olive-branches. A complete Vine it is, a great bliss: who would now refuse to be there? When you see any blasphemer have a wife, children, grandchildren, and yourself perchance without them, envy them not; discern that the promise has been fulfilled in you also, but spiritually. If therefore we have, why have we? Because we fear the Lord. Lo, thus shall the man be blessed that fears the Lord Psalm 127:4. He is the man, who is also the men; and the men are one man; because many are one, because Christ is One.

7. The Lord from out of Sion bless you: and may thou see you good things that are of Jerusalem Psalm 127:5. Even to the birds was it said, Be fruitful and multiply. Genesis 1:22 Do you wish to hold as a great blessing what was given unto birds? Who can be ignorant, that it was given indeed by the voice of God? But use these goods, if you receive them; and rather think how you may nourish those who have been born, than that others may be born. For it is not happiness to have children, but to have good ones. Labour in the task of nourishing them, if they be born; but if they be not born, give thanks unto God....Your children are infants: thou dost caress the infants: the infants caress you: do they abide thus? But you wish they may grow, you wish that their age may increase. But consider that when one age comes, another dies. When boyhood comes, infancy dies; when youth comes, boyhood dies: when manhood comes, youth dies; when old age comes, manhood dies: when death comes, all age dies. As many successions of ages as you wish for, so many deaths of ages do you wish for. These things therefore are not. Finally, are children born unto you to share life with you on earth, or rather to shut you out and to succeed you? Rejoicest thou in those born to exclude you? Boys when born speak somewhat like this to their parents: Now then, begin to think of removing hence, let us too play our parts on the stage. For the whole life of temptation in the human race is a stage play; for it is said, Every man living is altogether vanity. Nevertheless, if we rejoice in children who will succeed us; how much must we rejoice in children with whom we shall remain, and in that Father for whom we are born, who will not die, but that we may evermore live with Him? These are the good things of Jerusalem: for they are. And how long shall I see the good things of Jerusalem? All your life long. If your life be for ever, you will see the good things of Jerusalem for evermore....

8. For, if in this life only, says the Apostle, we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. 1 Corinthians 15:19 For what reason were the Martyrs condemned to beasts? What is that good? Can it be declared? By what means, or what tongue can tell it? Or what ears can hear it? That indeed, Neither ear has heard, nor has it entered into man's heart: 1 Corinthians 2:9 only let us love, only let us grow in grace: ye see, then, that battles are not wanting, and that we fight with our lusts. We fight outwardly with unbelieving and disobedient men; we fight inwardly with carnal suggestions and perturbations: we everywhere as yet fight....What sort of peace then is this? One from Jerusalem, for Jerusalem is interpreted, A vision of Peace. Thus then may thou see the good things that are of Jerusalem, and that, all your life long-- and may thou see, not only your children, but, your children's children. What means, Your children? Your works which thou here dost. Who are your children's children? The fruits of your works. You give alms: these are your children: for the sake of your alms you receive everlasting life, these are your children's children. May you see your children's children; and there shall be peace upon Israel Psalm 127:6, the last words of the Psalm..

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