Homilies on the Song of Songs

Origen of Alexandria (c. AD 185–253)

SermonIndex.net / Church Fathers

Homilies on the Song of Songs — Homily 1

Latin source: J.-P. Migne (ed.), Patrologia Latina 23, cols. 1117–1130 (Jerome's Latin version of Origen's Homiliae in Canticum canticorum), via the Corpus Corporum digital text (University of Zurich). This English translation is in the public domain.

Want a professionally translated (non-free) version? Check out the Ancient Christian Writers translation by R. P. Lawson. — PREFACE OF JEROME (to the most blessed Pope Damasus)

Origen, while in his other books he has surpassed all men, in the Song of Songs has surpassed himself. For having completed ten volumes, which come almost to twenty thousand lines, he expounds — first the Seventy Translators, then Aquila and Symmachus and Theodotion, and finally the fifth edition, which he writes that he found on the Actian shore — so magnificently and so plainly, that it seems to me there has been fulfilled in him what is said: The king has brought me into his chamber. And so, laying aside that work — because it is a matter of vast leisure, labor, and expense to render into the Latin tongue such great things, so worthy a work — these two treatises, which he composed after the manner of everyday speech for little ones still at the breast, I have translated faithfully rather than elegantly: offering you a taste of his meaning, not a full meal; that you may observe how greatly those things are to be esteemed which are great, when even these little ones can give such pleasure.

HOMILY 1

[§1] Just as we have learned through Moses that certain things are not only holy, but holy of holies; and others not only sabbaths, but sabbaths of sabbaths; so now we are taught, when Solomon writes, that there are certain things not only Songs, but the Song of Songs. Blessed indeed is he who enters the holy place, but more blessed he who enters the holy of holies. Blessed is he who keeps sabbaths, but more blessed he who keeps the sabbath of sabbaths. Blessed likewise is he too who understands the songs and sings them. For no one sings except at festivals;

but far more blessed is he who sings the Song of Songs. And as he who enters the holy place still has need of many things, that he may be able to go in to the holy of holies; and he who celebrates the sabbath which was appointed by the Lord for the people still has much that is necessary, that he may keep the sabbath of sabbaths: in the same way, one is found only with difficulty who, passing through all the songs that are contained in the Scriptures, is able to ascend to the Song of Songs. You must go out from Egypt, and, having gone out from the land of Egypt, pass through the Red Sea, that you may be able to sing the first song, saying: Let us sing to the Lord, for gloriously has he been glorified.

But although you have spoken the first song, you are still far from the Song of Songs. Traverse the land of the desert spiritually, until you come to the well which the kings dug, that there you may sing the second song. After this, come to the neighborhood of the holy Land, that, stationed upon the bank of the Jordan, you may sing the song of Moses, saying: Give ear, O heaven, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. Again you have need to serve as a soldier under Jesus, and to possess the holy Land by inheritance, and that the bee may prophesy to you, and the bee judge you — Deborah is interpreted ”bee” — that you may be able to learn also that song which is contained in the book of Judges. Then, ascending to the book of Kingdoms, come to the song sung when David was delivered from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul, and said: The Lord is my firmament, and my strength, and my refuge, and my deliverer. You must come as far as Isaiah, that with him you may say: I will sing a song to my beloved concerning my vineyard. And when you have passed through them all, mount up to higher things, that, a beautiful soul together with the Bridegroom, you may sing this Song of Songs as well.

[§2] Of how many persons it consists, I am uncertain. But, by your prayers and the Lord’s revealing, I seem to have found four persons in it: a man and a bride; with the bride, maidens; with the bridegroom, bands of companions. Some things are said by the bride, others by the bridegroom, some by the young girls, some by the companions of the bridegroom. For it is fitting that at a wedding there should be a throng of maidens with the bride, and a crowd of young men with the bridegroom. Do not seek all this outside: do not look beyond those who have been saved by the preaching of the Gospel. Understand Christ to be the Bridegroom, and the Church to be the Bride without spot or wrinkle, of whom it is written: That he might present to himself a glorious Church, having neither spot nor wrinkle, nor any such thing, but that it should be holy and unblemished. But those who, though they are faithful, are nevertheless not such as the word just described, but seem to have obtained salvation only after a certain measure — understand that the souls of believers are the maidens with the bride; while the Angels and those who have come to the perfect man, understand to be the men with the bridegroom. Hence, then, there appear to me four ranks: one man and one woman, and two choirs

singing in harmony with one another — the bride singing with the young girls, the bridegroom singing with his fellows.

And when you have understood this, hear the Song of Songs, and make haste to understand it, and to say with the bride the things which the bride says, that you may hear what the bride also heard. But if you cannot say with the bride the things she said, that you may hear the things spoken to the bride, make haste at least to become one with the companions of the bridegroom. And further, if you are lower even than they, be with the maidens who abide amid the bride's delights. For these are, in this book, at once the characters of a drama and of a wedding-song — from which the Gentiles too laid claim to the wedding-song and took up a poem of this kind. For the Song of Songs is indeed a wedding-song. First the bride prays; and at once, in the midst of her prayers, she is heard: she sees the bridegroom present, she sees the maidens joined to her company. Then the bridegroom answers her; and after the bridegroom's words, while he suffers for her salvation, the companions answer, saying that, until the bridegroom is at his rest and rises up from his passion, they will make certain ornaments for the bride. But now the very words must be set down, in which first the voice of the bride making entreaty is heard.

[§3] Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. Of which this is the sense: How long will my bridegroom send me kisses through Moses, send me kisses through the prophets? Now I long to touch his own lips; let him come himself, let him himself descend. She prays, therefore, to the Father of the bridegroom, and says to him: Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. And because she is such that there is fulfilled upon her that prophetic word in which it is said: While you are yet speaking, I will say, Behold, here I am, the Father hears the bride of the bridegroom, and sends his Son. Seeing him whose coming she had implored, she ceases to pray, and speaks to him face to face: For your breasts are better than wine, and the fragrance of your ointments is above all spices. The Bridegroom, therefore, Christ, sent by the Father, comes anointed to the bride, and it is said to him: You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows. If the bridegroom has touched me, I too shall be of good fragrance; I too am anointed with ointments, and his ointments reach even to me, that I may be able to say with the Apostles: We are the good fragrance of Christ in every place. But we, when we hear these things, still reek with sins and vices, of which the penitent prophet speaks:

My scars have festered and are corrupted, because of my foolishness. Sin is of a foul odor; virtue breathes forth ointments, the figures of which you may read again in Exodus. For there too you will find storax, onycha, galbanum, and the rest. These indeed for incense. Then, for the perfumer's work, various ointments are taken, among which are spikenard and storax. And God, who made heaven

and earth, speaks to Moses, saying: I have filled them with the spirit of wisdom and understanding, that they may make the works of the perfumer's art. God even teaches perfumers.

[§4] If these things are not understood spiritually, are they not mere fables? Unless they have something of a secret in them, are they not unworthy of God? It is necessary, therefore, that he who knows how to hear the Scriptures spiritually — or who at least does not yet know, but desires to know — should strive with all his labor not to live according to flesh and blood, that he may become worthy of the spiritual secrets, and (to speak somewhat more boldly) worthy of a spiritual longing or love. For there is also a spiritual love. And just as there is a certain carnal food and another spiritual, and one drink of the flesh and another of the spirit, so there is a certain carnal love coming from Satan, and another love of the spirit, taking its beginning from God. And no one can be possessed by two loves. If you are a lover of the flesh, you do not receive the love of the spirit. If you have despised all bodily things — I do not say flesh or blood only, but silver and possessions, and the earth itself, and heaven itself (for these shall pass away) — if you have scorned all these, and your soul is bound to none of them, nor are you held back by any love of vices, you can receive spiritual love. This, because the occasion has arisen, [I say] that we might say something of spiritual love.

Now it is profitable for us to keep Solomon's precept — or rather the precept of him who spoke through Solomon concerning wisdom, saying thus: Love her, and she will keep you; encompass her, and she will exalt you; honor her, that she may embrace you. There is a certain spiritual embrace; and would that it might come to pass that a deeper embrace of the bridegroom enclose my bride, that I too may be able to say what is written in the same book: His left hand is under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me.

[§5] Therefore: Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. It is the custom of the Scriptures to put the imperative mood for the optative, as in that place: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name — for "would that it be hallowed"; and now in the present passage: Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for that which is "would that he might kiss me. Then she beholds the bridegroom: he comes anointed with ointments. Nor could he come to the bride otherwise, nor was it fitting that the Father should send the Son to the wedding otherwise. With various ointments he anointed him, and made him Christ; he comes breathing forth diverse fragrances, and hears, For your breasts are better than wine. Fittingly the divine word names one and the same thing, according to the quality of the places, by different words. When a victim is offered in the Law, and it wishes to show the understanding, it speaks of the "little breast of separation. But when someone reclines with Jesus and enjoys the sharing of his thoughts, it addresses not the "little breast," as above, but the "breast. Further, when the bride speaks to the

bridegroom — because a nuptial song is being brought in — it names neither the ”little breast,” as in the sacrifice, nor the ”breast,” as in John the disciple, but ”breasts,” saying: For your breasts are better than wine.

Share, as a bride, in the thoughts of the bridegroom, and you will know that thoughts of this kind make one drunk and glad. And just as the Lord’s inebriating cup is altogether excellent, so the bridegroom’s breasts are better than all wine: For your breasts are better than wine. In the midst of her prayers she turns her words to the bridegroom: And the fragrance of your ointments is above all spices. Not with one, but with all ointments the bridegroom comes anointed. But if he will deign to come also to my soul, made his bride — how beautiful must she be, that she may draw him to herself from heaven, that she may make him come down to earth, that he may come to his beloved! With what beauty must she be adorned, with what love must she burn, that he may speak to her the things he spoke to the perfect bride: For your neck, for your eyes, for your cheeks, for your hands, for your belly, for your shoulders, for your feet! — concerning which, if the Lord grant it, we shall discourse: how the members of the bride are diversified, and how a different praise is spoken of each part, that after the discussion we may labor to have the like said also of our own soul. Better, then, are your breasts than wine. If you have seen the bridegroom, then you will understand that it is true which is said:

For your breasts are better than wine, and the fragrance of your ointments is above all spices. Many have possessed spices. The queen of the south brought spices to Solomon, and many others possessed spices; but however much anyone may have had, they cannot be compared to the fragrances of Christ, of which the bride now says: The fragrance of your ointments is above all spices. I think that Moses too had spices, and Aaron, and each one of the prophets. But if I have seen Christ, and perceived the sweetness and fragrance of his ointments, at once I pronounce sentence, saying: The fragrance of your ointments is above all spices. Your name is ointment poured out — a prophetic mystery. Only let the name of Jesus come into the world, and the ointment is proclaimed as poured out. In the Gospel too a woman, taking an alabaster jar of ointment of costly spikenard, poured it over the head and feet of Jesus. Observe diligently what the two women poured over the head of the Savior. For the sinful woman is shown to have poured over his feet, and she who is not called a sinner over his head. Observe, I say, and you will find, in the Gospel reading, that not fables and tales were written by the Evangelists, but mysteries. And so the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment — if what the sinful woman had is to be referred to the feet, and what the woman who was no sinner had, to the head.

Nor is it any wonder that the house was filled with the fragrance, since this world has been filled with it. In the same place it is written of Simon the leper and his

house. I think that the leper, the prince of this world, is also called ”Simon the leper,” whose house at the coming of Christ was filled with sweet fragrance, when the sinful woman did penance, and the holy woman drenched the head of Jesus with the fragrances of the ointment.

[§6] Your name is ointment poured out. As ointment, which by its outpouring scatters its fragrance far and wide, so the name of Christ has been poured out. Over all the earth Christ is named, in all the world the Lord is proclaimed. For his name is ointment poured out. Now the name of Moses is heard, which before was shut up only within the narrow bounds of Judea. For not one of the Greeks makes mention of him, nor in any history of Gentile letters do we find anything written about him or the rest. As soon as Jesus shone forth in the world, he led forth with him the Law and the Prophets, and truly was fulfilled, Your name is ointment poured out. Therefore the maidens have loved you. Because through the Holy Spirit the love of God has been poured out in our hearts, fittingly the name of ”outpouring” is introduced: Your name is ointment poured out. As she says this, the bride beholds the maidens. When she was entreating the Father of the bridegroom, and speaking face to face to the bridegroom himself, the maidens were not yet present. But in the midst of her prayers the choir of young girls enters, and is praised by the bride’s words: Therefore the maidens have loved you, and drawn you. And the maidens answer: We will run after you, toward the fragrance of your ointments. How beautifully do the bridegroom’s attendants not yet have the confidence of the bride!

The bride does not follow behind his back, but enters at his side. She grasps the bridegroom’s right hand, and her hand is held by the bridegroom’s right hand. But the handmaids enter after him. There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and maidens without number. One is my dove, my perfect one; she is the only one of her mother, the only one of her who bore her. After you, therefore, we will run, toward the fragrance of your ointments. To those who walk with all uprightness it is said: After you we will run, toward the fragrance of your ointments, according to that word: I have finished the course; and that: Those who run in the stadium all run indeed, but one receives the prize. The prize is Christ; and these maidens, whom we recognize as standing outside because of the beginning of their love, according to that example — But the friend of the bridegroom, standing and hearing him, rejoices with joy because of the bridegroom’s voice — undergo something of the same kind. When the bridegroom enters, they remain outside; but the bride — beautiful, perfect, without spot, without wrinkle — having entered into the bridegroom’s chamber, into the royal inner sanctuary, returns to the maidens, and announces to them the things which she alone has beheld, and says:

[§7] The king has brought me into his chamber. She does not say, ”he has brought us, the many, into his chamber.” The many remain outside; into the chamber the bride alone enters, that she may see the dark and hidden treasures, and report to

the maidens: The king has brought me into his chamber. Again the maidens, that is, the very great throng of brides who are but beginning, when the bride has entered the bridegroom's chamber and beholds the riches of her husband, while they await his coming, sing joyfully together: We will exult and be glad in you. They rejoice at the bride's perfection. There is no rivalry in the virtues. This love is clean, this love is without vice. We will exult and be glad in you; we will love your breasts. She who is the greater already enjoys the milk of your breasts, and says, exulting: Better are your breasts than wine. But these who bring exultation and gladness — for they are maidens — bring love, and say: We will exult and be glad in you. We will love — not "we love," but "we will love" — your breasts above wine. Then they speak to the bride: Equity has loved you. They praise the bride, giving her the name of "equity" from her own virtues: Equity has loved you. Again the bride answers the maidens:

[§8] I am black and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Do not look at me, because I am darkened, for the sun has looked askance at me. She is beautiful indeed, and I can find in what way the bride is beautiful. But we ask how she is black, and, without whiteness, is fair. She did penance for her sins, and conversion bestowed beauty upon her; and therefore she is sung as beautiful. But because she is not yet cleansed from all the filth of her sins, not yet washed in salvation, she is called black; yet she does not remain in that dark color. And so she becomes white, when she rises to greater things, and begins to ascend from lowly things to the heights, and it is said of her: Who is this that comes up made white? And, that the mystery of the perfected one may be described more plainly, it does not say, as is read in most manuscripts, leaning upon her kinsman — that is, ἐπιστηριζομένη — but ἐπιστηθιζομένη, that is, reclining upon his breast. And significantly it is said of the soul of the bride and of the word, "reclining upon his breast," because there is the ruling part of our heart. Whence, departing from carnal things, we ought to perceive spiritual things, and to understand that it is far better to love thus than to cease from love. She ascends, then, reclining upon the breast of her kinsman;

and she who now, at the opening of the Song, is set down as black, is sung of, at the end of the wedding-song: Who is this that comes up made white? We have understood how the bride is both black and beautiful. But if you too do not do penance, beware lest your soul be called black, and foul, and you be disfigured with a twofold ugliness: black because of past sins, and foul because you persist in the same vices. But if you do penance, your soul will be black because of former offenses, but because of penance it will have something, so to speak, of an Ethiopian beauty. And because I have once named the Ethiopian, I wish to summon Scripture as witness to this discourse. Aaron and Miriam murmur, because Moses has an Ethiopian woman for a wife. And now Moses takes an Ethiopian woman for a wife, since his law has passed over to this Ethiopian woman of ours. Let Aaron

murmur — the priesthood of the Jews; let Miriam also murmur — their Synagogue: Moses cares nothing for the murmuring; he loves his Ethiopian woman, of whom it is also said elsewhere through the Prophet: From the ends of the rivers of Ethiopia they shall bring offerings; and again: Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands to God before others. Beautifully, ”before others. For just as, in the Gospel, that woman with the issue of blood anticipated the healing of the synagogue-ruler’s daughter, so Ethiopia, while Israel was sick, was healed.

By their offense, salvation came to the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy. I am black and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem. And you, soul of the Church, turn your word to the daughters of Jerusalem, and say: The bridegroom loves me more, he cherishes me more than you, who are many daughters of Israel. You stand outside, and see the bride entering the chamber. Let no one doubt that she who is called black is a black woman who is beautiful. Who are we, that we should come to know God, that we should proclaim the Songs of the Song, that we should come from the ends of Ethiopia, from the end of the earth, to hear the wisdom of the true Solomon? And when the voice of the Savior is heard thundering: The queen of the south shall come at the judgment, and shall condemn the men of this generation, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here — hear the mystic things that are said. The queen of the south comes from the ends of the earth: the Church; and she condemns the men of this generation, that is, the Jews given over to flesh and blood. She comes from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon — not of him who is proclaimed in the Old Testament, but of this one who in the Gospel is greater than Solomon.

I am black and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem: black as the tents of Kedar, beautiful as the curtains of Solomon. For to both she answers: I am black and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. The very names too agree with the bride’s beauty. The Hebrews say that Kedar is interpreted ”darkness. I am black, then, as the tents of Kedar, as the Ethiopians; beautiful, as the curtains of Solomon, which he arranged for the ornament of the tabernacle at that time when he built the temple with the utmost zeal and labor. For Solomon was rich, and no one surpassed him in all his wisdom. As one of these things: I am black and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Do not look at me, because I am darkened. She has given satisfaction concerning her blackness, and, having turned through penance to better things, she announces to the daughters of Jerusalem that she is indeed black, yet beautiful, according to what we have expounded above, and says: Do not look at me, because I am darkened. Do not, she says, marvel that I am of a swarthy color: the sun has looked askance at me — for with its full ray the brightness of its light shone upon me, and I was darkened by its heat. For I did not receive its light within me as was fitting, as the dignity of the sun required.

By their offense salvation came to the Gentiles, and again, by the unbelief of the Gentiles, knowledge to Israel. You have both in the Apostle.

[§9] The sons of my mother fought against me. It must be considered how the bride says, The sons of my mother fought against me, and when a fight of her brothers rose up against her. Look at Paul, the persecutor of the Church, and you will understand how a son of her mother fought against her. The persecutors of the Church did penance, and her adversaries, turned back again to their sister's standards, preached the faith which before they destroyed. In this prophetic spirit the bride now, singing, says: They fought against me; they set me as a keeper in the vineyards; my own vineyard I have not kept. I, the Church, I, the bride, I, without spot, have been set as keeper of very many vineyards by the sons of my mother, who once had fought against me. Bound by which anxiety and care, while I keep many vineyards, I have not guarded my own vineyard. Understand this for me of Paul, or of any other of the saints, who is anxious for the salvation of all; and you will see how, not keeping his own vineyard, he keeps the vineyards of others. And how, that he may gain others, he himself in certain respects suffers loss. And though he was free from all, he made himself a servant, that he might gain all: made weak to the weak, a Jew to the Jews;

to those who were under the Law, as under the Law, and the rest — and he says, my own vineyard I have not kept. Then she beholds the bridegroom, who, when beheld, has withdrawn. And frequently he does this throughout the whole song, which, unless a man experiences it himself, he cannot understand. Often — God is my witness — I have beheld the bridegroom drawing near to me, and being present with me as much as possible; then, when he suddenly withdrew, I could not find what I was seeking. Again, therefore, I desire his coming, and sometimes he comes again; and when he has appeared, and been grasped by my hands, again he slips away; and when he has slipped away, again he is sought by me. And this I do repeatedly, until I truly hold him, and go up, leaning upon my kinsman.

[§10] Tell me, you whom my soul has loved, where you feed, where you lie down at noon. I do not ask for other times — when you feed in the evening, when at dawn, when at the sun's setting: I seek that time when, in the full-flowering day, in full light, you dwell in the splendor of your majesty. Tell me, you whom my soul has loved, where you feed, where you lie down at noon. Observe diligently wherever you read of "noon. At Joseph's, his brothers hold their meal at noon. At noon the angels are received into Abraham's hospitality, and other things of this kind. Seek, and you will find that the divine Scripture takes up no word in vain or by chance. Who, do you think, is worthy among us to reach even to noon, and to see where the bridegroom feeds, where he lies down? Tell me, you whom my soul has loved, where you feed, where you lie down at noon. For unless you tell me, I begin to be tossed about in wandering; and while I seek you, I run into the flocks of others; and

because I am ashamed before others, I begin to cover my face and my mouth. For I am a beautiful bride, and I do not show my bare face to others, but to you alone, whom I have long since kissed. Tell me, you whom my soul has loved, where you feed, where you lie down at noon;

lest I become as one veiled over the flocks of your companions. That I may not suffer this, that I may not become veiled, that I may not cover my mouth, and, coming at last to others, begin perhaps to love even those whom I do not know: therefore tell me where I may seek you, and find you at noon, lest perchance I become as one veiled over the flocks of your companions. After these words the bridegroom warns her, and says: Either you know yourself, that you are the bride of the king, and beautiful, and made beautiful by me — since I presented to myself a glorious Church, having neither spot nor wrinkle — or know that, if you do not know yourself and are not aware of your dignity, you will suffer the things that follow. And what are these? If you do not know yourself, O beautiful among women, go forth in the tracks of the flocks, and feed — not flocks of sheep, not of lambs, but your goats. For he will set the sheep on the right hand, and the goats on the left.

[§11] If you do not know yourself, O beautiful among women, go forth in the tracks of the flocks, and feed your goats in the tents of the shepherds. In the tracks, he says, of the shepherds you will become the last; not among the sheep, but among your goats, dwelling with whom you cannot be with me, that is, with the good shepherd. I have likened you to my cavalry among the chariots of Pharaoh. If you wish to understand, O bride, how you ought to know yourself, learn to whom I have compared you, and now you will see that you are such a one as ought not to be disfigured, when you have known your own beauty. What, then, is it? I have likened you to my cavalry among the chariots of Pharaoh. I know the bridegroom to be a horseman, the prophet saying: And his riding is salvation. You are likened, therefore, to my cavalry among the chariots of Pharaoh. As much as my cavalry — I who am the Lord, and drown in the waves Pharaoh, and his crested ones, and his riders, and his horses, and his chariots — as much, I say, as my cavalry differs from the horses of Pharaoh, so much are you, O bride, O soul of the Church, better than all the daughters, better than all souls that are not of the Church. If, then, you are a soul of the Church, you are better than all souls; if you are not better, you are not of the Church. I have likened you to my cavalry among the chariots of Pharaoh, my love. Then he describes the beauty of the bride with spiritual love.

[§12] Your cheeks are as those of a turtledove. He praises her face, and is kindled by the blush of her cheeks. For the beauty of women is said to be greatest in the cheeks. So let us too understand the beauty of the soul to be in its cheeks. But her lips and her tongue let us proclaim to be her understanding. Your neck is as a necklace. As an ornament which is wont to hang from the necks of virgins, and is called ὅρμισκος (a little necklace), so, even without this adornment, your neck

itself is an ornament. [§13] After these things the bridegroom is at his rest; he has lain down as a lion, he has slept as a lion's whelp, so that thereafter it may be asked: Who shall rouse him? While he sleeps in the meantime, the companions of the bridegroom, the Angels, appear to the bride, and console her with these words: We cannot make ornaments of gold for you; for we are not so rich as your bridegroom, who bestows on you a golden necklace. We will make a likeness of gold; for we do not have gold. And in this too there is cause for gladness, if we make likenesses of gold, if we make studs of silver. We will make you likenesses of gold, with studs of silver. But not for all time; only until your bridegroom rises from his couch. For when he has risen, he himself will make you gold, he himself will make silver, he himself will adorn your mind and understanding, and you will be truly rich in the bridegroom's house, a beautiful bride — to whom be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Homilies on the Song of Songs — Homily 2

Latin source: J.-P. Migne (ed.), Patrologia Latina 23, cols. 1130–1144 (Jerome's Latin version of Origen's Homiliae in Canticum canticorum), via the Corpus Corporum digital text (University of Zurich). This English translation is in the public domain.

Want a professionally translated (non-free) version? Check out the Ancient Christian Writers translation by R. P. Lawson. — HOMILY 2

(From the place where it is written, "My spikenard has given forth its fragrance," as far as the place where it says, "For your voice is sweet, and your form beautiful.")

[§1] All the motions of the soul God, the maker of the universe, created for good; but through our use of them it often comes to pass that things which are good by nature lead us into sins, while we misuse them ill. One of the motions of the soul is love, which we use well for loving, if we love wisdom and truth. But when our love has fallen away to worse things, we love flesh and blood. You, therefore, as a spiritual person, hear spiritually the words of love being sung, and learn to transfer the motion of your soul and the burning of natural love to better things, according to that word: Love her, and she will keep you; encompass her, and she will exalt you. "Husbands, love your wives," says the Apostle; but he did not stop at what he had said, "Husbands, love your wives"; rather, knowing that there is a love of husbands even for their own wives which is dishonorable, and knowing that there is a love which is pleasing to God, he taught how husbands ought to love their wives, adding: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church." And these things we have said by way of preface to the matters which are to be discussed hereafter.

[§2] Since the friends of the bridegroom, while the king is reposing on his couch — for he has slept restfully as a lion, and a lion's whelp — had promised the bride that, until he should rise up, they would make likenesses of gold and silver, not having gold as the bridegroom does; and since in a manner, in other words, the bridegroom's passion was proclaimed: not unreasonably does the bride answer to

these things, and she herself, understanding a certain dispensation of the passion, [says] to that which she had heard, We will make you likenesses of gold with studs of silver, while the king is on his couch, she says: My spikenard has given forth its fragrance. A little bundle of a droplet is my kinsman to me; he shall abide between my breasts. How, then, shall we fit to it what went before, While the king is on his couch, that which follows, My spikenard has given forth its fragrance? The Gospel says that there came a woman having an alabaster jar of costly ointment of spikenard — not that sinful woman, but a holy one, of whom now I speak. For I know that Luke spoke of the sinful woman; but Matthew and John and Mark spoke not of a sinful woman. There came, then, not that sinful woman, but a holy one, whose name too John inserted; for it was Mary who had the alabaster jar of costly ointment of spikenard, and she poured it over the head of Jesus.

Then, when some were indignant at this — not all the disciples, but Judas alone, saying, This could have been sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor — the Master and Savior answered: The poor you have always with you; but me you have not always. For in doing this beforehand she has done it for the day of my burial. Therefore, wherever this Gospel shall be preached, what she has done shall also be told, in memory of her. In the figure, then, of this woman who now says, My spikenard has given forth its fragrance, that woman poured ointment over the head of the Lord; and you too, therefore, take up spikenard, that after you have drenched the head of Jesus with sweet fragrance, you may be able boldly to declare, My spikenard has given forth its fragrance, and to hear Jesus' answering word: Wherever this Gospel shall be preached in all the world, what she has done shall also be told in memory of her. Your deed too shall be proclaimed among all the nations. But when will you do this? If you have become as the Apostle, and have said, We are the good fragrance of Christ to God in every place, in those who are saved and in those who perish: your good works are spikenard. But if you have sinned, your sins will reek with a foul odor. For the penitent says: My scars have festered and are corrupted because of my foolishness.

It was not of spikenard that the Holy Spirit purposed now to speak, nor of that ointment which we behold with our eyes, that the Evangelist writes, but of spiritual spikenard, of the spikenard which has given forth its fragrance.

[§3] A little bundle of stacte — that is, of a drop, or a droplet — is my kinsman to me. A drop of ointment, cassia, galbanum, we read in Exodus, by the Lord's command, compounded into the incense, that is, into the priestly anointing. If, then, you see my Savior descending to earthly and lowly things, you will see how, by great power and divine majesty, a certain small droplet has flowed down to us. Of this droplet the Prophet too sang, saying: And it shall come to pass, from the droplet of this people Jacob shall be gathered together. And just as, according to another sense, a stone was cut from the mountain without hands — the coming of our Savior in

the flesh — for it was not the whole mountain that descended to earth, nor could human frailty contain the greatness of the whole mountain, but a stone from the mountain, a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, descended into the world: so, according to another understanding, he is called a droplet. For it was fitting that (since all the nations are reckoned as a droplet of the bucket) he who for the salvation of all became all things should become also a droplet, to set them free. For what did he not become for our salvation? We are empty; and he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. We are a foolish people and not wise;

and he became the foolishness of preaching, that the foolishness of God might be made wiser than men. We are weak; the weakness of God was made stronger than men. Since, therefore, all the nations are reckoned as a droplet of the bucket, and as the turn of a balance, therefore he became a droplet, that through him a fragrance might come forth from our garments, according to that word: Myrrh, and a droplet, and cassia from your garments, from the ivory houses, whence the daughters of kings have made you glad in your honor — which in the forty-fourth psalm are said to the bride. A little bundle of a droplet is my kinsman to me. Let us consider what the Church means by the name of ”kinsman,” she who speaks this of her kinsman: we are gathered from the Gentiles. Our Savior is the son of her sister, that is, of the Synagogue. For there are two sisters, the Church and the Synagogue; the Savior therefore, as we have said, being the son of the Synagogue her sister, the husband of the Church, the bridegroom of the Church, is the kinsman of his bride: A little bundle of a droplet is my kinsman to me; he shall abide between my breasts. Who is so blessed as to have as a guest, in the ruling part of the heart, between the breasts, in his own bosom, the Word of God? For this is what is sung: He shall abide between my breasts.

If your breasts have not been broken, the divine word shall dwell between them. It was fitting, in a nuptial song, that ”breasts” should be named rather than ”breast. And it is evident why, for the exposition of that which says, He shall abide between my breasts, this has been taken up: if your breasts have not been broken, between your breasts shall abide the divine word. Whence did I say, ”if your breasts have not been broken”? From Ezekiel. For in that place where Jerusalem is rebuked by the Lord’s voice, among other things it is said to her: In Egypt your breasts were broken. The breasts of the chaste are not broken; but the breasts of harlots hang wrinkled with loose skin. The breasts of the pure are upright, and swelling with virginal vigor. They receive the word of the bridegroom, and say: He shall abide between my breasts.

[§4] A cluster of cypress is my kinsman to me. The beginning is of the word, in the Word; and the beginning of cypress, that is, of flowering, is in the bud, whence she says: A cluster of cypress — that is, of flowering — is my kinsman to me. The cluster of cypress is not for all, but for those who are worthy of its flower. To others

the grape is varied; to her alone who is black and beautiful he offers himself in the beauty of the flower. A cluster of cypress is my kinsman to me. She does not say simply, ”A cluster of cypress is my kinsman,” but with the addition, ”to me,” to teach that he is not a cluster of cypress to all. But let us see in what regions this cluster of the bride is. In the vineyards of Engedi, which is interpreted ”eye of temptation. In the vineyards, then, of the eye of temptation, a cluster of cypress is my kinsman to me. The eye of temptation is in the present life. For we abide in temptation in this world; and human life upon earth is a temptation. While we are engaged in this light, we are in the vineyards of Engedi. But if afterward we deserve to be transplanted, we shall be transferred by our husbandman. And do not doubt that you can be transferred from the vineyards of Engedi to better places. Our husbandman has by frequent practice already become skilled at transferring the vine.

For you brought a vine out of Egypt; you cast out the nations, and planted it. Its shadow covered the mountains, and its branches the cedars of God. And these things which we have expounded, let the bride have spoken of the bridegroom, signifying her love, and the lodging of the coming bridegroom — how, between her breasts, and in the secret place of her heart, the coming bridegroom takes his rest. Again the bridegroom’s word is directed to her, and he says:

[§5] Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves’. She says thus to the bridegroom: Behold, my kinsman is beautiful — she does not add, ”and my love. But he, when he speaks to her, Behold, you are beautiful, adds, ”and my love. But why does she not say, ”Behold, he is beautiful, and near to me,” but only, ”Behold, he is beautiful”? Why does he say, not only, ”You are beautiful,” but ”You are beautiful, my love”? If the bride be far from the bridegroom, she is not beautiful; she becomes beautiful then, when she is joined to the Word of God. And rightly is she now taught by the bridegroom to be near, and not to depart from his side. Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful. You begin indeed to be beautiful from this, that you are near to me. But after you have begun to be beautiful, even without the addition of ”near,” you are absolutely beautiful. Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful. Let us see also another praise of the beautiful one, that we too may strive to become the bride. Your eyes are doves’. He who has looked upon a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart: he does not have the eyes of a dove. But if anyone does not have the eyes of a dove, he enters, unhappy, the house of his brother, not keeping that which is enjoined in the Proverbs:

Do not enter, unhappy one, into the house of your brother. (For that which the Seventy translated ”unhappy,” Aquila, expressing the Hebrew truth, rendered ἄγροικον. But he who has the eyes of a dove sees rightly, and obtains mercy. For seeing rightly, he shall obtain mercy. And who sees rightly, except he who beholds

with a chaste gaze and with pure eyes? Do not, then, understand me [to speak] only of these eyes of the flesh in what has been said — though to have understood it of these too is not useless — but, entering into the inner parts of your heart, and searching out with the mind those other eyes which are also enlightened by the commandment of God (for the commandment of God enlightens the eyes): shine forth in that, labor, strive, that you may holily understand all the things that have been said, and hear the like things from the Spirit who descended in the form of a dove — because ”your eyes are doves’. If you understand the Law spiritually, your eyes are doves’. If you understand the Gospel as the Gospel wills to be understood and preached, you see Jesus healing every languor and infirmity, not only at that time when these things were done carnally, but healing today also; and not only descending then to men, but descending today also, and being present — for Behold, he says, I am with you all the days, even to the consummation of the age — your eyes are doves’. Behold, you are beautiful, my love;

behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves’. The bride, hearing these praises of herself, renders to the bridegroom a return in praises: not that she bestows on him by her proclamation what he does not have, but, understanding and beholding his beauty, she says:

[§6] Behold, you are beautiful, my kinsman; yes, comely. Our couch is shady. I seek the couch on which the bridegroom rests with the bride, and, unless I am mistaken, it is the human body. For that paralytic in the Gospel who lay on his couch — and was bidden by the Savior’s voice, when his pallet had been taken up, to go into his house — before he was healed, was lying upon the weak body of his members, which afterward was made firm by the power of God. Thus, then, do I understand: Take up your pallet, and go into your house. For the Son of God had not descended from heavenly things to earthly for this, to give commands about little couches, and not to allow one rising from his sickness to depart without his little couch. Take up, he says, your pallet, and go into your house. And you too, therefore, healed by the Savior, take up your pallet, and go into your house, that when the bridegroom comes to you, his bride, and has reclined in it with you, you may say: Behold, my kinsman is the bridegroom; yes, comely. Our reclining is shady. Behold, my kinsman is beautiful: he is both beautiful and shady. For by day the sun shall not burn you, neither the moon by night.

[§7] The beams of our houses are cedars. These are the words of the multitude. And they seem to me to be spoken by the men who are with the bridegroom, of whom the discourse spoke above — houses woven with beams of cedar, and roofed with cypresses. For instead of the thorn there shall come up the cypress, and instead of the nettle there shall come up the myrtle. Seeking, then, of what nature these woods are, and finding the cedar to be incorruptible and the cypress of the best fragrance, labor you too so to roof your house, that of you too it may be said: The

beams of our houses are cedars, and our rafters cypresses. After these things the bridegroom speaks.

[§8] I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys. For my sake, who was in the valley, he descended into the valley; and coming into the valley, he becomes a lily. Instead of the tree of life, which was planted in the paradise of God, he became the flower of the whole field, that is, of the whole world and of the entire earth. For what can so be the flower of the world as the name of Christ? His name is ointment poured out. Otherwise: by himself it is said, I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys. And these things indeed of himself. Then, praising the bride, he says: As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. As the lily cannot be compared to the thorns among which it always springs up, in the same way my love, above all the daughters, is a lily among thorns. Hearing this, the bride renders a return to the bridegroom, and, perceiving his sweetness too, she breaks forth into the voice of one who praises. For the fragrance of ointments, though it breathe sweetly and soothe the sense with its odor, is nevertheless not of such a kind as to be sweet to eat. But there is something which is of the best both in savor and in fragrance — that is, which delights the throat with sweetness and soothes the spirit with its scent. Such is the apple; its nature is such that it possesses both in itself. Therefore, wishing to praise not only the graciousness of the bridegroom’s word, but also its sweetness, the bride says:

[§9] As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my kinsman among the sons. All woods, all trees, in comparison with the word of God, are reckoned barren thickets. Compared to Christ, everything you may name is a wild wood; and all things are unfruitful. For what things, compared to him, can be called fruitful? Even the trees which seemed to be bowed down with fruits, in comparison with his coming, are shown to be unfruitful. Therefore, as the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my kinsman among the sons. Under his shadow I desired, and I sat. How beautifully she says, not ”under his shadow I desire,” but ”under his shadow I desired”; and not ”I sit,” but ”I sat. For in the beginning we cannot hold proper converse with him; but in the beginning, so to speak, we enjoy a certain shadow of his majesty. Whence also it is read in the Prophets: Christ the Lord is the spirit of our countenance, to whom we said: Under his shadow we shall live among the nations; and we pass over from shadow to another shadow. For to those sitting in the region and shadow of death, a light has arisen for them. And we pass from the shadow of death to the shadow of life. Such are always the advances, that in the beginning one may desire at least to stand in the shadow of the virtues.

I think that for this reason the nativity of Jesus too began from a shadow, and was completed not in shadow but in truth. The Holy Spirit, he says, shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you. The nativity of Christ took its beginning from a shadow. And not only in Mary did his nativity begin from

a shadow, but in you too, if you are worthy, the Word of God is born. See to it, then, that you can receive his shadow, and, when you have been made worthy of the shadow, there may come to you, so to speak, his body, from which the shadow is born. For he who is faithful in little will be faithful also in greater things. Under his shadow I desired, and I sat. You see that she did not always stand in the shadow, but passed thence to better things, saying: And his fruit is sweet in my throat. I, she says, desired to rest under his shadow; but after his shadow protected me, I was also satisfied with his fruit, and I say: And his fruit is sweet to my throat.

[§10] Bring me into the house of wine. The bridegroom stood outside, and was received by the bride; for he rested between her breasts. The neighboring maidens are not such as to deserve to have the bridegroom for a guest. To the multitude he speaks outside, in parables. How I fear that perhaps we many are the maidens! Bring me into the house of wine. Why do I remain so long outside? Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. If anyone opens to me, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me. Bring me in. And now the divine word says the same: behold, Christ speaks, ”Bring me in. To you catechumens also he speaks, ”Bring me in” — not simply into the house, but into the house of wine. Let your soul be filled with the wine of gladness, with the wine of the Holy Spirit. And so bring into your house the bridegroom, the Word, Wisdom, Truth. But it can also be said to those who are not yet perfect: Bring me into the house of wine. Set love in order within me. Elegantly he said, ”set in order. For the love of very many is disordered: what they ought to love in the first place, they love in the second; what in the second, they love in the first; what they ought to love fourth, they love third; and again the third in the fourth place; and in most people the order of love is perverse.

But the love of the saints is well-ordered. To bring this to understanding — what is said, ”set love in order within me” — I wish to repeat some examples. The divine word wills you to love father, son, daughter; the divine word wills you to love Christ. Nor does it say to you, ”Do not love your children, do not be joined in love to your parents. But what does it say? ”Do not have a disordered love; do not love first father or mother, and then me; do not be held by the love of sons and daughters more than by love of me. He who loves father or mother above me is not worthy of me; he who loves son or daughter above me is not worthy of me. Recall your conscience concerning your affection for father, mother, or brother, and consider what love you have toward the word of God and of Jesus: at once you will detect that you love son and daughter more than the Word, that you love your parents more than Christ. Who, do you think, so advances among us, that he holds the love of the word of God chief and first among all, and puts his children in the second place? In the same way, love your wife. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but loves it as flesh. And the two, he says, shall be in one flesh — and not in one spirit. Love God also;

but love him not as flesh and blood, but as spirit. For he who cleaves to God is one spirit. Therefore love is well-ordered in the perfect. And that after God there may be set an order even among ourselves: the first commandment is that we love our parents; the second, that we love our children; the third, that we love our household. But if the son is bad, and the servant good, let the servant be placed in the love due a son. And so it will come about that the love of the saints is well-ordered. Our Master and Lord too, in the Gospel, establishing precepts about love, attached to the love of each one something proper, and gave the understanding of order to those who can hear the Scripture saying, ”Set love in order within me. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. You shall love your neighbor as yourself — not the neighbor with all the heart, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and with all the mind. Again, he says: Love your enemies — and he did not add, ”with all the heart. The divine word is not disordered, nor does it command impossible things, nor say, ”Love your enemies as yourselves,” but only, ”Love your enemies”; it is enough for them that we love them and do not hold them in hatred. But the neighbor, as yourself.

And God, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the mind, and with all the strength. If you have understood these things, and, having understood, have fulfilled them, you have done what is enjoined by the bridegroom’s word: Bring me into the house of wine; set love in order within me. Who, do you think, among us is of well-ordered love? Strengthen me with ointments. One of the Translators put οἰνανθῶν [vine-blossoms]. But it is the bride who speaks: Stay me up with apples. With what apples? As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my kinsman among the sons. Therefore, stay me up with his apples, because I am wounded with love. How beautiful it is, how comely, to receive a wound from love! One has taken the dart of carnal love; another has been wounded by earthly desire: but do you bare your members, and offer yourself to the chosen dart, the beautiful dart — for God is an archer. Hear the Scripture speaking of this same dart; nay, that you may marvel the more, hear the dart itself speak, what it says: He set me as a chosen arrow, and in his quiver he kept me, and said to me: It is a great thing for you to be called my servant. Understand what the arrow says, and how it is chosen by God. How blessed a thing it is to be wounded by this dart!

With this arrow had those men been wounded who conferred among themselves, saying: Was not our heart burning within us on the way, when he opened to us the Scriptures? If anyone is wounded by our word, if anyone by the teaching of the divine Scripture, and can say, ”I am wounded with love,” perhaps this also follows for him. Why do I say ”perhaps”? I set forth a plain sentence: His left hand is under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me. The word of God has wisdom both in the left hand and in the right, which, though it be manifold according to the variety of understanding, is in its foundation one. Solomon himself taught of the left and

the right hand of wisdom, saying: For length and years of life are in her right hand; but in her left hand riches and glory. Therefore let his left hand be under my head, that it may make me rest, and let the bridegroom's arm become my pillow, that the ruling part of my soul may recline upon the word of God. His left hand is under my head. It is not profitable for you to have pillows which lamentation follows. In Ezekiel it is written: Woe to those who sew pillows under every elbow of the hand. Do not sew pillows, do not seek rest for your head from elsewhere: you have the bridegroom's left hand; let it be under your head, and say:

His left hand is under my head — and when you have it, all the things which are in the left hand are bestowed upon you. For you say, in his left hand are riches and glory, and his right hand shall embrace me. Let the bridegroom's right hand embrace you wholly. For length and years of life are in his right hand; and on this account you shall be of long life, and of many days, upon the good land which the Lord your God gives you.

[§11] I have adjured you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the powers and the forces of the field. Of what does the bride adjure the daughters of Jerusalem? If you will raise up and awaken love. How long does love sleep in you, O daughters of Jerusalem, O maidens — love which does not sleep in me, because I am wounded with love? But in you, who are many, and maidens, and daughters of Jerusalem, the love of the bridegroom sleeps. I have adjured you, therefore, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you will raise up — and not only raise up, but also awaken — the love that is in you. The Creator of the universe, when he formed you, sowed in your hearts the seeds of love. But now, as it is said elsewhere, Justice slept in her, so love slumbers in you: according to what is also said elsewhere, "The bridegroom rested as a lion, and as a lion's whelp." Still, in the unbelieving and in those who are of a doubtful heart, the divine word slumbers; it is awake in the saints. It slumbers in those who are tossed by storms; but it is awakened by the voices of those who, while the bridegroom is awake, desire to be saved. At once, when he is awake, there is calm; at once the masses of the waves grow still, the contrary winds are rebuked, the raging of the billows is silent. When he sleeps, there is tempest, death, and despair. I adjure you, therefore, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the powers and the forces of the field. Of what field? Surely of that field of which it is said: the fragrance of a full field, which the Lord has blessed.

[§12] If you will raise up and awaken love, until the voice of my kinsman will. Behold, here he comes, leaping over the mountains. This the Church still speaks, exhorting the maidens to prepare themselves for the coming of the bridegroom — if indeed he will to come, and to grant them his converse. While she is still speaking, therefore, the bridegroom comes, whom she points out with her finger, and says: Behold, here he comes, leaping over the mountains. Understand the bride to be the blessed and perfect soul, who sooner sees, sooner contemplates the coming

of the Word, who perceives that wisdom has come to her, that love has come to her, and says to those who do not see: Behold, here he comes. Pray that I too may be able to say: Behold, here he comes. For if I can discourse of the word of God, in a manner I too say, Behold, here he comes. Whither? Surely not where the valley is, not where the lowly places are. Whither does he come? Leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills. If you are a mountain, the word of God leaps upon you. If you cannot be a mountain, but are a hill, second to the mountain, he bounds over you. But how beautiful and fitting to the matters are the words. He leaps over the mountains, because they are greater; he bounds over the hills, because they are smaller. He does not bound over the mountains, he does not leap over the hills. Behold, here he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills.

[§13] My kinsman is like a roe, or a young hart, upon the mountains of Bethel. These two animals are named more frequently in the Scriptures, and — that you may marvel the more — they are often set down joined together. And these are they, he says, which you shall eat, adding a little after, the roe and the hart. In the present book too the hart and the roe are named together. For in a manner these animals are akin and near to one another. The roe, that is, the dorcas, sees most sharply. The hart is a slayer of serpents. Who, do you think, is worthy among us, who according to the dignity of the place and of the mystery could set forth the full account? Let us pray the Lord to bestow on us understanding for the opening of the Scriptures, and that we may be able to say, How Jesus opened to us the Scriptures. What, then, do we say? That the dorcas — that is, the roe — according to the natural science of those who discourse of the natures of all animals, received its name from a power implanted in it. For from the fact that it sees more sharply — that is, ὀξυδερκέστερον — it is called dorcas. But the hart is the enemy and vanquisher of serpents, so that with the breath of its nostrils it draws them out of their caverns, and, the destructive power of their venom being overcome, delights in feeding upon them.

Perhaps my Savior becomes a roe according to contemplation (θεωρία), a hart according to works. And what are these works? He himself slays serpents, when he cuts the throats of the opposing powers. Therefore I will say to him: You have crushed the heads of the dragons upon the water. My kinsman is like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of the house of God. For Bethel is interpreted ”house of God. Not all mountains are the house of God, but those which are the mountains of the Church. For there are found also other mountains, raised up and rising against the knowledge of God — the mountains of the Egyptians, and of the foreigners. Do you wish to know that my kinsman is like a roe, or a young hart, upon the mountains of Bethel? Be a mountain of the Church, a mountain of the house of God, and the bridegroom will come to you, like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bethel. She perceives that the bridegroom has drawn nearer, who before was moving about upon the mountains and hills; she likens him as bounding

and leaping, and, recognizing that after these things he has come to her and to the other maidens, she says:

[§14] Behold, here he is, behind our wall. If you have built a wall, and have made the building of God, he will come behind your wall, looking through the windows. One window is one sense: through this the bridegroom looks. Another window is another sense: and through this too the bridegroom carefully gazes. For through what senses does the word of God not look? But what it is to look through the windows, and how the bridegroom gazes through them, the following example will teach. Where the bridegroom does not look, there death is found climbing up, as we read in Jeremiah: Behold, death has climbed up through your windows. When you have looked upon a woman to lust after her, already death has climbed up through your windows. Leaning out through the nets. Understand that you walk in the midst of snares, and pass beneath overhanging engines. All things are full of nets; the devil has filled everything with snares. But if the word of God has come to you, and has begun to lean out from the nets, saying: Our soul, like a sparrow, has been snatched from the snare of the hunters; the snare is broken, and we are set free. Blessed are we by the Lord, who made heaven and earth. The bridegroom, then, leans out through the nets, making a way for you. Jesus descended to earth, subjected himself to the nets of the world.

Seeing a great flock of men entangled in the nets, and [seeing] that it could be cut apart by no other than himself, he came to the nets, taking on a human body, which was held by the snares of the hostile powers; he burst them apart for you, and you shall say: Behold, here he is, behind our wall, looking through the windows, leaning out through the nets. When he has leaned out, he says to you — my kinsman answers, and says: Rise up, come, my love; I have made you a way, I have cut apart the nets: so come to me, my love:

[§15] Rise up, come, my love, my beautiful one, my dove. Why does he say, ”Rise up”? Why ”make haste”? I for your sake bore the raging of the tempests; I received the billows which were owed to you. My soul was made sorrowful for you, even unto death. I rose from the dead, the stings of death being broken and the bonds of hell dissolved; therefore I say to you: Rise up, come, my love, my beautiful one, my dove: for behold, the winter is past, the rain is gone away, the flowers have appeared in the earth. I, rising from the dead, the tempest being stilled, have restored calm. And because, according to the dispensation of the flesh from the Virgin, and by the will of the Father, I grew, and advanced in wisdom and in age, the flowers have appeared in the earth; the time of pruning is at hand. The pruning is the remission of sins. For every branch, he says, abiding in me and bearing fruit, my Father cleanses, that it may bear greater fruit. Have fruits, and the former things which are unfruitful in you shall be taken away. For the time of pruning is at hand.

[§16] The voice of the turtledove has been heard in our land. Not without cause is a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons, taken in the sacrifices: for they are of equal worth, and it is never said separately, a pair only of pigeons, but a pair of turtledoves, and two young pigeons. The dove is the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit, when he speaks of great and more hidden mysteries, which many cannot receive, is signified by the name of the turtledove — that is, of that bird which dwells always on the ridges of the mountains and on the tops of the trees; but in the valleys, and in the things which reach even to men, the dove is taken. In short, the Savior, because he deigned to take on manhood, and came to earth, and there were then many sinners about the Jordan: therefore the Holy Spirit is not turned into a turtledove, but becomes a dove. Among us, because of the multitude of men, the tamer bird dwells. But the turtledove seems, for instance, to signify Moses and any one you please of the prophets who withdraw into the mountains and deserts, and there receive the words of God. The voice of the turtledove, then, has been heard in our land. The fig tree has put forth its green figs. From the fig tree learn the parable. When its branch has become tender, and has put forth leaves, know that summer is near. The word of God wishes to announce to us that, after the winter, after the storms, the harvest of souls has drawn near, and it says:

[§17] The fig tree has put forth its green figs; the vines flower, they have given their fragrance. If the vines already burst into flower, the time will come, and there will be grapes. Rise up, come, my love, my beautiful one, my dove. These things which we have expounded above, the bridegroom speaks not while the maidens hear, but while the bride alone hears. But we wish now to hear his own word too, as he speaks to the bride.

[§18] Rise up, come, my love, my dove; and come, my dove, under the covering of the rock. Moses too is placed under the covering of the rock, that he may see the hinder parts of God under the covering of the outwork. First come to that which is before the wall, and afterward you will be able to enter where the wall of the rock is. Show me your face. Up to the present day like things are said to the bride. For she did not yet have the confidence to contemplate, with unveiled face, the glory of the Lord. But because she is now adorned and set in order, it is said to her: Show me your face. For her voice was not yet so sweet that she deserved to have it said to her, Make me hear your voice. When, then, did she learn to speak? Be silent, and hear, O Israel, and you shall know what the Lord speaks. And her voice was made sweet to the bridegroom, according to that prophetic word: Let my petition be sweet to him. Then the bridegroom declares to her: And make me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet. If you open your mouth to the Word of God, the bridegroom will say to you: Your voice is sweet, your aspect beautiful. Wherefore, rising up, let us beseech the Lord that we may be made worthy of the bridegroom’s word, of the wisdom of Christ Jesus, to whom is glory and dominion unto the 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.