De cibis (On the distinction between foods)

Methodius of Olympus (d. c. AD 311)

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By the same. On the distinction between foods, and on the heifer mentioned in Leviticus, with the ashes of which sinners were sprinkled.

[I. 1.] We ought finally to have been content with these homilies, the remembrances spoken previously (for they are many), overwhelmed as we are by many temptations, and we have not yet found any deliverance from this. For you know, O Phrenope, having laboured with us and having been a partaker in our work by prayer and fasting, how many trials I had in every homily, how much Satan made me to be ill after I had finished my homily on virginity, how much annoyance he caused me, preventing me from finishing my homily on the resurrection. [2.] He raised up waves (of trouble, I mean) like impassable mountains, so that I despaired even of life, such things were happening to me; and even more the people nowadays – they love slander and abomination and lying, and would rather listen to evil things than good things said about their neighbours.

[3.] Nevertheless, even if so many storms of care have encompassed me, I shall not refrain from writing, for this is the common lot of as many as set about declaring the truth. And this has not only arisen now, but has indeed been since the time of the prophets themselves, who were glad to be hated by the evil demons who opposed them. [4.] For the demons strive for nothing so much as to seduce people from their creator and his only-begotten firstborn son Jesus Christ. They oppose the right thoughts of anyone who teaches people to walk on the road of truth and to imitate better things. They trip up the mind of those who lead people by way of reason to incorruption. For the condemnation and exposure of such doings the way of salvation is to be revealed to men. [5.] Therefore they endeavour that we should be ignorant, and that when people approach both natural and divine knowledge, and are zealous for book-learning, their souls should be caught by foolish urges.

[6] For when the soul is yet unstable, and has not heard the divine words, and does not know its Creator and Father, it finds itself [the prey] of all kinds of things, and has not seen the

good that flows from thence. Otherwise, taking all kinds of other things to be glories which are invented by demons, it strives after foolish imaginings. [II.1] However, whether it is demons or other causes that bring temptations upon us, let us not be afraid, for we have the Lord Jesus Christ for our helper. [2.] For if we receive punishment in this life for the sins which we have committed previously, we should be glad of it, because our judgement there is light; or if we stand firm and courageously against our troubles, like those holy men who were tempted, so that our faith is known. For the one who is untried by God is useless. And so it is right for us to rejoice and glorify God, because he has made us worthy to experience those misfortunes.

[3.] For it is no small prayer of the prophet, when he asks for a sorrowful labour, saying, "Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and mind." And the Apostle Paul says, "Whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance." So I think that these cares are profitable. For he would not have said, writing of them, "They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two," etc., and he would not have said, writing to Timothy, "All who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." [4.] For it is good for anyone who is chastised by God not to weaken, lest our spiritual carcases fall, like those unbelieving people who did not want to follow the angel because the road was hard, and therefore did not enter into the Promised Land. Wretched people, who turned away from God because of hard labour! Therefore they went down to their graves and their carcases were scattered. [5.] Therefore, then, we should be blameless, nor should anyone separate us because of the labour of the love of wisdom or for any other reason.

[III.1] For it shall be, when it is over, that we shall pass from this life, and having taken no harm from spiritual beasts, shall say, "I waited patiently for the Lord, and he turned to me, and saved me out of all my troubles." For it is better to take care first, and rest afterwards. [2.] For a ploughman does not pray that the seeds will come up before he has yoked his oxen and ploughed, but rather expects it to happen after his labour. And if we go to the seamen, we do not admire an inept helmsman, but a skilful one who has delivered his ship from many storms. [3.] For anyone who would taste of the great gifts of God must also accept many afflictions. And at public entertainments all run, but only one receives the prize. "Run in such a way that you may win it," says Paul, crying out. For there are many obstacles to success, as for a runner there are pits and banks, of which the ignorant and those unfit for the race are afraid, but the knowledgeable and the strong, having endured the perils of the journey, will be saved.

[4.] For what is the remembrance of that man who loved what is good, and was chaste, and loved his brethren? It is such as endures for all ages. But if you take away from him all his patience, then you take away his being sold by his brethren, and his temptation by that woman, and all his courage and beauty. Likewise with David, if you take away from him his meekness and patience, you take away all his goodness. [5.] And if you take away from Daniel his wisdom, or patience, you take away Bel and the Dragon, and those even more

wicked men, and the burning fiery furnace, and many other afflictions. And for what is Moses admirable, if not for his patience? If you take all that away, you diminish his good character. [6.] And you have other spiritual warriors, I mean Elijah, and Jeremiah, and Isaiah, and Elisha, who strove and resisted great persecutors, and their hunger, and their nakedness, and all their labour. And where shall we place the labour of the apostles, who journeyed all over land and sea?

[IV.1]But having said so much of these things, let us go on to others, understanding very well that we should not be dismayed by the calamities that befell them, but rather receiving the heritage of the word. "Open your mouth to the word of God. [2. Therefore, O Kilonia, beloved and faithful in the Lord, I have a word to you from hence. I rejoice greatly in your true wisdom. For this is true wisdom. Solomon already understood, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This has seemed hard to many, for many trials come upon such people. But this I say, because the brother by whom you sent to me told me all your afflictions and sufferings in the Lord, for the sake of whose name you have received them; [3. for this is the way of those who thirst for heavenly things and strive to obtain them. For though that way is narrow, it is short, and leads to a great expanse. [4] Thus it is for us, who come to the light, to receive our portion of eternal life, and the unfading crown thereof. For James says, "Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life. "For what shall it profit a man," to speak in Christ's words, "what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? [5.

And, this life being very short and having nothing real, David says of our days that they are "seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble. [6. Therefore choose to suffer with the people of God. The people of God are those who for the sake of receiving the gift of the calling which is from above, have received also many afflictions. Therefore they have not been told (like that rich man) that they have received their good things in this life. [7. And those giants famous from the beginning, that were of so great stature, did not achieve anything by their strength and pride, as Jeremiah the prophet said, "But they were destroyed, because they had no wisdom."

[V.1] But God has given us to know all things that are pleasing to him. "Happy are we," he said, "for things that are pleasing to God are made known to us." It is integrity that is pleasing to God. Integrity is having an undivided mind and not being moved by wicked stormy thoughts. [2.] For all spiritual transgression is a sickness, and a sickness does not combine with good things, as a good thing does, but is healed through the receiving of what is good. Righteousness is health, and unrighteousness is sickness. Therefore the soul is impatient, and the mind by the coming of perils; not having a firm and healthy mind. Therefore also the prophet, urging us to the greatest firmness, said, God has proved us, saying, "You have tried us as silver is tried," and also: "I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined to me." [3.] Therefore let us rather choose to be, according to the Apostle, in "weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities." For the time will come when we who have suffered these things will hear from the Lord, as he said to Job, "Do

you think that I have dealt with you in any other way, than that you might appear to be righteous?" Therefore, O Kilonia, let us strive to be partakers in this voice. [4.] This can be shown from gardens also, for gardens are spread with manure so that they may come to magnificence and beauty and bring forth good and sweet fruit; likewise our soul, coming upon trials, grows more to righteousness and all good character. The same thing is said in the Gospels about the fig tree that did not bear fruit, about which the gardener asked that he might manure it.

Why Job sat on the dunghill. [5.] Therefore Job sat on the dunghill during his trials, and sitting there waited for a word from God. Patience under trials is a very great good. For despising all worldly things he sat on the dunghill as if in the emperor's palace. [6.] Truly, O beloved Kilonia, if riches increase do not set your heart on them. For if there come upon us the exhaustion of our possessions, or attacks of sickness, or calumnies, we should stand firm. If we want them to go away, we shall be unable to drive them all off, therefore we had better accept them all with patience. Let us seem to be judged by God rather than condemned with the world. [7.] "Now you," says the Apostle, writing to Timothy, "have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, and my suffering." I instruct you strongly to know these words, for this admonition is said not to him alone, but to all of us. For he tells us to set our minds on the things that are above.

[VI.1] We have said enough about those who are in afflictions for righteousness' sake; and now we shall talk about what you asked when you sent to me, that is, the dead man who dies in a tent. "This is the law, [2.] when someone dies in a tent: everyone who comes into the tent, and everyone who is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. 15 And every open vessel [...] is unclean." And he shall take of the burnt heifer and mix it with water and purify the vessel. "Then a clean person shall take hyssop, dip it in the water, and sprinkle it on the tent, on all the furnishings, on the people who were there [...] And the clean person shall sprinkle the unclean ones on the third day and on the seventh day. [...] Any who are unclean but do not purify themselves, those people shall be cut off from the assembly, for they have defiled the sanctuary of the Lord. Since the water for cleansing has not been dashed on them, they are unclean. It shall be a perpetual statute for them. The one who sprinkles the water for cleansing shall wash his clothes, and whoever touches the water for cleansing shall be unclean."

[3.] It is to be understood that our Saviour, in establishing this commandment, did not give it to be understood literally, for he said to Peter, "One who has bathed does not need to wash." For it is manifest that he that has purified himself once by being born again will not be defiled by anything that is mentioned in the law (that is, a dead man, or a dead man's bone, or anything else). For it is not right to wash the outside of the cup and neglect inner, that is, spiritual purity. [4.] And the distinction between foods is abolished not only by the voice from heaven to Peter, saying, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane," but also what the Lord said to his disciples, that not those things that go into a person defile

a person, but those things which come out. [5.] For the voice that came to Peter one might also understand of the Gentiles, that God forbids rejecting anyone from the faith, as also the great Peter indicated, when he said, while talking to Cornelius, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean" that comes to the faith.

[6.] Therefore not only by this was the distinction between foods abolished, but by what was said by the Lord. And lest we fall into prolixity declaring how the law is abolished in detail, let us reject it entirely as if [we were] sitting with the apostles, for it is wrong, they said, to put upon the necks of believers a yoke which our fathers were not able to bear.

[7.] For there had been a question in the church, and those who said that believers should be circumcised. For it is said in the Acts, "The apostles and the elders met together for to consider this matter. And [...] Peter stood up and said to them, 'My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit'." And soon after James said, "I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood." And shortly afterwards the apostles saw fit to choose certain men and send them to the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas and Silas and Judas surnamed Barsabas, and wrote by them thus: "The apostles and elders [...] to the believers [...] in Antioch and Syria [...], greetings. Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no instructions from us, have said things to disturb you [...] we have decided unanimously to choose representatives[...] and send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ." And afterwards: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication."

[8.] The commandment of the Holy Spirit and the apostles says that the Gentiles are not to be compelled to keep the law of Moses – looking at the law carnally, as of the washing of vessels and having respect to many other things. [VII.1] But someone will ask, why did God not allow them to eat of other beasts, which other people eat, but commanded them to abstain from them, dividing them into clean and unclean? [2.] For if the vegetarian life is pure and free from wrongdoing, and not thought unrighteous (since we can live on the fruit of the earth), we do not act at all justly, since of old we have done injury to those creatures by slaughtering them for our pleasure. Nor was it enough for us to take our ease at their expense, and enjoy their labours, but after so much service we take them to be slaughtered, and make their harm our pleasure. [3.] And if it is forgiveable to eat animals, since God has created them for our pleasure, why do we not eat those that have no part in our service? But it is rather those that labour for us – the oxen that plough, the cows that give milk, the

sheep that adorn us with their wool – that are slaughtered and killed. But if anyone ate a pig, he was reproached and had to be purified.

[4.] For whom (I mean, for whose salvation) were these laws given by God? – For God has commanded nothing that is not to our benefit. But [he so commanded in order] that he should show the way of piety to the many, by separating them from the foods of Egypt, and instead leading them to integrity. And as often physicians heal those who are sick with other kinds of food, [5.] this first law was necessary because of the smoke of idolatry, so that they should accept a multitude of customs, and be tried, how diligent they would be in this. For law is compulsion. Those who would not obey God in small things would not obey him in greater things, but those who obeyed in small things would hold the greater.

[6.] Therefore he first decreed the law about foods and sacrifices and other simpler things, not unaware that what goes into a man cannot defile him, but rather desiring that our souls should be taught by lesser things, so that they would hold fast to those that were more necessary. As schoolmasters bring children to learning by writing simple characters for them, so God instead of written lines gave the law. He gave it to them so that having learnt it first, they should pass on to higher things – [7.] as Paul also revealed, "[the law] has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities" For a shadow does not have a true image of things, but an image explains that of which it is the image. So he shows the image of things which are to come by the likeness of things that have already come. As the shadow is to the image, so is the law to the gospel, and as the image is to the things themselves, so is the gospel to the things that are to come. [VIII.1] And since this is how things are, it was necessary that this commandment concerning food should be the shadow of good things to come, which were revealed and purified by the gospel. We should not so much concern ourselves with food, and with which animals have cloven hooves, as with righteousness and with the food of understanding and with works of love towards God.

What is dividing the hoof, and what is chewing the cud? [2.] "Cloven hooves" there are a useful and rational life here; and what elsewhere is "bringing up the cud" is understanding the Scriptures properly, lest understanding them literally we do ourselves harm. [3.] For the law does not only divide beasts into clean and unclean, even if there is much confusion in the dietary regulations. For the pig, in that it does not chew the cud, is unclean, but in that it has a cloven foot, it is clean. And the camel, in that it does not have cloven hooves, is unclean, but in that it chews the cud, it is clean. If in one way they are clean and in one way they are unclean, they are half clean and half unclean. Altogether unclean are those which neither have cloven hooves nor chew the cud; but those that do both (I mean have cloven hooves and chew the cud) are clean. [4.] So the pig is half clean, and the elephant altogether unclean, for it neither chews the cud nor has cloven hooves. The law commands that one should keep away from them, and not touch their bones, or anything dead. So how do they regard those of a half clean beast unclean, while those of a completely unclean beast, that is, the elephant, they do not regard as unclean, but make use of its ivory and its tusks, not

keeping the commandments? How does the prophet in the Psalms make a house for Christ out of ivory? "From ivory palaces," he said, "make you glad; daughters of kings are among your ladies of honour." But the law had once forbidden to touch the bones of such a beast.

How a simple reading of Scripture without understanding is a veil. [5.] Do the scriptures contradict themselves, or do the prophets disagree with the law? But rather the Lord's books agree among themselves to praise him worthily and to send us into one and the same knowledge and life, and one hope that is to come, if the veil of the scriptures is drawn aside. It is impossible for it to be drawn aside, unless we turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. And so with an uncovered face we shall know his glory, which is proclaimed in the old books, [6.] not making him a house of ivory and gold (for this is not what the prophet commands). If the Jews are in error about Christ in this way, we know that the Deity takes no pleasure in the dead wiles of human ingenuity, but in those things which are living and never decay.

How the towers are spiritual bodies. [7.] The "towers" are the spiritual bodies, in whom the Lord rejoices, seeing them without sin in the resurrection. Therefore he calls our bodies towers of ivory, which are sanctified with good works as if with ivory, and they shall receive the kingdom, and God is glad of them, as the prophet says, "I was glad when they said to me, Let us go to the house of the Lord." [IX.1] Let us therefore follow the way of the word: light is shone upon the shadow, the law is fulfilled, hope is come near, the truth is revealed, the end of time has come, God has sent his Son to redeem man, who was under the nomos. Not only can the blood and ashes of the heifer and the hyssop purify the unclean, but the whole commandment of the nomos was ordained to that end; for that was not what was awaited, but the Lord Christ. [2.] The hope has come, the gospel is preached, we have learnt greater things. Where now is the purification that was written required? For the law and the prophets were proclaimed until John. But since John, those who think to be purified by the nomos transgress the nomos; for the nomos is washing, and purified by purifications. Since the coming of Christ there are no more ashes of the heifer, for it was not permitted to use the ashes of any other heifer but that prescribed by Moses, nor to omit this mode of purification, nor for anyone who was not purified to go unpunished.

[3.] " This is a statute of the law that the Lord has commanded: Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect, in which there is no blemish and on which no yoke has been laid. You shall give it to the priest Eleazar, and it shall be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence." And then there is also this law: if a man enter the tent of a man that has died, he shall be unclean, and so shall all that is in that tent, and anyone who touches them is unclean. And he shall take some of the ashes that are made purification, and mix them with water and hyssop, and he shall purify those that are unclean. And then, if anyone becomes unclean and does not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from the congregation, because he has defiled the holy things of the Lord, because he has not been sprinkled with the water of purification. And this shall be an eternal law for you.

[X.1] If the Jews want to live according to the law, none of them ought to take the book of the law into his hands, nor kill the lamb and keep the passover, lest they come under wrath

as having defiled the holy things of the Lord. [2.] For it says, if any person becomes unclean and is not purified, that soul shall be cut off from the congregation, because he has not been purified with the water of purification. [3.] It does not say ordinary water, but water that has been mixed with the ashes of the heifer, because that is purification according to the law. For God did not ordain that they should be purified with water only, lest they should boast, but that they should not touch a tomb, nor enter the house of one who had died, nor cross a field of the dead – which is impossible. [4.] Therefore if you set yourself to live according to the law when there are no more ashes left, you have fallen under condemnation; for God has so arranged it, that they should be forced to seek one who would redeem them from the law. "For I say," said the apostle, "to every man that is circumcised, that he must fulfil the whole nomos." [5.] The time is past, there is no more ash, it is no longer written on tablets of stone, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, compelling those who are under the law to serve the Lord against their will, but on tablets of flesh for those who would live forever to serve God of their free will.

[6.] I would have liked to ask them kindly how they would have us keep the law: as the law itself and the Holy Spirit command us, or as they themselves think it should be kept? If it is as they think, then they command nothing but the breaking of the law. For the nomos is: anyone who has touched a dead bone, or a dead body, if he is not purified, then he shall be cut off from his people lest he touch the holy things. But they, when they have touched dead persons or bones, not only do not purify themselves, but they defile the holy things when they approach them. But if [they say that the law is to be kept] as the Holy Spirit commands, then how are they not the most shameless of all people, [7.] if they tell us to live according to the Spirit, and themselves are seen to do the opposite? "For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God."

[XI.1] For the mystery of the heifer is kept in us, who keep the nomos not according to the letter, but according to the spirit, not serving the shadow, or the likeness, or the image, but the truth itself according to the truth. [2.] Human weakness invented these signs, in which it placed its ignorance; but it received the truth from others. For it is impossible for humanity, being still separated from the goodness of God because of the deceptions that beset it, to receive the signs of the truth, wherein it should understand the truth. Those whose souls are healthy and can understand the Creator by his heavenly goodness, those need neither signs nor images. But it needed to be shown at first in the law, so that thereby they would become capable also of spiritual things, of which our Lord Jesus Christ has taught us. Those who have tasted the truth shall not worship God in Jerusalem, nor on Mount Gerizim, but in spirit and in truth, lifting up pure hands. [3.] For the holy is not confined in space, nor measured in length of time. By such pure service is the true heifer made manifest, of which she was an image, to show what true purification is. For "See," he said, "that you make them according to the pattern for them, which is being shown."

How the heifer is the flesh of Christ.

[4. "The heifer" is the true flesh of Christ, which he took for the purification of the world. She is called red because of the passion, and without blemish because of his innocence, and without the yoke, because he was free of all sin, and not trained to harness, because he was dispassionate, and outside the camp – outside Jerusalem, in a clean place – he was killed away from any tumult. By her blood the churches are sanctified, by her ashes the people are purified, and by her death all the nations are redeemed from death.[5. For "The Lord," he says, "is my helper. And Jeremiah says: "my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble, to you shall the nations come from the ends of the earth and say: Our ancestors have inherited nothing but lies. And for this reason it is burnt (for the scripture says, they shall burn "her skin and her flesh and her blood, with her dung"), [6. because the mysteries are established for the enlightenment and illumination and vivification of those who are taught. Her flesh is holy works, her blood is the word of interpretation, her skin the image and purification of faith which, when we have it, we offer to God. Her dung is the stinking sores of transgression, for he took our infirmities upon him, etc.

[7] Hence the law commands us to burn all this, and by this is to be understood the spiritual life, whereby we are to be enlightened by being made alive in the spirit in our hearts, that we understand nothing dark of him, and as if brought out of the dungeon into God's light on high, as if somehow upon a high mountain, receiving the coming of the Holy Spirit. For as the eye is the light of the body, so is the mind the light of the soul. When you escape the darkness of what is written, you will remain in the light forever.

Why they roast the flesh of the lamb and eat it. [XII.1] The flesh of the lamb is not boiled in water, but roasted and eaten. For he forbids it to be eaten raw, or boiled with water; and this saying is about Christ. For he was the perfect lamb: for he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, etc. For when he brings his people out of Egypt, and delivers them from the oppressor, he is a lamb; but when he purifies from sin, he is a heifer without blemish. [2.] Therefore cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet are cast into the midst of the burning, so that we may read in these books which reveal to us by these images, how the scripture shows to us that it is not fitting, when we make enquiry concerning the flesh of Christ, to fail to make reference immediately to the Holy Trinity. For thus is the coming of the Word, holding this faith, and by no means making up opinions of our own about the incarnation of the pre-eternal Word. [3.] The cedar wood, because it does not rot, and is evergreen, we take to indicate the Father, who possesses incorruptibility and immortality. We take the hyssop as a symbol of the coming of the only-begotten Son, for he came for our healing and salvation, for this herb helps against the wasting away of the body, and our Lord Jesus Christ brought us to life when we had dried up and withered away, and brought us back to our original honour. We say that the scarlet denotes the communion of the Holy Spirit, because of whom our souls will bear a good token, and his gifts shine forth from our bodies. [4.] And this is an image of the Trinity made of those things thrown into the burning of the heifer.

[5.] And that there are two persons indicates that there are two lives, the pure and the murky, and that the choice of the good life requires help, [showing] by these signs that when one is enlightened, his soul immediately receives renewal, whereby it is all cleansed of sin. [6.] And the ash that is sprinkled on those who are defiled reveals on the one hand the burial of the body of Christ, how he entered into the dust of the earth for our sake, and on the other symbolises repentance from sins, for while Christ was not yet come, they purified themselves with ashes. And why did the scriptures call Christ's death the dust of death and ashes? Because now they are purified by being baptised into Christ's death, which washes the wounds which we have sustained through transgressions. Those who "were baptised into Christ," says the apostle, "were baptised into his death. Therefore we are buried with him by baptism," etc.

[7.] Why then do the scriptures call Christ's death dust and ashes? Because Christ underwent his passion not in the imagination, but in reality, having taken our flesh unchanged, and tasted death, like us, in truth. Thus they who have believed in him, but do not say that he really underwent his passion for us, are still in their sins. [8.] Therefore the people were not commanded to use the ashes of a second heifer, if there was no more of the first, that it should be clearly manifest, that Christ died for our sake, he died for the salvation of the world. And, says the apostle, "will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God," having brought the flesh into eternal life. [XIII.1] What else does it say? For the rest should also be seen. And this is the law: if a man die in a tent, anyone who enters the tent is unclean, as is everything that is there. He does not speak of death in general, but of spiritual death – for the soul also dies, and not for a time, but eternally. As the prophet says, "The soul that sins, it shall die." [2.] This is real death, that is, the death of sin. For the beauty of the soul, and its covering, and its adornment, is a good life according to the scriptures. "The wise woman," he says, "builds her house." Likewise the Lord commands each of us to build our houses by good living, like the work of the wise man who built his house upon the rock. He calls himself the rock, and the stronghold of faith the house.

[3.] For if a man dies in spiritual death, and you enter his house, that is to say, his way of life and his works, you have immediately defiled your conscience and darkened your mind. However, if you repent before the evil can fester in your soul and body, you will come and purify yourself with the holy body. [4.] Every vessel that is open, and has no cover tied on it, is unclean. But every soul that is tied up with bonds of love and bound around, cannot receive that defilement. But that which is open through weakness, and does not bear the seal of Christ upon it, is defiled by the wiles of the Devil. Thus Jeremiah told the people, saying, "For death has come in through their doors." He calls their senses doors.

[5.] If therefore they want to obey the words of the law concerning those who have died, how in reality one who has touched a dead man should be unclean, then let us say what sort of a likeness that was, that those who had touched a dead person should be in defilement. How is it that we consider dead bodies unclean – as not going to die ourselves, or as going to die?

If as not going to die, then we shall say nothing. But if as going to die, it is impossible for anyone not to taste death. What is this absurdity, to abhor dying bodies, as if we were not going to be just like them? For both the dying and the dead are more honourable than we (if they are not afflicted with sins), for they have escaped the occasion of sin. "For whoever has died," he said, "is freed from sin." [6.] If it were not clean, would the Lord wish to raise it up and grant it the Kingdom of Heaven? The Lord spoke concerning the resurrection of the dead, as he spoke to Moses, "He is not a God of the dead, but of the living." If he is a God of the living, the bodies that have left this life are alive, in that they have the hope of resurrection; therefore they are not unclean, for God takes care of them. [7.] Or how did the bones of Joseph not defile those who approached them? For all the people went with them.

[XIV.1] And anyone who crosses a field of the dead, or touches a dead body, or a human bone, or a grave, shall be unclean. [2.] What is a field of the dead? The "field of the dead" is the mentality of self-indulgence, which has hurt many, and has undone countless numbers by bringing them imaginary pleasures. And the wise [son of] Sirach prayed that he might avoid this snare: "O Lord, Father and Governor of all my whole life, leave me not to their counsels. [...] Let not the greediness of the belly nor lust of the flesh take hold of me." For blessed indeed is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, and has gone round far off from wicked works. [3.] Or the bone of a dead man or the grave of a dead man. The bone means those who have abandoned the faith, and are not members of the church, but are cut off, and dead, and have lost all movement of life, and are separated from the most holy head, Our Lord, on whom the whole body depends, and being put together grows into a holy temple to the Lord. [4.] The "grave" and the "tomb" are hypocrites, and because they are fair on the outside but evil on the inside, the Lord compared them to whitewashed tombs.

[5.] The nomos commands that anyone who has touched this sort of wickedness should be purified. For it is good for those who have sinned in small things to purify themselves quickly, before they descend to the depths of evil. [6.] The seventh day, on which the unclean person is declared clean, is the distance from sin to confession, the time not having come for their complete pilgrimage. For if these seven days were longer than their pilgrimage, then, the times coming to an end, they would find no place for repentance. And on the seventh day, that is, at the end of life, he should be found clean. [7.] The ashes symbolise humility, as David said, "a humbled heart God will not despise." And the Ninevites also repented with sackcloth and ashes. Likewise also Esther filled her head and ashes and dung, when she prayed to the Lord for her fellow-countrymen. Likewise Abraham said to the Lord, "I am dust and ashes." And it says in the hundred and first Psalm, "I eat ashes like bread, and mingle tears with my drink," showing great humility, offered wholeheartedly. And he also says, "O give thanks to the Lord; for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever."

[XV.1] These are the true purifications of those who fear God, and these are the sprinklings which are accomplished by the Body of Christ, whereby not only bodies, but souls also are cleansed, better than by the blood of a heifer or the other purifications of the nomos. For

the blood of Christ, says the apostle, will purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God, to whom be glory now and forever and unto ages of ages, Amen.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.

Note from the source file. De cibis (On the distinction between foods) Text translated into English from Old Slavonic by Ralph Cleminson, commissioned and edited by Roger Pearse, who then released it into the public domain.