

Homily 6 on the Statues

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the fear of Magistrates and the role of the Church in consolation, and encourages listeners to live with austerity and to desire future things.

Topics: "Civil Authority", "Suffering Faith"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the fear of Magistrates being beneficial, using examples from history and Scripture to illustrate the importance of fearing rulers and the consolation that comes from God. He emphasizes the need to endure unjust suffering, give thanks to God, and avoid oaths. Chrysostom encourages the congregation to find comfort in God's providence, trust in His faithfulness, and strive for righteousness even in the face of trials and temptations.

Transcript

This Homily is intended to show that the fear of Magistrates is beneficial. It also contains an account of what occurred, during their journey, to those who were conveying the tidings of the sedition to the Emperor. The case of Jonah is further cited in illustration. The exhortation on the fear of death is here continued; and it is shown, that he who suffers unjustly, and yet gives thanks to God, by whose permission it happens, is as one suffering for God's sake. Examples are again adduced from the history of the Three Children, and the Babylonian furnace. The Homily concludes with an address on the necessity of abstaining from oaths.

1. We have spent many days addressing words of comfort to your Charity. We would not, however, on that account lay the subject aside; but as long as the sore of despondency remains, we will apply to it the medicine of consolation. For if in the case of bodily wounds, physicians do not give over their fomentations, until they perceive that the pain has subsided; much less ought this to be done in regard to the soul. Despondency is a sore of the soul; and we must therefore foment it continually with soothing words. For not so naturally is warm water efficacious to soften a hard tumour of the flesh, as words of comfort are powerful to allay the swelling passions of the soul. Here, there is no need of the sponge as with physician, but instead of this we employ the tongue. No need of fire here, that we may warm the water; but instead of fire, we make use of the grace of the Spirit. Suffer us then to do so today. For if we were not to comfort you, where else could ye obtain consolation? The judges affright; the priests therefore must console! The rulers threaten; therefore must the Church give comfort! Thus it happens with respect to little children. The teachers frighten them, and send them away weeping to their mothers; but the

mothers receiving them back to their own bosoms, keep them there, embrace them, and kiss them, while they wipe away their tears, and relieve their sorrowing spirits; persuading them by what they say, that it is profitable for them to fear their teachers. Since therefore the rulers also make you afraid, and render you anxious, the Church, which is the common mother of us all, opening her bosom, and cradling us in her arms, administers daily consolation; telling us that the fear of rulers is profitable, and profitable too the consolation that comes from hence. For the fear of the former does not permit us to be relaxed by listlessness, but the consolation of the latter does not allow us to sink under the weight of sadness; and by both these means God provides for our safety. He Himself has armed magistrates with power; that they may strike terror into the licentious; and has ordained His priests that they may administer consolation to those that are in sorrow.

2. And both these things are taught us by the Scripture, and by actual experience of recent events. For if, while there are magistrates and soldiers living under arms, the madness of a few individuals, a motley crew of adventurers, has kindled such a fire among us, in so short a moment of time, and raised such a tempest, and made us all to stand in fear of shipwreck, suppose the fear of magistrates to be wholly taken away? To what lengths would they not have gone in their madness? Would they not have overthrown the city from its foundations, turning all things upside down, and have taken our very lives? If you were to abolish the public tribunals, you would abolish all order from our life. And even as if you deprive the ship of its pilot, you sink the vessel; or as, if you remove the general from the army, you place the soldiers bound in the hands of the enemy; so if you deprive the city of its rulers, we must lead a life less rational than that of the brutes, biting and devouring one another; the rich man, the poorer; the stronger man, the weaker; and the bolder man, him who is more gentle. But now by the grace of God none of these things happen. For they who live in a state of piety, require no correction on the part of the magistrates; for the law is not made for a righteous man, 1 Timothy 1:9 says one. But the more numerous being viciously inclined, if they had no fear of these hanging over them, would fill the cities with innumerable evils; which Paul knowing, observed, There is no power, but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God. Romans 13:1 For what the tie-beams are in houses, that rulers are in cities; and in the same manner as if you were to take away the former, the walls, being disunited, would fall in upon one another of their own accord; so were you to deprive the world of magistrates, and of the fear that comes of them, houses at once, and cities, and nations, would fall on one another in unrestrained confusion, there being no one to repress, or repel, or persuade them to be peaceful, by the fear of punishment!

3. Let us not then be grieved, beloved, by the fear of our rulers, but let us give thanks to God that He has removed our listlessness, and rendered us more diligent. For tell me, what harm has arisen from this concern and anxiety? Is it that we have become more grave, and gentle; more diligent, and attentive? That we see no one intoxicated, and singing lascivious airs? Or is it that there are continual supplications, and prayers, and tears? That unseasonable laughter, and impure words, and all dissoluteness is banished; and that the city is now in all respects, like the pattern of a modest and virtuous woman? Do you grieve, I ask, for any of these reasons? For these things, assuredly, it were right to rejoice, and to be thankful to God, that by the terror of a few days He has put an end to such stupidity!

Very true, says some one, if our danger did not go beyond fear, we should have reaped a sufficient benefit; but we are now in dread lest the mischief should proceed much farther, and we should be all placed in the extremest peril.

Nevertheless, I say, fear not. Paul comforts you, saying, God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make the way of escape, that you may

be able to bear it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 He indeed Himself has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you. For had He resolved to punish us in deed, and in actual endurance, He would not have given us over to terror during so many days. For when He would not punish, He affrights; since if He were intending to punish, fear would be superfluous, and threatening superfluous. But now, we have sustained a life more grievous than countless deaths; fearing and trembling during so many days, and being suspicious of our very shadows; and paying the punishment of Cain; and in the midst of our sleep, starting up, through constant agony of mind. So that if we have kindled God's wrath, we have appeased Him in the endurance of such a punishment. For if we have not paid the satisfaction due to our sins, yet it has been enough to satisfy the mercy of God.

4. But not this, but many other grounds for confidence ought we to have. For God has already given us not a few pledges for favourable hopes. And first of all, those who carried the evil tidings departing hence with the speed of wings, supposing they should long ere this have reached the camp, are yet delayed in the midst of their journey. So many hindrances and impediments have arisen; and they have left their horses, and are now proceeding in vehicles; whence their arrival must of necessity be retarded. For since God here stirred up our priest, and common father, and persuaded him to go forth, and undertake this embassy, he detained the messengers for a while, when they were but half way on their road, lest arriving before him they might kindle the fire, and make our teacher's efforts to mend matters useless, when the royal ears had become inflamed. For that this hindrance on the road, was not without God's interposition is evident from this. Men who had been familiar with such journeys all their lives, and whose constant business it was to ride on horseback, now broke down through the fatigue of this very riding; so that what has now happened is the reverse of what took place in the case of Jonah. For God hastened him when unwilling, to go on his mission. But these, who were desirous to go, He hindered. O strange and wonderful event! He wished not to preach of an overthrow; and God forced him to go against his will. These men with much haste set forward to be the bearers of a message of overthrow, and against their will again He has hindered them! For what reason think you? Why, because in this case the haste was an injury; but in the other case, haste brought gain. On this account, He hastened him forward by means of the whale; and detained these by means of their horses. Do you see the wisdom of God? Through the very means by which each party hoped to accomplish their object, through these each received an hindrance. Jonah expected to escape by the ship, and the ship became his chain. These couriers, by means of their horses, expected the more quickly to see the Emperor; and the horses became the obstacles; or rather, neither the horses in one case, nor the ship in the other, but the Providence of God everywhere directing all things according to its own wisdom!

5. Consider also His care over us, and how He both affrighted and consoled us. For after permitting them to set out on the very day when all these outrages were committed, as if they would report all that had taken place to the Emperor; He alarmed us all at their sudden departure. But when they had gone, and two or three days had elapsed, and we thought the journey of our Priest would now be useless, as he would arrive when it was too late, He delivered us from this fear, and comforted us by detaining them, as I observed, midway; and by providing persons coming to us from thence by the same road, to announce to us all the difficulties they had met with on their journey, that we might thus take a little breath, as indeed we did, and were relieved of a great part of our anxiety. Having heard of this, we adored God who had done it, who has even now more tenderly than any father disposed all things for us, delaying by some invisible power those evil messengers, and all but saying to them, Why do ye hasten? Why do ye press on, when you are going to overwhelm so great a city? For are you the bearers of a good message to the Emperor? Wait there till I have made ready my servant, as an excellent physician, to come up with you

and anticipate you in your course. But if there was so much of providential care in the first breaking out of this wound of iniquity, much more shall we obtain a greater freedom from anxiety, after conversion, after repentance, after so much fear, after tears and prayers. For Jonah was very properly constrained, in order that he might be forcibly brought to repentance; but you have already given striking evidences of repentance, and conversion. Therefore, it is necessary that you should receive consolation, instead of a threatening messenger. For this reason also has He sent our common father hence, notwithstanding the many things to hinder it. But if He had not been tender of our safety, He would not have persuaded him to this, but would have hindered him, however disposed he might be to undertake the journey.

6. There is a third reason by which I may possibly persuade you to have confidence; I mean, the present sacred season, which almost all, even unbelievers, respect; but to which this our divinely-favoured Emperor has shown such reverence and honour, as to surpass all the Emperors who have reigned with a regard for religion before him. As a proof of this, by sending a letter on these days in honour of the feast, he liberated nearly all those who were lodged in prison; and this letter our Priest when he arrives will read to him; and remind him of his own laws, and will say to him, Do thou exhort yourself, and remember your own deeds! You have an example for your philanthropy at home! You chose to forbear from executing a justifiable slaughter, and will you endure to perpetrate one that is unjust. Reverencing the feast, you discharged those who had been convicted and condemned; and will you, I ask, condemn the innocent, and those who have not committed any violence, and this when the sacred season is present? That be far from you, O Emperor! Thou, speaking by this Epistle to all the cities, said, 'Would it were possible for me to raise even the dead.' This philanthropy and these words we now stand in need of. To conquer enemies, does not render kings so illustrious, as to conquer wrath and anger; for in the former case, the success is due to arms and soldiers; but here the trophy is simply your own, and you have no one to divide with you the glory of your moral wisdom. You have overcome barbarian war, overcome also Imperial wrath! Let all unbelievers learn that the fear of Christ is able to bridle every kind of authority. Glorify your Lord by forgiving the trespasses of your fellow-servants; that He also may glorify you the more; that at the Day of Judgment, He may bend on you an Eye merciful and serene, being mindful of this your lovingkindness! This, and much more, he will say, and will assuredly rescue us from the Emperor's wrath. And not only will this fast be of the greatest assistance to us in influencing the Emperor in our favour, but also towards enduring what befalls us with fortitude; for we reap no small consolation from this season. For our very meeting together daily as we do, and having the benefit of hearing the divine Scriptures; and beholding each other; and weeping with each other; and praying, and receiving Benedictions, and so departing home, takes off the chief part of our distress.

7. Let us, therefore, not despond, nor give ourselves up by reason of our distress; but let us wait, expecting a favourable issue; and let us give heed to the things that are now about to be spoken. For it is my purpose to discourse to you again to day respecting contempt for death. I said to you, yesterday, that we are afraid of death, not because he is really formidable; but because the love of the kingdom has not kindled us, nor the fear of hell laid hold of us; and because besides this we have not a good conscience. Are you desirous that I should speak of a fourth reason for this unseasonable distress, one which is not less, and truer than the rest? We do not live with the austerity that becomes Christians. On the contrary, we love to follow this voluptuous and dissolute and indolent life; therefore also it is but natural that we cleave to present things; since if we spent this life in fastings, vigils, and poverty of diet, cutting off all our extravagant desires; setting a restraint upon our pleasures; undergoing the toils of virtue; keeping the body under like Paul, and bringing it into subjection; not making provision for the lusts of the flesh; and pursuing the strait and narrow way, we should soon be earnestly desirous of future things, and eager to be

delivered from our present labours. And to prove that what I say is not untrue, ascend to the tops of the mountains, and observe the monks who are there; some in sackcloth; some in bonds; some in fastings; some shut up in darkness. You will then perceive, that all these are earnestly desiring death, and calling it rest. For even as the pugilist is eager to leave the stadium, in order that he may be freed from wounds; and the wrestler longs for the theatre to break up, that he may be released from his toils; so also he who by the aid of virtue leads a life of austerity, and mortification, earnestly longs for death in order that he may be freed from his present labours, and may be able to have full assurance in regard to the crowns laid up in store, by arriving in the still harbour, and migrating to the place where there is no further apprehension of shipwreck. Therefore, also, has God provided for us a life that is naturally laborious and troublesome; to the end that being here urged by tribulation, we may conceive an eager longing for future blessings; for if now, while there are so many sorrows, and dangers, and fears, and anxieties, surrounding us on all sides, we thus cling to the present life; when should we ever be desirous of the life to come, if our present existence were altogether void of grief and misery?

8. Thus also God acted towards the Jews. For wishing to infuse into them a desire of returning (to Canaan), and to persuade them to hate Egypt, He permitted them to be distressed by working in clay, and brick-making, that being oppressed by that weight of toil and affliction, they might cry unto God respecting their return. For if, indeed when they departed after these things had happened, they did again remember Egypt, with their hard slavery, and were urgent to turn back to that former tyranny; what if they had received no such treatment from these barbarians? When would they have ever wished to leave that strange land? To the end, therefore, that we may not be too closely attached to the earth, and grow wretched while gaping after present things, and become unmindful of futurity, God has made our lives here full of labour. Let us not then cherish the love of the present life beyond what is necessary. For what does it profit us? Or what is the advantage of being closely riveted to the desire of this present state? Are you willing to learn in what respect this life is advantageous? It is so, inasmuch as it is the ground-work and starting point of the life to come; the wrestling-school and the arena for crowns of victory hereafter! so that if it does not provide these for us, it is worse than a thousand deaths. For if we do not wish to live so as to please God, it is better to die. For what is the gain? What have we the more? Do we not every day see the same sun, and the same moon, the same winter, the same summer, the same course of things? The thing that has been, shall be; and that which is done, is that which shall be done. Ecclesiastes 1:9 Let us not then at once pronounce those happy, who are alive, and bewail the dead, but let us weep for those who are in their sins, whether they be dead or alive. And on the other hand, let us call those happy in whatsoever condition they be, who are in a state of righteousness. You, forsooth, fear and lament one death; but Paul, who was dying daily, 1 Corinthians 15:31 was so far from shedding a tear on that account, that he rejoiced and exulted!

9. O that I did endure the peril for God, says some one, then I should have no anxiety! But do not even now sink into despondency; for not only indeed is he well approved, who suffers in the cause of God: but he who is suffering any thing unjustly: and bearing it nobly, and giving thanks to God who permits it, is not inferior to him who sustains these trials for God's sake. The blessed Job is a proof of this, who received so many intolerable wounds through the devil's plotting against him uselessly, vainly, and without cause. Yet, nevertheless, because he bore them courageously, and gave thanks to God who permitted them, he was invested with a perfect crown. Be not sad then on account of death; for it is natural to die: but grieve for sin; because it is a fault of the will. But if you grieve for the dead, mourn also for those who are born into the world; for as the one thing is of nature, so is the other too of nature. Should any one, therefore, threaten you with death, say to him, I am instructed by Christ not to 'fear them which kill the body, but are

not able to kill the soul.' Matthew 10:28 Or should he threaten you with the confiscation of your goods, say to him, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And though thou take me not, death will come and take me; and though thou slay me not, yet the law of nature will presently interfere and bring the end. Therefore we should fear none of these things which are brought on us by the order of nature, but those which are engendered by our own evil will; for these bring forth our penalty. But let us continually consider this, that as regards the events which come upon us unexpectedly we shall not mend them by grieving, and so we shall cease to grieve.

10. And moreover we should think of this again, that if we suffer any evil unjustly, during the present life, we discharge a multitude of sins. Therefore it is a great advantage to have out the chastisement of our sins here, and not there; for the rich man received no evil here, and therefore he was scorched in the flames there; and that this was the reason why he did not enjoy any consolation, hear in proof what Abraham says, Son, you have received your good things; therefore you are tormented. But that to the good things bestowed on Lazarus, not only his virtue, but his having here suffered a thousand ills, contributed, learn also from the patriarch's words. For having said to the rich man, You have received your good things, he goes on to say, and Lazarus evil things, and for this reason he is comforted. Luke 16:25 For as they who live virtuously, and are afflicted, receive a double reward from God, so he who lives in wickedness, and fares sumptuously, shall have a double punishment. Again, I declare this not for the purpose of accusing those who have taken flight, for it is said, Add not more trouble to a heart that is vexed; Sirach 4:3 nor do I say it because I wish to rebuke; (for the sick man stands in need of consolation); but for the purpose of endeavouring to promote an amendment. Let us not entrust our safety to flight, but flee from sins, and depart from our evil way. If we escape from these things, although we be in the midst of ten thousand soldiers; not one of them will be able to smite us; but not flying from these, though we ascend to the very summit of the mountains, we shall there find innumerable enemies! Let us again call to mind those three children, who were in the midst of the furnace, yet suffered no evil, and those who cast them into it, how they that sat around were all consumed. What is more wonderful than this? The fire freed those it held possession of, and violently seized those whom it did not hold, to teach you, that not the habitation, but the habit of life, brings safety or punishment. Those within the furnace escaped, but those without were consumed. To each alike were the same bodies, but not the same dispositions. For this reason neither were the effects on them the same; for hay, although it lie without the flame, is quickly kindled; but gold, although it remain within, becomes the more resplendent!

11. Where now are those who said, Let the Emperor take all, and grant us our bodies free? Let such go and learn what is a free body. It is not immunity from punishment that makes the body free, but perseverance in a life of righteousness. The bodies of these youths, for instance, were free, though they were given over to the furnace, because they had before put off the slavery of sin. For this alone is liberty; and not an immunity from punishment, or from suffering anything fearful.

But having heard of the furnace, call thou to mind the rivers of fire, which there shall be in that fearful day. For as on the above occasion, the fire seized upon some, but revered others, so also shall it be with those rivers. If any one should then have hay, wood, stubble, he increases the fire; but if he has gold and silver, he becomes the brighter. Let us therefore get together this kind of material, and let us bear the present state of things nobly; knowing that this tribulation will both bring us deliverance from that punishment if we understand how to practise true wisdom, and will also make us better here; and not only us, but often those too, who throw us into trouble, if we be vigilant; so abundant is the force of this spiritual

wisdom; which was the case then even with the tyrant.

For when he knew that they had suffered no harm, hear how he changed his language. You servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Daniel 3:26 Did not you say, a little before Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? Daniel 3:15 What has happened? Whence this change? Thou saw those without destroyed, and do you call on those within? Whence has it come to pass that you are grown wise in such matters. You see how great a change took place in the monarch!

Whilst he had not yet exercised his power over them, he blasphemed, but as soon as he had cast them into fire, he began to show moral wisdom. For this reason also God permitted all to take place, whatsoever the tyrant wished, in order that He might make it manifest, that none will be able to injure those who are kept by Him. And what He did towards Job, He performed here. For on that occasion also, He permitted the devil to manifest all his power; and not till he had exhausted all his darts, and no further mode of plotting against him remained, was the combatant led out of the field, that the victory might be brilliant and indubitable.

So here too He did the very same thing. He willed to overthrow their city, and God stayed him not: he willed to carry them away captive, and He hindered him not: he willed to bind them, and He permitted; to cast them into the furnace, and He allowed it: to heat the flame beyond its measure, and this too He suffered; and when there was nothing further left for the tyrant to do, and he had exhausted all his strength, then God manifested His own power, and the patience of the youths.

Do you see how God permitted these tribulations even to the end, that He might show the assailants the spiritual wisdom of those whom they assailed, as well as His own providence. Both of which circumstances also that man then discerned, and cried out, You servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither.

12. But consider thou with me the magnanimity of the youths; for they neither sprang out before the call, lest some should suppose they feared the fire; nor when they were called did they remain within, lest any one should think that they were ambitious and contentious. As soon, say they, as you have learned whose servants we are, as soon as you have acknowledged our Lord, we come forth to be heralds to all who are present of the power of God. Or rather, not only they themselves, but even the enemy with his own voice, yea, both orally, and by his epistle, proclaimed to all men both the constancy of the combatants, and the strength of Him who presided over the contest. And even as the heralds, when they proclaim the names of the victorious combatants in the midst of the theatre, mention also the cities to which they belong; such an one, of such a city! So he too, instead of their city, proclaimed their Lord, by saying, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. What has come to pass, that you call them the servants of God? Were they not your servants? Yea, says he, but they have overthrown my sovereignty; they have trampled under foot my pride. They have shown by deeds, that He is their true Lord. If they were the servants of men, the fire would not have feared them; the flame would not have made way for them; for the creation knows nothing of reverencing or honoring the servants of men. Therefore again he says, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

13. Contemplate with me also, how first he proclaims the Arbiter of the contest. Blessed be God, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants. Daniel 3:28 This of the power of God. He speaks also of the virtue of the combatants. Because they trusted in Him, and have changed the king's word, and have yielded their bodies, that they might not worship any god except their own God. Could anything equal the

virtue of this? Before this, when they said, We will not serve your gods, he was inflamed more fiercely than the very furnace; but now, when by their deeds they had taught him this, he was so far from being indignant, that he praised and admired them, for not having obeyed him! So good a thing is virtue, that it has even its enemies themselves to applaud and admire it! These had fought and conquered, but the vanquished party gave thanks, that the sight of the fire had not terrified them, but that the hope in their Lord had comforted them. And He names the God of the whole world after the three youths, not at all circumscribing His sovereignty, but inasmuch as these three youths were equivalent to the whole world. For this reason he both applauds those who had despised him, and passing by so many governors, kings, and princes, those who had obeyed him, he stands in admiration of the three captives and slaves, who derided his tyranny! For they did these things, not for the sake of contention, but for the love of wisdom; not of defiance, but of devotion; not as being puffed up with pride, but fired with zeal. For great indeed is the blessing of a hope in God; which then also the barbarian learned, and making it manifest that it was from that source they had escaped the impending peril, he exclaimed aloud: Because they trusted in Him!
Daniel 3:28

14. But I say all this now, and select all the histories that contain trials and tribulations, and the wrath of kings, and their evil designs, in order that we may fear nothing, save only offending God. For then also was there a furnace burning; yet they derided it, but feared sin. For they knew that if they were consumed in the fire, they should suffer nothing that was to be dreaded; but that if they were guilty of impiety, they should undergo the extremes of misery. It is the greatest punishment to commit sin, though we may remain unpunished; as on the other hand, it is the greatest honour and repose to live virtuously, though we may be punished. For sins separate us from God; as He Himself speaks; Have not your sins separated between you and Me? But punishments lead us back to God. As one says, Give peace; for You have recompensed us for all things. Suppose any one has a wound; which is the most deserving of fear, gangrene, or the surgeon's knife? The steel, or the devouring progress of the ulcer? Sin is a gangrene, punishment is the surgeon's knife. As then, he who has a gangrene, although he is not lanced, has to sustain the malady, and is then in the worse condition, when he is not lanced; so also the sinner, though he be not punished, is the most wretched of men; and is then especially wretched, when he has no punishment, and is suffering no distress. And as those who have a disease of the spleen, or a dropsy, when they enjoy a plentiful table, and cool drinks, and a variety of delicacies, and condiments, are then especially in a most pitiable state, increasing as they do their disease by luxury; but should they rigorously subject themselves to hunger and thirst, according to medical laws, they might have some hope of recovery; so also those who live in iniquity, if they are punished, may have favourable hopes; but if, together with their wickedness, they enjoy security and luxury, they become more wretched than those who cram their bellies, though they are in a state of dropsy; and so much the more, as the soul is better than the body. If then you see any who are in the same sins, and some of them struggling continually with hunger, and a thousand ills; while others are drinking their fill, and living sumptuously, and gormandizing; think those the better off, who endure sufferings. For not only is the flame of voluptuousness cut off by these misfortunes, but they also depart to the future Judgment, and that dread tribunal, with no small relief; and go hence, having discharged here the penalty of the greater part of their sins by the ills they have suffered.

15. But enough of consolation. It is time for us now, at last, to proceed to the exhortation on the subject of avoiding oaths, and to remove that seeming palliation on behalf of those who swear, which is but futile, and useless. For when we bring an accusation against them, they allege the case of others who do the very same thing; and they say, such and such persons swear. Let us then say to these, Nevertheless;

such a man does not swear: and God will give His judgment concerning you, from those who do good works; for sinners do not profit sinners by fellowship in transgressions; but they who perform what is right condemn sinners. For they who gave not Christ food, or drink, were many; but they rendered no aid to each other. Matthew 25:35 Similar also was the case of the five virgins, who found no pardon from companionship, Matthew 25:10 but being condemned by a comparison with those who had acted wisely, both these and the former were alike punished.

16. Dismissing then this argument of frigid self-deception, let us not look at the case of those who fall, but at those who fashion their conduct rightly; and let us endeavour to carry along with us a memento of the present fast when it is over. And as it often happens when we have purchased a vestment, or a slave, or a precious vase, we recall again the time when we did so, and say to each other, That slave I purchased at such a festival; that garment I bought at such a time; so, in like manner, if we now reduce to practice this law, we shall say, I reformed the practice of swearing during that Lent; for till then I was a swearer; but from barely hearing an admonition, I have abstained from the sin.

But the custom, it may be objected, is a hard thing to be reformed. I know it is; and therefore am urgent to throw you into another custom, which is good and profitable. For when you say, it is difficult for me to abstain from what is habitual; for that very reason, I say, you should make haste to abstain, knowing for certain, that if you once make another custom for yourself of not swearing, you will want no labour afterwards. Which is the more difficult thing; not to swear, or to remain the whole day without food; and to shrivel up on water-drinking, and meagre diet? It is evident that the latter surpasses the former; yet, notwithstanding, custom has made this matter so possible and easy of execution, that when the fast comes round, although any one should exhort a thousand times, or as frequently constrain and compel one to partake of wine, or taste of any other of those things which are forbidden during fasts, yet a man would prefer to suffer anything, rather than touch the prohibited article of food; and that not for want of relish for the table, nevertheless, we bear it all with fortitude, from the habit of our conscience. And the case will be the same in regard to oaths; and just as if now, any one were to impose ever so great necessity, you would remain immovable, holding fast the habit; so also in that case, if any one should urge you ten thousand times, you would not depart from your custom.

18. When you go home, therefore, discourse of all these things with those who are in your house; and as many persons often do, when they come back from a meadow, having plucked there a rose, or a violet, or some flower of that kind, they return twisting it about with their fingers; and as some, again, when they quit the gardens to go home, take with them branches of trees, with their fruit upon them; and as others, moreover, from sumptuous feasts, carry away leavings of the entertainment for their dependents; so indeed do thou, departing from hence, take an exhortation home to your wife, your children, and all your household. For this admonition is more profitable than the meadow, the garden, or the banquetting table. These roses never wither; these fruits never drop off; these dainties never corrupt. The former yield a temporary delight; but the latter a lasting advantage, not only after this reformation has taken place, but in the very act of reforming. For think what a good practice this would be, having dismissed all other matters public or private, to discourse Deuteronomy 6:7 only of the divine laws continually, at the table, in the forum, and in your other meetings. Would we give our attention to these things, we should say nothing of a dangerous or injurious nature, nor should we sin unwittingly. Giving our leisure to discourse respecting these things, we should be able to withdraw our soul even from this despondency that hangs over us, instead of looking with so much anxiety as we do, while we say one to another, Hath the Emperor heard what has happened? Is he incensed? What sentence has he pronounced? Hath any one petitioned him?

What? Will he himself endure to destroy utterly a city so great and populous? Casting these and all such cares upon God, let us be anxious only as to what He has commanded! Thus shall we rid ourselves of all these sorrows; and although ten only among us should succeed, the ten would quickly become twenty; the twenty fifty; the fifty a hundred; the hundred a thousand; the thousand all the city. And just as when ten lamps are lighted, one may easily fill the whole house with light, so also with respect to right actions; should only ten act rightly, we shall light up a general flame throughout the city, to shine forth, and to procure us safety. For not so naturally does the fire, when it falls upon a forest, kindle the neighbouring trees successively, as will the emulation for virtue, when it seizes upon a few minds, be mighty in its progress to diffuse itself through the whole community.

19. Give me cause, then, to exult over you both in the present life, and at that future Day, when those to whom talents have been entrusted, shall be summoned! Your good reputation is a sufficient reward for my labours; and if I see you living in piety, I have all I wish. Do, then, what yesterday I recommended, and today will repeat, and will not cease to say it. Fix a penalty for those who swear; a penalty which is a gain, and not a loss; and prepare yourselves henceforth so as you may give us a proof of success. For I shall endeavour to hold a long conversation with each of you, when this assembly is dismissed; in order that in the continuance of discourse I may discover the persons who have been acting rightly, and those who have not. And if I find any one still swearing, I shall make him manifest to all who are amended, that by reproving, rebuking, and correcting, we may quickly deliver him from this evil habit. For better it is that he should amend through being reproached here, than that he should be put to shame, and punished, in the presence of the whole assembled universe, on that Day, when our sins shall be revealed to the eyes of all men! But God forbid that any in this fair assembly should appear there suffering such things! But by the prayers of the holy fathers, correcting all our offenses, and having shown forth the abundant fruit of virtue, may we depart hence with much confidence, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom, and with whom, be glory to the Father together with the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

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