

Exposition on Psalm 91

by St. Augustine

Imitating Christ in suffering and trusting in God's protection enables us to endure persecution and trials, and gives us hope in a future reward.

Topics: "Trusting God", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the importance of trusting in God and imitating Christ in the face of temptations and trials. He emphasizes the need to resist the devil's temptations by following Christ's example, acknowledging our weaknesses, and seeking strength in God. St. Augustine highlights the significance of enduring troubles with hope set on God's protection, drawing from the Psalms to illustrate how God delivers and safeguards those who dwell under His defense. He encourages believers to trust in God's salvation, seek eternal life, and eagerly anticipate the day when they will see Christ face to face.

Transcript

1. This Psalm is that from which the Devil dared to tempt our Lord Jesus Christ: let us therefore attend to it, that thus armed, we may be enabled to resist the tempter, not presuming in ourselves, but in Him who before us was tempted, that we might not be overcome when tempted. Temptation to Him was not necessary: the temptation of Christ is our learning, but if we listen to His answers to the devil, in order that, when ourselves are tempted, we may answer in like manner, we are then entering through the gate, as you have heard it read in the Gospel. For what is to enter by the gate? To enter by Christ, who Himself said, I am the door: John 10:7 and to enter through Christ, is to imitate His ways....He urges us to imitate Him in those works which He could not have done had He not been made Man; for how could He endure sufferings, unless He had become a Man? How could He otherwise have died, been crucified, been humbled? Thus then do thou, when you suffer the troubles of this world, which the devil, openly by men, or secretly, as in Job's case, inflicts; be courageous, be of long suffering; you shall dwell under the defence of the Most High, as this Psalm expresses it: for if you depart from the help of the Most High, without strength to aid yourself, you will fall.

2. For many men are brave, when they are enduring persecution from men, and see them openly rage against themselves: imagining they are then imitating the sufferings of Christ, in case men openly persecute them; but if assailed by the hidden attack of the devil, they believe they are not being crowned by Christ. Never fear when thou dost imitate Christ. For when the devil tempted our Lord, there was no man in the wilderness; he tempted Him secretly; but he was conquered, and conquered too when openly

attacking Him. This do thou, if you wish to enter by the door, when the enemy secretly assails you, when he asks for a man that he may do him some hurt by bodily troubles, by fever, by sickness, or any other bodily sufferings, like those of Job. He saw not the devil, yet he acknowledged the power of God. He knew that the devil had no power against him, unless from the Almighty Ruler of all things he received that power: the whole glory he gave to God, power to the devil he gave not....

3. He then who so imitates Christ as to endure all the troubles of this world, with his hopes set upon God, that he falls into no snare, is broken down by no panic fears, he it is who dwells under the defence of the Most High, who shall abide under the protection of God Psalm 90:1, in the words with which the Psalm, which you have heard and sung, begins. You will recognise the words, so well known, in which the devil tempted our Lord, when we come to them. He shall say unto the Lord, You are my taker up, and my refuge: my God Psalm 90:2. Who speaks thus to the Lord? He who dwells under the defence of the Most High: not under his own defence. Who is this? He dwells under the defence of the Most High, who is not proud, like those who ate, that they might become as Gods, and lost the immortality in which they were made. For they chose to dwell under a defence of their own, not under that of the Most High: thus they listened to the suggestions of the serpent, Genesis 3:5 and despised the precept of God: and discovered at last that what God threatened, not what the devil promised, had come to pass in them.

4. Thus then do thou say also, In Him will I trust. For He Himself shall deliver me Psalm 90:3, not I myself. Observe whether he teaches anything but this, that all our trust be in God, none in man. Whence shall he deliver you? From the snare of the hunter, and from a harsh word. Deliverance from the hunter's net is indeed a great blessing: but how is deliverance from a harsh word so? Many have fallen into the hunter's net through a harsh word. What is it that I say? The devil and his angels spread their snares, as hunters do: and those who walk in Christ tread afar from those snares: for he dares not spread his net in Christ: he sets it on the verge of the way, not in the way. Let then your way be Christ, and you shall not fall into the snares of the devil....

But what is, from a harsh word? The devil has entrapped many by a harsh word: for instance, those who profess Christianity among Pagans suffer insult from the heathen: they blush when they hear reproach, and shrinking out of their path in consequence, fall into the hunter's snares. And yet what will a harsh word do to you? Nothing. Can the snares with which the enemy entraps you by means of reproaches, do nothing to you? Nets are usually spread for birds at the end of a hedge, and stones are thrown into the hedge: those stones will not harm the birds. When did any one ever hit a bird by throwing a stone into a hedge? But the bird, frightened at the harmless noise, falls into the nets; and thus men who fear the vain reproaches of their calumniators, and who blush at unprovoked insults, fall into the snares of the hunters, and are taken captive by the devil...Just as among the heathen, the Christian who fears their reproaches falls into the snare of the hunter: so among the Christians, those who endeavour to be more diligent and better than the rest, are doomed to bear insults from Christians themselves. What then does it profit, my brother, if you occasionally find a city in which there is no heathen? No one there insults a man because he is a Christian, for this reason, that there is no Pagan therein: but there are many Christians who lead a bad life, among whom those who are resolved to live righteously, and to be sober among the drunken, and chaste among the unchaste, and amid the consulters of astrologers sincerely to worship God, and to ask after no such things, and among spectators of frivolous shows will go only to church, suffer from those very Christians reproaches, and harsh words, when they address such a one, You are the mighty, the righteous, you are Elias, you are Peter: you have come from heaven. They insult him: whichever way he turns, he hears harsh sayings on each side: and if he fears, and abandons the way of Christ, he falls into

the snares of the hunters. But what is it, when he hears such words, not to swerve from the way? On hearing them, what comfort has he, which prevents his heeding them, and enables him to enter by the door? Let him say; What words am I called, who am a servant and a sinner? To my Lord Jesus they said, You have a devil. John 8:48 You have just heard the harsh words spoken against our Lord: it was not necessary for our Lord to suffer this, but in doing so He has warned you against harsh words, lest you fall into the snares of the hunters.

5. He shall defend you between His shoulders, and you shall hope under His wings Psalm 90:4. He says this, that your protection may not be to you from yourself, that you may not imagine that you can defend yourself; He will defend you, to deliver you from the hunter's snare, and from an harsh word. The expression, between His shoulders, may be understood both in front and behind: for the shoulders are about the head; but in the words, you shall hope under His wings, it is clear that the protection of the wings of God expanded places you between His shoulders, so that God's wings on this side and that have you in the midst, where you shall not fear lest any one hurt you: only be thou careful never to leave that spot, where no foe dares approach. If the hen defends her chickens beneath her wings; how much more shall you be safe beneath the wings of God, even against the devil and his angels, the powers who fly about in mid air like hawks, to carry off the weak young one? For the comparison of the hen to the very Wisdom of God is not without ground; for Christ Himself, our Lord and Saviour, speaks of Himself as likened to a hen; how often would I have gathered your children, etc. Matthew 23:37 That Jerusalem would not: let us be willing....If you consider other birds, brethren, you will find many that hatch their eggs, and keep their young warm: but none that weakens herself in sympathy with her chickens, as the hen does. We see swallows, sparrows, and storks outside their nests, without being able to decide whether they have young or no: but we know the hen to be a mother by the weakness of her voice, and the loosening of her feathers: she changes altogether from love for her chickens: she weakens herself because they are weak. Thus since we were weak, the Wisdom of God made Itself weak, when the Word was made flesh, and dwelt in us, John 1:14 that we might hope under His wings.

6. His truth shall surround you with a shield Psalm 90:5. What are the wings, the same is the shield: since there are neither wings nor shield. If either were literally, how could the one be the same as the other? Can wings be a shield or a shield wings? But all these expressions, indeed, are figuratively used through likenesses. If Christ were really a Stone, Acts 4:10-11 He could not be a Lion; if a Lion, Revelation 5:5 He could not be a Lamb: but He is called both Lion, and Lamb, John 1:29 and Stone, and Calf, and anything else of the sort, metaphorically, because He is neither Stone, nor Lion, nor Lamb, nor Calf, but Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all of us, for these are likenesses, not literal names. His truth shall be your shield, it is said: a shield to assure us that He will not confound those whose trust is in themselves with those who hope in God. One is a sinner, and the other a sinner: but suppose one that presumes upon himself is a despiser, confesses not his sins, and he will say, if my sins displeased God, He would not suffer me to live. But another dared not even raise his eyes, but beat upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. Luke 18:13 Both this was a sinner, and that: but the one mocked, the other mourned: the one was a despiser, the other a confessor, of his sins. But the truth of God, which respects not persons, discerns the penitent from him who denies his sin, the humble from the proud, him who presumes upon himself from him who presumes on God. You shall not be afraid for any terror by night.

7. Nor for the arrow that flies by day, for the matter that walks in darkness, nor for the ruin and the devil that is in the noonday Psalm 90:6. These two clauses above correspond to the two below; You shall not fear for the terror by night, from the arrow that flies by day: both because of the terror by night, from the

matter that walks in darkness: and because of the arrow that flies by day, from the ruin of the devil of the noon-day. What ought to be feared by night, and what by day? When any man sins in ignorance, he sins, as it were, by night: when he sins in full knowledge, by day. The two former sins then are the lighter: the second are much heavier; but this is obscure, and will repay your attention, if, by God's blessing, I can explain it so that you may understand it. He calls the light temptation, which the ignorant yield to, terror by night: the light temptation, which assails men who well know, the arrow that flies by day. What are light temptations? Those which do not press upon us so urgently, as to overcome us, but may pass by quickly if declined. Suppose these, again, heavy ones. If the persecutor threatens, and frightens the ignorant grievously, I mean those whose faith is as yet unstable, and know not that they are Christians that they may hope for a life to come; as soon as they are alarmed with temporal ills, they imagine that Christ has forsaken them, and that they are Christians to no purpose; they are not aware that they are Christians for this reason, that they may conquer the present, and hope for the future: the matter that walks in darkness has found and seized them. But some there are who know that they are called to a future hope; that what God has promised is not of this life, or this earth; that all these temptations must be endured, that we may receive what God has promised us for evermore; all this they know: when however the persecutor urges them more strenuously, and plies them with threats, penalties, tortures, at length they yield, and although they are well aware of their sin, yet they fall as it were by day.

8. But why does he say, at noon-day? The persecution is very hot; and thus the noon signifies the excessive heat....The demon that is in the noon-day, represents the heat of a furious persecution: for these are our Lord's words, The sun was up; and because they had no root, they withered away: and when explaining it, He applies it to those who are offended when persecution arises, Because they have not root in themselves. We are therefore right in understanding by the demon that destroys in the noon-day, a violent persecution.

Listen, beloved, while I describe the persecution, from which the Lord has rescued His Church. At first, when the emperors and kings of the world imagined that they could extirpate from the earth the Christian name by persecution, they proclaimed, that any one who confessed himself a Christian, should be smitten. He who did not choose to be smitten, denied that he was a Christian, knowing the sin he was committing: the arrow that flies by day reached him. But whoever regarded not the present life, but had a sure trust in a future one, avoided the arrow, by confessing himself a Christian; smitten in the flesh, he was liberated in the spirit: resting with God, he began peacefully to await the redemption of his body in the resurrection of the dead: he escaped from that temptation, from the arrow that flies by day.

Whoever professes himself a Christian, let him be beheaded; was as the arrow that flies by day. The devil that is in the noon-day was not yet abroad, burning with a terrible persecution, and afflicting with great heat even the strong. For hear what followed; when the enemy saw that many were hastening to martyrdom, and that the number of fresh converts increased in proportion to that of the sufferers, they said among themselves, We shall annihilate the human race, so many thousands are there who believe in His Name; if we kill all of them, there will hardly be a survivor on earth.

The sun then began to blaze, and to glow with a terrible heat. Their first edict had been, Whoever shall confess himself a Christian, let him be smitten. Their second edict was, Whoever shall have confessed himself a Christian, let him be tortured, and tortured even until he deny himself a Christian....Many therefore who denied not, failed amid the tortures; for they were tortured until they denied. But to those who persevered in professing Christ, what could the sword do, by killing the body at one stroke, and sending the soul to God?

This was the result of protracted tortures also: yet who could be found able to resist such cruel and continued torments? Many failed: those, I believe, who presumed upon themselves, who dwelt not under the defence of the Most High, and under the shadow of the God of Heaven; who said not to the Lord, You are my lifter up: who trusted not beneath the shadow of His wings, but reposed much confidence in their own strength. They are thrown down by God, to show them that it is He that protects them, He overrules their temptations, He allows so much only to befall them, as each person can sustain.

9. Many then fell before the demon of the noon-day. Would ye know how many? He goes on, and says, A thousand shall fall beside you, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you Psalm 90:7. To whom, brethren, but to Christ Jesus, is this said?...For the members, the body, and the head, are not separate from one another: the body and the head are the Church and her Saviour. How then is it said, A thousand shall fall beside you, and ten thousand by your right hand? Because they shall fall before the devil, that destroys at noon. It is a terrible thing, my brethren, to fall from beside Christ, from His right hand but how shall they fall from beside Him? Why the one beside Him, the other at His right hand? Why a thousand beside Him, ten thousand at His right hand? Why a thousand beside Him? Because a thousand are fewer than the ten thousand who shall fall at His right hand. Who these are will soon be clear in Christ's name; for to some He promised that they should judge with Him, namely, to the Apostles, who left all things, and followed Him....Those judges then are the heads of the Church, the perfect. To such He said, If you will be perfect, go and sell that you have, and give to the poor. Matthew 19:21 What means the expression, if you will be perfect? It means, if you will judge with Me, and not be judged....Many such at that period, who had distributed their all to the poor, and already promised themselves a seat beside Christ in judgment of the nations, failed amid their torments under the blazing fire of persecution, as before the demon of the noon-day, and denied Christ. These are they who have fallen beside Him: when about to sit with Christ for the judgment of the world, they fell.

10. I will now explain who are they who fall on the right hand of Christ....And because many have fallen from that hope of being judges, but yet many, many more from that of being on His right hand, the Psalmist thus addresses Christ, A thousand shall fall beside You, and ten thousand at Your right hand. And since there shall be many, who regarded not all these things, with whom, as it were with His own limbs, Christ is one, he adds, But it shall not come near You. Were these words addressed to the Head alone? Surely not; surely neither (does it come near) to Paul, nor Peter, nor all the Apostles, nor all the Martyrs, who failed not in their torments. What then do the words, it shall not come near, mean? Why were they thus tortured? The torture came near the flesh, but it did not reach the region of faith. Their faith then was far beyond the reach of the terrors threatened by their torturers. Let them torture, terror will not come near; let them torture, but they will mock the torture, putting their trust in Him who conquered before them, that the rest might conquer. And who conquer, except they who trust not in themselves?...Who will not fear? He who trusts not in himself, but in Christ. But those who trust in themselves, although they even hope to judge at the side of Christ, although they hoped they should be at His right hand, as if He said to them, Come, you blessed of My Father, etc.; yet the devil that is at noon overtook them, the raging heat of persecution, terrifying with violence; and many fell from the hope of the seat of judgment, of whom it is said, A thousand shall fall beside you; many too fell from the hope of reward for their duties, of whom it was said, And ten thousand at your right hand. But this downfall and devil that is at noon-day shall not come near you, that is, the Head and the body; for the Lord knows who are His. 2 Timothy 2:19

11. Nevertheless, with your eyes shall you behold, and see the reward of the ungodly Psalm 90:8. What is this? Why nevertheless? Because the wicked were allowed to tyrannize over Your servants, and to

persecute them. Will they then have been allowed to persecute Your servants with impunity? Not with impunity, for although You have permitted them, and Your own have thence received a brighter crown, nevertheless, etc. For the evil which they willed, not the good they unconsciously were the agents of, will be recompensed them. All that is wanting is the eye of faith, by which we may see that they are raised for a time only, while they shall mourn for evermore; and to those into whose hands is given temporal power over the servants of God, it shall be said, Depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. Matthew 25:41 But if every man have but eyes in the sense in which it is said, With your eyes shall you behold, it is no unimportant thing to look upon the wicked flourishing in this life, and to have an eye to him, to consider what will become of him in the end, if he fail to reform his ways: for those who now would thunder upon others, will afterwards feel the thunderbolt themselves.

12. For Thou, Lord, art my hope Psalm 90:9. He has now come to the power Which rescues him from falling by the downfall and the devil of the noon-day. For Thou, Lord, art my hope: You have set Your house of defence very high. What do the words very high mean? For many make their house of defence in God a mere refuge from temporal persecution; but the defence of God is on high, and very secret, whither you may fly from the wrath to come. Within You have set your house of defence very high. There shall no evil happen unto You: neither shall any plague come near Your dwelling Psalm 90:10.

13. The Holy City is not the Church of this country only, but of the whole world as well: not that of this age only, but from Abel himself down to those who shall to the end be born and believe in Christ, the whole assembly of the Saints, belonging to one city; which city is Christ's body, of which Christ is the Head. There, too, dwell the Angels, who are our fellow citizens: we toil, because we are as yet pilgrims: while they within that city are awaiting our arrival. Letters have reached us too from that city, apart from which we are wandering: those letters are the Scriptures, which exhort us to live well. Why do I speak of letters only? The King himself descended, and became a path to us in our wanderings: that walking in Him, we may neither stray, nor faint nor fall among robbers, nor be caught in the snares that are set near our path. This character, then, we recognise in the whole Person of Christ, together with the Church....He Himself is our Head, He is God, co-equal with the Father, the Word of God, by whom all things were made: John 1:3 but God to create, Man to renew; God to make, Man to restore. Looking upon Him, then, let us hear the Psalm. Listen, beloved. This is the teaching and doctrine of this school, which may enable you to understand, not this Psalm only, but many, if you keep in mind this rule. Sometimes a Psalm, and all prophecy as well, in speaking of Christ, praises the Head alone, and sometimes from the Head goes to the Body, that is, the Church, and without apparently changing the Person spoken of: because the Head is not separate from the Body, and both are spoken of as one...

14. What then, my brethren, what is said of our Head? For Thou, Lord, art my hope, etc. Of this we have spoken, for He has given His angels charge over You, to keep You in all Your ways Psalm 90:11. You heard these words but now, when the Gospel was being read; attend therefore. Our Lord, after He was baptized, fasted. Why was He baptized? That we might not scorn to be baptized. For when John said to our Lord, Comest Thou to me to be baptized? I ought to be baptized by You; and our Lord replied, Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness; Matthew 3:14-15 He wished to fulfil all humility, so that He should be washed, who had no defilement....Our Lord, then, was baptized, and after baptism He was tempted; He fasted forty days, a number which has, as I have often mentioned, a deep meaning. All things cannot be explained at once, lest needful time be too much taken up. After forty days He was an hundred. He could have fasted without ever feeling hunger; but then how could He be tempted? Or had He not overcome the tempter, how couldest thou learn to struggle with him? He was

hungry; and then the tempter said, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Was it a great thing for our Lord Jesus Christ to make bread out of stones, when He satisfied so many thousands with five loaves? He made bread out of nothing. For whence came that quantity of food, which could satisfy so many thousands? The sources of that bread are in the Lord's hands. This is nothing wonderful; for He Himself made out of five loaves bread enough for so many thousands, who also every day out of a few seeds raises up on earth immense harvests. These are the miracles of our Lord: but from their constant operation they are disregarded. What then, my brethren, was it impossible for the Lord to create bread out of stones? He made men even out of stones, in the words of John the Baptist himself, God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Matthew 3:9 Why then did He not so? That he might teach you how to answer the tempter, so that if you were reduced to any straits and the tempter suggested, if you were a Christian and belonged to Christ, would He desert you now?...Listen to our Lord: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Do you think the word of God bread? If the Word of God, through which all things were made, was not bread, He would not say, I am the bread which came down from heaven. John 6:41 You have therefore learned to answer the tempter, when pressed with hunger.

15. What if he tempt you in these words: If you were a Christian, you would do miracles, as many Christians have done? You, deceived by a wicked suggestion, would tempt the Lord your God, so as to say to Him, If I am a Christian, and am before Your eyes, and Thou dost account me at all in the number of Your own, let me also do something like the many works which Your Saints have done. You have tempted God, as if you were not a Christian, unless you did this. Many who desired such things have fallen. For that Simon the sorcerer desired such gifts of the Apostles, when he wished to buy the Holy Spirit for money. Acts 8:18 He loved the power of working miracles, but loved not the imitation of humility....What then, if he tempt you thus, work miracles? That you may not tempt God, what should you answer? What our Lord answered. The devil said to Him, Cast Yourself down; for it is written, He shall give His Angels charge concerning You, etc. If You shall cast Yourself down, Angels shall receive You. And it might indeed, my brethren, happen, if our Lord had cast Himself down, the attending Angels would receive our Lord's flesh; but what does He say to him? It is written again, You shall not tempt the Lord your God. Deuteronomy 6:16 You think Me a man. For the devil came to Him with this view, that he might try whether He were the Son of God. He saw His Flesh; but His might appeared in His works: the Angels had borne witness. He saw that He was mortal, so that he might tempt Him, that by Christ's temptation the Christian might be taught. What then is written? You shall not tempt the Lord your God. Let us not then tempt the Lord, so as to say, If we belong to You, let us work a miracle.

16. Let us return to the words of the Psalm. They shall bear You in their hands, lest at any time Thou hurt Your foot against a stone Psalm 90:12. Christ was raised up in the hands of Angels, when He was taken up into heaven: not that, if Angels had not sustained Him, He would have fallen: but because they were attending on their King. Say not, Those who sustained Him are better than He who was sustained. Are then cattle better than men, because they sustain the weakness of men?

And we ought not to speak thus either; for if the cattle withdraw their support, their riders fall. But how ought we to speak of it? For it is said even of God, Heaven is My throne. Because then heaven supports Him, and God sits thereon, is therefore heaven the better? Thus also in this Psalm we may understand it of the service of the Angels: it does not pertain to any infirmity in our Lord, but to the honour they pay, and to their service....What the finger of God is, the Gospel explains to us; for the finger of God is the Holy Ghost.

How do we prove this? Our Lord, when answering those who accused Him of casting out devils in the name of Beelzebub, says, If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God; Matthew 12:28 and another Evangelist, in relating the same saying, says, If I with the finger of God cast out devils. Luke 11:20 What therefore is in one stated clearly, is darkly expressed in another. You did not know what was the finger of God, but another Evangelist explains it by terming it the Spirit of God.

The Law then written by the finger of God was given on the fiftieth day after the slaughter of the lamb, and the Holy Ghost descended on the fiftieth day after the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lamb was slain, the Passover was celebrated, the fifty days were completed, and the Law was given. But that Law was to cause fear, not love: but that fear might be changed into love, He who was truly righteous was slain: of whom that lamb whom the Jews were slaying was the type.

He arose from the dead: and from the day of our Lord's Passover, as from that of the slaying of the Paschal lamb, fifty days are counted; and the Holy Ghost descended, now in the fullness of love, not in the punishment of fear. Acts 2:1-4 Why have I said this? For this then our Lord arose, and was glorified, that He might send His Holy Spirit. And I said long ago that this was so, because His head is in heaven, His feet on earth. If His head is in heaven, His feet on earth; what means our Lord's feet on earth?

Our Lord's saints on earth. Who are our Lord's feet? The Apostles sent throughout the whole world. Who are our Lord's feet? All the Evangelists, in whom our Lord travels over all nations....We need not therefore wonder that our Lord was raised up to heaven by the hands of Angels, that His foot might not dash against a stone: lest those who on earth toiled in His body, while they were travelling over the whole world might become guilty of the Law, He took from them fear, and filled them with love.

Through fear Peter thrice denied Him, Matthew 26:69-75 for he had not yet received the Holy Ghost: afterwards, when he had received the Holy Spirit, he began to preach with confidence....Our Lord so dealt with him, as if He said, thrice you have denied Me through fear: thrice confess Me through love. With that love and that charity He filled His disciples. Why? Because He has set His house of defence very high: because when glorified He sent the Holy Ghost, He released the faithful from the guilt of the Law, that His feet might not dash against a stone.

17. Thou shall go upon the asp and the basilisk; the lion and the dragon shall you tread under your feet Psalm 90:13. You know who the serpent is, and how the Church treads upon him, as she is not conquered, because she is on her guard against his cunning. And after what manner he is a lion and a dragon, I believe you know also, beloved. The lion openly rages, the dragon lies secretly in covert: the devil has each of these forces and powers. When the Martyrs were being slain, it was the raging lion: when heretics are plotting, it is the dragon creeping beneath us. You have conquered the lion; conquer also the dragon: the lion has not crushed you, let not the dragon deceive you....A few women in the Church have bodily virginity: but the virginity of the heart all the faithful have. In the very matter of faith he feared that the heart's virginity would be corrupted by the devil: and those who have lost it, are uselessly virgins in their bodies. What does a woman who is corrupt in heart preserve in her body? Thus a Catholic married woman is before a virgin heretic. For the first is not indeed a virgin in her body, but the second has become married in her heart; and married not unto God as her husband, but unto the dragon. But what shall the Church do? The basilisk is the king of serpents, as the devil is the king of wicked spirits.

18. These are the words of God to the Church. Because he has set his love in me, therefore will I deliver him Psalm 90:14. Not only therefore the Head, which now sits in heaven, because He has set His house

of defence very high, to which no evil shall happen, neither shall any plague come near His dwelling; but we also who are toiling on earth, and are still living in temptations, whose steps are feared for, lest they fall into snares, may hear the voice of the Lord our God consoling us, and saying to us, Because he has set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him up, because he has known my name.

19. He shall call upon me, and I will hear him: yea, I am with him in trouble Psalm 90:15. Fear not when you are in trouble, as if the Lord were not with you. Let faith be with you, and God is with you in your trouble. There are waves on the sea, and you are tossed in your bark, because Christ sleeps. Christ slept in the ship, while the men were perishing. Matthew 8:24-25 If your faith sleep in your heart, Christ is as it were sleeping in your ship: because Christ dwells in you through faith, when you begin to be tossed, awake Christ sleeping: rouse up your faith, and you shall be assured that He deserts you not. But you think you are forsaken, because He rescues you not when you yourself dost wish. He delivered the Three Children from the fire? Daniel 3:29-30 Did He, who did this, desert the Maccabees? 2 Maccabees vii God forbid! He delivered both of these: the first bodily, that the faithless might be confounded; the last spiritually, that the faithful might imitate them. I will deliver him, and bring him to honour.

20. With length of days will I satisfy him Psalm 90:16. What is length of days? Eternal life. Brethren, imagine not that length of days is spoken of in the same sense as days are said to be long in summer, short in winter. Hath he such days to give us? That length is one that has no end, eternal life, that is promised us in long days. And truly, since this suffices, with reason he says, will I satisfy him. What is long in time, if it has an end, satisfies us not: for that reason it should not be even called long. And if we are covetous, we ought to be covetous of eternal life: long for such a life, as has no end. Lo, a line in which our covetousness may be extended. Do you wish money without limit? Long for eternal life without limit. Do you wish that your possession may have no end? Seek for eternal life. I will show him my salvation. Nor is this, my brethren, to be briefly passed over. I will show him my salvation: He means, I will show him Christ Himself. Why? Was He not seen on earth? What great thing has He to show us? But He did not appear such as we shall see Him. He appeared in that shape in which those who saw Him crucified Him: behold, those who saw Him, crucified Him: we have not seen Him, yet we have believed. They had eyes, have not we? Yea, we too have the eyes of the heart: but, as yet we see through faith, not by sight. When will it be sight? When shall we, as the Apostle says, see Him face to face? 1 Corinthians 13:12 which God promises us as the high reward of all our toils. Whatever you toil in, you toil for this purpose, that you may see Him. Some great thing it is we are to see, since all our reward is seeing; and our Lord Jesus Christ is that very great sight. He who appeared humble, will Himself appear great, and will rejoice us, as He is even now seen of His Angels....Let us love and imitate Him: let us run after his ointments, as is said in the Song of Solomon: Because of the savour of your good ointments, we will run after you. Song of Songs 1:3 For He came, and gave forth a savour that filled the world. Whence was that fragrance? From heaven. Follow then towards heaven, if you do not answer falsely when it is said, Lift up your hearts, lift up your thoughts, your love, your hope: that it may not rot upon the earth....For wherever your treasure is, there will be your heart also. Matthew 6:21

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