Commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah

The Venerable Bede (AD 673–735)

SermonIndex.net / Church Fathers

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Introduction

Translated from Migne's Patrologia Latina, Allegorica expositio in Esdram et Nehemiam, Vol 91

Preface

The exceptional interpreter and doctor of the Holy Scriptures, Jerome, while he briefly ran through the books of the same Scriptures in a letter to a friend, and briefly touched on what was contained in each of them, said: "Ezra and Nehemiah, evidently the helper and consolation from the Lord, are narrated in one volume, and they restore the temple, build the walls of the city, and all that crowd of the people returning to their homeland, and the description of priests, Levites, Israel, proselytes, and the works of the walls and towers divided among individual families, present one thing on the surface, but retain another in the core. Therefore, most reverend bishop Acca, diligently complying with your urgings, I devoted my work to considering the same volume. Confident, however, in the helper and consoler, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that He kindly grants us to, with the covering of the letter removed, more deeply find another and more sacred meaning in the core of the spiritual sense; that is to say, it indeed designates the same Lord, and His temple and city, which we are, by prophetic figures, but manifestly by reason. In this work, notably, we were greatly aided by the aforementioned master of the Church, Jerome, in the explanation of the prophets, who had foretold that the same deeds which Ezra and Nehemiah wrote about, were to be done under the figure of Christ and the Church."

It is clear to all readers that the house or temple of God in the holy Scriptures is customarily called such, and each of the elect, and the entire Church together, that is, the company of the righteous; because God deigns to dwell in the hearts of those who believe, hope, and love Him, according to what He Himself says: If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him (John XIV). Hence also the Apostle says: The temple of God is holy, which you are (I Cor. III). And in the Epistle to the Hebrews: And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken; but Christ as a son over His own house, whose house we are, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end (Hebr. III). In whose figure of the spiritual house or temple, King Solomon made a temple to the Lord in Jerusalem; for Solomon himself, who is interpreted as peaceful, aptly

held the figure of Him of whom the prophet sings: His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace (Isa. IX). Of whom also the Apostle writes to the Church of the Gentiles:

And He came and preached peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near, because through Him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father (Eph. II). But the fact that the same temple was built in seven years and was completed and dedicated in the eighth can signify that during the whole period of this age, which revolves in seven days, the Lord builds the Church by gathering the faithful for the heavenly building. Moreover, in the future life, with the appearance of the glory of resurrection, He perfects it completely, and raises it into the joy of immortal life in the vision of His eternal glory. Because indeed He Himself rose from the dead on the eighth day, that is, after the seventh of the Sabbath, rightly is our time of resurrection also expressed by the number eight. But that in the following age certain parts of the temple began to decay due to excessive age, but these were soon restored and brought back to their former state by the efforts of kings and priests who were at those times, signifies the daily and slight errors of the faithful, about which Solomon says: The just man falls seven times and rises again (Prov. XXIV); who by their daily zeal, with the Lord granting, are corrected through the examples or exhortations of the preceding righteous ones, as though through the diligence of the kings and priests of God;

for kings and priests are deservedly called perfected in the Church, since they are members of the highest king and priest, when they have learned to govern themselves well, when they have learned to offer their bodies to the Lord as a living sacrifice. The further fact that, with the increasing evils, the very temple was profaned by the filth of idols, and ultimately destroyed and burned by the Chaldeans, signifies the more serious falls of those who, though joined to the members of the holy Church through the confession of true faith and the sacrament of the saving bath, are once again cast down from the state of faith by the deceit of evil spirits and are burned by the flame of their vices. But that, with the temple destroyed and the city of Jerusalem likewise ruined, its citizens were carried off to Babylon, but after seventy years, repenting of their evils, they were mercifully returned by the Lord to their homeland and rebuilt the same temple and holy city with great labor, typologically represents those who, deceived by the devil, not only lose the sincerity of faith and the integrity of good works but are also seen to be assimilated to the Gentiles and publicans through the bitterness of their crimes, according to what the Lord says: If he does not listen to the Church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector (Matt. XVIII).

Yet some of these, repenting through the look of divine grace, return to the Church when, pierced by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, they begin once again to listen to and keep the commandments of divine law, which they had abandoned. For there are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, which the prophet Isaiah enumerates with clear distinction. And indeed the sum of all divine law is comprehended in ten commandments. Multiply seven by ten, and you get seventy. Hence, by proper significance, those who were taken captive to Babylon by

perverse works are freed after seventy years and rebuild the house of God and the holy city. Because sometimes those who, through their sins, were separated from the communion and society of the holy Church and joined the lot and number of unbelievers, again by the gift of the Holy Spirit, exercise themselves in the pursuit of good works and by this regain the communion of the faithful, namely of the house and city of the Lord, from which they had been ejected. For it is notable that one and the same repentance to return to the Church is typified by the repaired house of the Lord after the fire, the restored city of Jerusalem after destruction, and the people returned to their homeland after captivity, and the returned holy vessels which had been carried away to the house.

However, since the prophet Ezra sufficiently explains how all these things were done, it is fitting to mention some points from his volume and to expound them with a spiritual sense as the Lord grants so that it may be more manifest how those who had perished through negligence or error should return to repentance; how great God's grace is, how much effort they themselves must make to seek and obtain pardon for their transgressions; how the same penitents, along with those who have recently come to faith, build one and the same house of Christ, and similarly await the future solemnity of its dedication.

Chapter 1

Cyrus, at the beginning of his reign, liberated the captivity of God's people, and, after returning the holy vessels, ordered them to ascend to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

[Ezra 1:1] -- In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, etc. Ancient histories, which likewise agree with the writings of the prophet Daniel, recount that Cyrus, king of Persia, with the assistance of Darius, king of the Medes, destroyed the empire of the Babylonians, killing their last king Balthasar, and devastating and destroying the city itself. Cyrus, knowing that the kingdom had been given to him by the God of Israel, immediately after he conquered the kingdom that had oppressed and enslaved the people of Israel, granted the people the ability to return to their homeland and to rebuild the house of their God, which had been burnt down in that place. He proclaimed this decree of liberation not only verbally to those present but also sent letters to those far-off throughout his provinces, declaring publicly that the God of Israel is the true Lord and God of heaven and the author of all kingdoms. All these events were openly predicted by the holy prophets, and Jeremiah foretold the number of years they would serve in Babylon and when they would be called back to their homeland. Isaiah even revealed the name of King Cyrus, through whom the liberation from servitude and the permission to restore the temple would occur, without any prophetic enigmas. Thus, Jeremiah says: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the captives whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and dwell in them, etc. And later:

"When seventy years are completed in Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill my good word toward you and bring you back to this place" (Jer. 25, 29). Moreover, Isaiah says: "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb: I am the Lord who makes all things. And shortly after: "Who says to the deep: Be dry! and I will dry up your rivers. Who says to Cyrus: He is my shepherd, and he will fulfill all my pleasure. Who speaks to Jerusalem: You shall be built, and to the temple: Your foundation shall be laid" (Isa. 44). "Thus says the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held, to subdue nations before him, and to loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut. I will go before you and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the Lord, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob My servant's sake,

and Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name: I have named you, though you have not known Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me.

I will gird you, though you have not known Me" (Isa. 45). From Isaiah's prophecy, it is believed that King Cyrus greatly loved the children of Israel, released them from captivity, and commanded the rebuilding of the Lord's temple because he had heard their prophets speak by the Spirit of God of his kingdom and the destruction of Babylon. The very manner of the conquest by which Babylon began to be overthrown was explicitly expressed by the same prophets; Isaiah said: "Who says to the deep: Be dry! and I will dry up your rivers. And Jeremiah added: "The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire. Histories narrate that, by diverting and drying up the Euphrates river that flowed through the middle of Babylon, the enemy entered the city through its dried-up channels. These few points have been mentioned about history. Yet, according to mystical meanings, King Cyrus is a type of the Lord and Savior both in name and deed, which we state not from our conjecture but from the very clear words of Isaiah, where Isaiah says in the person of the Lord: "I have likened you, and you have not known Me" (Isa. 45). God likened him to His Son, although he did not recognize God who likened him; first, in that he dignified him by calling him His anointed; secondly, in designating him Cyrus, meaning 'heir,' long before he was born; for the name fittingly applies to Him to whom the same God the Father said:

"Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance" (Ps. 2). The Apostle says: "He appointed Him heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds" (Heb. 1). And even while He appeared in the flesh, the enemies who persecuted Him said: "This is the heir. Come, let us kill Him, and seize His inheritance" (Matt. 21; Mark 12). But also because God the Father subjected nations before the face of Cyrus, turned the back of kings, broke the gates of bronze, and shattered the bars of iron, that is, of Babylon and other cities taken by him, these treasures of hidden riches and secrets of various unknown provinces likened him to our Lord and Savior, who subjoined not only all gentile nations but even the very rulers and authors of secular wisdom to His dominion through the preaching of the apostles across the world; who overthrew the gates of Hell to bring His elect, taken thence, into the liberty of the heavenly homeland; who destroyed the errors of the nations and by the mouths of humble apostles overturned doctrines fortified by human reasoning, so that, having corrected them, He might reveal the light of His faith and truth, in which are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge. These treasures our Lord eternally possessed in the nature of His Divinity from the Father, but in assumed humanity, He received them in time, from the moment He began to be man.

So He likened Cyrus to His only begotten Son, our God and Lord Jesus Christ, for just as he, by destroying the Chaldean empire, liberated God's people, sent them back to their homeland, and ordered the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, manifesting this in letters to fulfill the words of Jeremiah, who predicted this would happen. Thus, the Mediator between God and men, by destroying the kingdom of the devil throughout the world, rescues

His dispersed elect from tyranny and gathers them into His Church, justifying them by faith in the present and hastening them toward the vision of perpetual peace in the future, for Jerusalem is called the vision of peace. He also causes the restoration of the temple that had been set on fire, bringing back those who had lost faith through the snares of the ancient enemy to salvation, making them worthy of His habitation. Moreover, He sent the holy Scriptures into the whole world, by which he preached the faith in His name and the hope of salvation to all who belong to His kingdom, that is, to all the elect. Not only Jeremiah but all the prophets, in common sense, foretold this. As He Himself said to His disciples: "It is necessary that all things written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms concerning Me be fulfilled" (Luke 24). The Lord also stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that, recognizing the power and providence of the God of Israel, he would do what Scripture narrates of him.

And the Lord says in the Gospel to the Jews: "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things" (John 8). When Cyrus in his written declaration says: "The Lord God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth," he rightly confesses the God of Israel to be the Lord God of heaven, who also has control of all the kingdoms of the earth and can give them to whomever He wills. Yet it seems less true that he declares all the kingdoms of the earth were given to him unless it is understood that at the time he wrote this, no adversary of his reign existed; or that, having conquered, destroyed, and emptied the ancient and strong empire of the Chaldeans, he believed none could resist his kingdom in the whole world. This statement, however, truly applies to His majesty who said: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28). The same Scripture of Cyrus follows:

[Ezra 1:3] -- Who among you of all His people, let his God be with him, etc. Great is the faith of the king in these words, great shines his piety. Faith indeed, that he understood the people of Israel to be the people of God above all other nations. Piety, that he allowed all who wished without exception to return to their country as free men. Faith, that he confessed that the same Lord God both dwells in heaven and is in Jerusalem and can go up with each of those returning from Babylon to Jerusalem. Is it not clearer than light that he believed this one to be not corporeal and confined to one place, but a Spirit present everywhere? He confessed that he has a place in Jerusalem and in the temple such that he did not doubt that He presides in the kingdom of heaven; he believed so much that He reigns in the heavens, while nonetheless He is with His faithful on earth and directs their minds and hands to do what is salutary. Moreover, all the words of this Scripture exude a spiritual sense. For whom is it not easily evident that only those with whom God is, from the confusion of sins, to the works of virtues, as if from Babylonian captivity, can pass to Jerusalem to freedom? Because without Him we can do nothing (John XV). Who does not see rightly that ascension is named in the same sentence?

Because surely all who sin, and who serve the cares of this world, are in the lowest place. But those who desire to please God must necessarily lift their minds to higher things, yearn for heavenly things, surpass all the pomp and enticements of the world with the love of eternal things. Jerusalem is also mentioned to be in Judah, that is in confession, so that we who deserved to be captivated by Chaldeans through forgetfulness of God, who are interpreted as demons, that is, by malignant spirits, may return through confession of divine piety to the vision of free peace and light; and there we build a house for the Lord God of Israel, that is in the unity of catholic peace, confessing either our iniquity or divine mercy and grace. Let us prepare our hearts in which the Lord Himself may deign to dwell graciously and illuminate with His presence. And let us also care to kindle the hearts of our neighbors to praise their Creator and perform works of piety. For in both ways we build a house for the Lord, either by exercising ourselves in works of justice or by encouraging those whom we can to follow the path of justice, both by examples and words. The rest of the writing of King Cyrus follows:

[Ezra 1:4] -- And all the rest, wherever they live, should help him, etc. The distinction of words is to be noted, because to all those released from the injury of captivity, the king gave the permission that whoever wished to go up and build the temple of the Lord might go up with the leader. However, he did not command everyone to go up there. For if there were any from the same people of God, who preferred to enjoy the liberty given more than others in the various places, he commanded them to assist those who were ascending from their own places, providing them with money or livestock for the necessity of such a long journey. He also desired them to give and present other gifts, which, upon arriving there, they should offer in the temple of the Lord as a memorial for those who remained. Therefore, all were freed from the Babylonian captivity. All were devoted to acts of piety; but the more perfect went up to build the temple of the Lord, while the rest helped those who ascended. For although all the chosen, having been delivered from the power of darkness, pertain to the liberty of the glory of the sons of God, and all rejoice to be numbered among the society of the holy city, that is, the Church; yet it is not the task of all, but only of the more perfect, to labor in building the same Church also by preaching to others.

Hence, such as these, before other believers, are deemed worthy of double honor by the Apostle (1 Tim. V); just as the angel said to Daniel, ”Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who instruct many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Dan. XII). And certainly, the more these instructors of many teach their helpers to seek and love heavenly things, the less they themselves care for acquiring or possessing earthly things, and indeed, very often, whatever temporal things they have acquired, they leave all for the hope of eternal things. Therefore, it is necessary for their poverty to be supported by the generosity of the wealthier, who cannot preach, so that even the rich may be partners in the same preaching. On their behalf, John says to Gaius: ”For they went forth for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles” (John III). Therefore, we ought to support people like these, so that we may become co-workers for the truth. Consequently, it is now said that those who were going up to build the house of the

Lord should be aided by the generosity of money from their friends wherever they lived, that is, whether in Chaldea or other places to which they had fled in fear of the Chaldeans: except, he says, that whatever they voluntarily offer to the temple of God, which is in Jerusalem;

for it is fitting for those who abound in temporal riches not only to supply the necessary things to the poor of Christ from these, but also to freely perform good works themselves, so that by the merit of these, as if by spontaneous offering, they also may earn a share in the temple of God, which is the Church. Let this brief mention of the writing of King Cyrus suffice. Nor will anyone doubt that his words overflow with spiritual sacraments since it is foretold that God raised his Spirit so that he might understand these things to be written and commanded; since, as the prophet Ezra admonished, he commanded these things to the people to fulfill the words of the prophets. For how could it be that a king, inspired by divine instinct, would not be able to write about heavenly mysteries, who is proven to have known, confessed, and loved the true glory of God's house and to have restored it? When the very governor, a treacherous man, enemy, and murderer of our Redeemer, wrote the greatest sacrament of true faith, to set over His cross: "This is Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews. In the intention of this title, he remained so fixed that he could not be persuaded by the Jews to alter it, although they asked persistently. He also wrote it in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin in the grace of a certain mystery for us;

because surely all divine law, which the Hebrews had, all worldly wisdom in which the Greeks boasted, and all earthly kingdom, in which the Romans then preeminent, attest that Christ is the King, the Lord of all the holy and confessing ones. If, therefore, the writing of a prince hostile to God is so full of significant sacraments, how much more could a king, a lover and doer of divine worship, inspired or raised by the Lord, as the prophet says, both declare and spread in writing the mysteries of the Lord? The subsequent text of holy Scripture shows what effect his edicts and writings had.

[Ezra 1:5] -- And the leaders of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin rose up, etc. Cyrus indeed, having proclaimed his voice, and having sent letters throughout his kingdom, permitted, nay commanded, from the whole people of Israel, which consisted of twelve tribes, those with whom God was, to go up to Jerusalem to build the house of the Lord. Nevertheless, of the entire people, only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and the priestly and Levitical tribe, to whom Jerusalem itself and the temple of the Lord previously belonged, wanted to ascend. For the other ten tribes had long since under King Jeroboam been alienated from the temple of the Lord and the worship of piety, and for the merit of such a great transgression had been taken captive by the kings of Assyria, and deported beyond the mountains of the Medes, and are not said to have ever been collectively returned to their homeland. Moreover, the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, who held Jerusalem and the surrounding regions of Judah, together with the priests and Levites to whom the ministry of the temple belonged, although they had imitated the sins of the ten tribes, never abandoned the habitation of the city of Jerusalem and the ceremonies of the temple. Hence they were

the last to be captured by the Chaldeans and the first, under Persian rule, to be permitted to return home;

and rightly so, because our Lord arose from the tribe of Judah, and his mother Mary was also connected by consanguinity to the tribe of Levi. Hence Elizabeth, the wife of the priest Zechariah, is called her cousin by the angel (Luke 1). The tribe of Benjamin also joined them in devout faith, particularly because the city of Jerusalem was within its lot, and therefore it deserved to share in the mercy granted to them. It is beautifully said that the leaders of the fathers from the aforementioned tribes rose to go up to build the temple of the Lord. For it is the duty of the leaders and fathers, that is, of the teachers, by work and doctrine of preaching, to take on the laborious task of exhorting, reproving, correcting, and striving in the pursuit of good works, to build the mind of the erring. They are said to rise well to go up to Jerusalem, because they seem to lie down with a weak and inert mind who shirk the care of their own or their brother's salvation. But they rise when they hear the king's edict, and indeed, the Lord stirring their spirit, so they ascend to build the house of the Lord when, admonished by the words of the holy Scriptures, and kindled by the grace of their Creator, they shake off the sloth of their previous negligence;

and having taken up the intention of a better way of life, by daily advancements in good works, like certain steps of ascent, they strive to reach the highest virtues, which are in the vision of eternal peace. In these steps, the first are those who restrain their own life from vices by living well. The second are those who, by well teaching, convert their neighbors from their errors or negligences. The highest are those who, after good works and teaching, await the joys of perpetual reward. But that those who thus ascended to build the house of the Lord were helped by all who were around them with silver and gold, substance and cattle; we have briefly previously discussed how it is mystically to be understood; namely, that the abundance of believing rich should support the poverty of preachers. This can also justly be taken thus; that the hands of the builders of the temple should be aided by their companions who cannot build, by giving money; when secular men entrust their children or family to holy preachers to be brought up for the Lord; so that what they themselves cannot do, they offer to the Lord through those who can complete it. They give silver vessels, when they present men brilliant in eloquence; they give gold ones, when they present those illustrious in natural talent; they give beasts of burden, when they present those slower in mind but meek and accommodating to carry the light and gentle yoke of the Gospel;

they give cattle, when they present those humble in spirit and mild, who usually give freely to the poor from their substance, as from milk or wool. They also give substance and various utensils when they commend men or women distinguished by the manifold flowers of good works to the holy teachers of the Lord, by whom they are consecrated to the Lord and progress in the building of His house. For there are many who are naturally chaste, patient, modest, liberal, abstinent, kind, spurning worldly honors and pleasures alike, lovers of justice no less than of wisdom, and perhaps like Cornelius, devoted to prayers and alms-giving; of whom the Apostle says: "For when the Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the

things contained in the law" (Romans 2). These are offered to holy preachers to be reborn in Christ, or to be more firmly confirmed in the faith, as varied utensils to be contributed to the building of the house of the Lord, given to the leaders of the fathers.

[Ezra 1:7] -- King Cyrus also brought forth the vessels of the temple of the Lord, etc. Nebuchadnezzar took the vessels of the Lord from Jerusalem, as any unclean spirit, snatching certain of the faithful from the Church, deprives them of the joy of internal peace. Moreover, he places them in the temple of his god, when he joins them to the company of the reprobates, who are the temple and city of the devil, namely the head of all evils, both angels and men. But King Cyrus brings them forth and numbers them for the prince of Judah to be returned to Jerusalem, when our Lord, who is the heir of all things, rescues those whom He has predestined to eternal salvation from the power of Satan, and offers them to the priests of the Church to be reconciled through repentance. And well does he say that the vessels are numbered for the prince of Judah; for the Lord knows the number of His elect, nor does any of His sheep perish who confess His great and terrible name; for Judah means confession.

[Ezra 1:9] -- And this is their number: thirty golden bowls, etc. Different types of vessels signify different persons or operations of the faithful. Finally, we read in the Apocalypse that the twenty-four elders had golden bowls full of incense (Rev. 5); and the Scripture explains: These are the prayers of the saints. Therefore, the bowls, which are open, bright vessels, signify the hearts of the simple, who know not how to conceal any deceitful thought within them, but are accustomed to express with a pure tongue what they hold in their mind. Wherefore it is rightly said that such aromatic substances, that is, prayers acceptable to God, are found in them. On the other hand, the impure hearts of the reprobate are deservedly compared to sponges, which are dark and convoluted within. Hence also the Jews, when the Lord was crucified, offered Him a sponge full of vinegar (Matt. 27; Mark 15; John 19); so that by such a service they might signify that to their Creator, coming to them in the flesh, they offered from a deceitful heart thoughts and bitter words, deviating far from the pure taste of their forefathers. The knives, however, which they used for cutting and dividing the limbs of the sacrifices according to the proper order, so that with everything properly distinguished, a part would be consumed on the sacred altar by fire, a part would be for the use of priests, a part for Levites, and a part for the offerers;

these surely demonstrate in the Church those who are distinguished by the grace of discernment, who perfectly know how to discern from the saving sacrifice, which is Christ, what should be said to all, what to the more perfect, what exceeds the measure of human thought and should be attributed to the fire of the Holy Spirit; likewise, because all who are dedicated to Him in faithful service are victims of God. The knives by which the limbs of the sacrifice are divided into pieces are typologically understood to be the scribes educated in the kingdom of heaven; who, carefully examining the merits and thoughts of their hearers, know well how to judge with whom they should advance in the rank of ecclesiastical ministry. The cups, which are vessels for drinking, figuratively express those who are ac-

customed to be inflamed with the fervent ardor of inner charity. As for the fact that some vessels were gold, some silver; the golden ones signify those who shine with a greater splendor of spiritual wisdom; the silver ones, those who are clear in the beauty of speech and know how to expound eloquently what they know; whom the Apostle distinguishing from one another, says: To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit (1 Cor. 12).

And the fact that the number of vessels, both individually and collectively in total, is mentioned, reminds us that the Lord contains the sum of His elect, not only those who persevere in the purity of the received faith, but also those who, after they have strayed, return to faith by repentance, written in the book of eternal memory. In whose figure it is aptly added:

[Ezra 1:11] -- Sasabasar took everything, etc. Because surely none of those who are predestined to life can perish forever; but all who belong to the Lord, although they may seem to be led into Babylon, that is, the confusion of sins, for a time, are brought back by divine provision through association with the just also by whichever means to the peace of the Church. Moreover, the vessels which the army of the Chaldeans is said to have captured from Jerusalem and smashed, and the broken ones taken to Babylon, express the type of those who are so captured by the victorious devil, that before they can be saved by repenting, they are taken away from human affairs to be seized for eternal punishment.

Chapter 2

The number of those who returned to Judah under the leaders Zerubbabel and Joshua: also the total amount of money which the chiefs of the fathers gave for the restoration of the temple is described. [Ezra 2:1] -- Now these are the children of the province, who went up from the captivity, etc. He calls them the children of the province of Judea, not of Babylon. For to this belonged not only those who were transferred from it to Babylon, but also those who were born in Babylon from their stock. Even though they were born physically in Babylon, they longed with their whole mind for Judea and Jerusalem. Their notable leader Zerubbabel bore their figure, who by name indeed indicates that he was born in Babylon; but by intention and actions shows that he is a citizen of Jerusalem. In another sense, they are children of the Church, children of the heavenly fatherland, not only those who are already imbued with the sacraments of the Church, but also those who, although wandering outside, that is among the impious for some time, are yet by divine election preordained to life before the ages, to be consecrated in their time by the mysteries of divine grace. About whom it is aptly added:

[Ezra 2:1] -- And they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, etc. For when those who have strayed from the faith are freed from the power of Satan, along with those who have recently learned the faith, they return to Jerusalem of desired peace and to Judah of devoted confession or praise. Soon each one enters and returns to his own city, that is, he devoutly performs the keeping and practice of virtues, which divine largess has bestowed upon him according to the measure of faith. And it is well said, with general reference, that they have returned to Jerusalem and Judah, he immediately added: Each to his own city, because indeed each individual dwelt in their own cities, yet all generally pertained to Jerusalem and Judah. Therefore, Jerusalem signifies the universal state of the holy Church, which is throughout the world. The cities pertaining to it designate each of the virtues of the faithful, in which, as if by the protection of cities, they are fortified against the temptations and incursions of evil spirits. The cities in which those who came from captivity to Jerusalem and Judah dwelt can also be understood as the various Churches of Christ throughout the world, from all of which one Catholic Church is completed. In these Churches, whoever resides, each one professes himself as a child of the Catholic Church, as a citizen of Jerusalem. Moreover, they were led before others by Zerubbabel and Jesus, one from royal lineage, the other from priestly lineage, as is shown in many places of sacred history;

both of them represented one and the same person of our Redeemer, namely the true King and High Priest. For He alone is the one through whom we ought to come to salvation. Hence He says: No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14). He gathers each of the elect, either through His own hidden inspiration or through the manifest teaching by holy preachers, from the confusion of present life to the vision of eternal peace and the confession of divine praise, as if from Babylon to Jerusalem and Judah. This vision of peace and this confession of thanksgiving, given by Him, begin indeed in the present but are perfected in the future.

[Ezra 2:3] -- The number of men of the people of Israel, sons of Phares, two, etc. After the catalog of leaders, consequently the number of the people; after the sum of the people has been counted, the ranks dedicated to God follow in order. However, he speaks of the people of Israel, the tribe of Judah and Benjamin, and whoever had escaped from the hands of the Assyrians of other tribes once; but, captured by the Babylonians with these, they had nonetheless been led into captivity. Finally, it must be noted that within the very series of the catalog, and especially where the same catalog is repeated in the second part of the book, that is, in the words of Nehemiah, nearly fifteen names of cities are listed, which, unless I am mistaken, are all found only in the tribe of Judah and Benjamin. Hence it is likely that the people of Israel should be understood here, primarily from these very tribes, together with the priests and Levites who had their lot among them. However, the Nethinim, who are described in order after the priests, Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, were themselves then those who are now called subdeacons in the Church, obedient to the duties of the Levites, and receiving offerings in the temple from the people. Furthermore, the sons of Solomon's servants were called the builders of the temple, who were responsible for repairing the sacred structures, or whatever had been damaged, and restoring them again from the sacred money.

What we said above about the vessels must now be said about the people; that Scripture so diligently distinguishes how many from each generation of the captives returned to their homeland; in order that we might be reminded with how much certainty the Lord inscribes the sum of His elect in the book of life and, as it were, records them in the register of heaven, how many souls each of the faithful, either by preaching or showing the examples of good works, have converted from error; for each of whom He rewards those who converted them with a certain recompense.

[Ezra 2:59] -- And those who came up from Thelmela, etc. In this place, even according to the letter, the grace of God, by which also in the Old Testament the Gentiles were received into salvation, is shown. While a catalogue of those who clearly belonged to the people of God has been listed, some of those whose origins whether from Israel or from proselytes were unknown, are also included, and their number is mentioned among the children of Israel. Even though due to the long separation of their fathers from the temple or the people of God, they couldn't specify how they belonged to them; nevertheless, since they had ascended from captivity when general permission was granted, and hastened with those

who unquestionably descended from the seed of Israel to build the temple of God, they were accepted by them as companions. For they were glad to have them as brothers and acquaintances due to the common love of faith and religion, although because of the uncertainty of their carnal origins it seemed they recognized them less. Moreover, in the spiritual sense, among penitents who, liberated from the captivity of vices, ascend to build the house of the Lord either in themselves or in others, there are often some bound by graver sins who appear so estranged from all acts of piety and chastity that none of the goodness and religion they had received from holy teachers seems to remain in them. About these, what else can be said than that they cannot indicate whether they were born from Israel, that is, from the holy Church by believing; for evidently, by sinning, they have become as though they had never belonged to the holy seed; however, through repentance, they sometimes correct themselves and turn to a better life, so that their number is rightfully inscribed among the true Israelites, in whom there is no deceit, in heaven (John 1).

[Ezra 2:60] -- And from the sons of the priests, the sons of Tobiah, etc. The sons of the exiled act with the same caution towards the priests as they are reported to have acted towards the people. For they took great care that it would be openly revealed without confusion who truly belonged to the people of Israel or to the priestly lineage; but those who were suspected, or who were certainly begotten from the lineage of proselytes, that is, foreigners. Therefore, they removed the suspected priests from the office of the altar, until their origin could be more certainly clarified; but nonetheless preserved them in the society of the exiled with unanimous peace. According to the mystical sense, the sons of the priests, ascending from the Babylonian captivity, seek the record of their genealogy, and not finding it, are ejected from the priesthood; because they themselves, the ministers of the altar, fall into such crimes and such unspeakable doctrines that even if they return to salvation by repenting, they cannot become worthy to be promoted to the sacred rank which they lost, nor to resume the office of teaching the Gospel or administering the sacraments. For these, although they expect eternal life among the faithful, do not find the record of their rank, which they cannot regain, among the perfect priests.

[Ezra 2:64] -- The whole multitude as if one, etc. Note the grace of the early Church, in which the heart and soul of the multitude of believers was one (Acts IV), being found even in this group of exiles: so that even though there was such a large army, which almost completed the total of fifty thousand, and this army of different rank and condition, nonetheless the whole multitude, on account of the same faith and love, seemed as if it were one man, by the gift of Him who makes those of one mind live in a house. But the servants and handmaids returning from Babylon to Jerusalem hold the type of those in the Church who indeed strive, through the improvement of a better life, to overcome vices and ascend to the pinnacle of virtues; yet they are not sufficient by themselves to provide the way of a regular life, but rather need to be still restrained by the industry of those who have preceded them in Christ, and to be directed to the path of the desired truth. It continues:

[Ezra 2:65] -- And in those same places, singers and singing women were appointed (II Chronicles XXV). Not only among the Levites were singers found, along with the doorkeepers of the temple and the Nethinim, but also within God's people, joined with singing women, they hastened to restore the buildings of the house of God. According to the literal meaning, he calls singers those who resounded the psalms with sweet modulation; this, we see from the Words of the Days, was customary for the Levites to do in the temple of God among the daily sacrifices. But it is also credible that at that time many from the people themselves did this in each of their places. According to the mystical senses, however, singers in the temple or people of God are those who, with greater sweetness of spirit, keep the heavenly commandments themselves and urge their listeners to keep these same commandments through frequent exhortations. Moreover, it is fitting that women singers are joined to the men, considering the feminine sex, where many individuals are found who, not only by living but also by preaching, kindle the hearts of their neighbors to praise their Creator and, as if with the sweetness of their holy voices, assist in the labor of building up the temple of the Lord. To the ministry of all these people, the title and text of Psalm 115 aptly apply. The title is: When the house of the Lord was being built after the captivity, a song for David.

This, according to the literal sense, seems to express the restoration of the temple, about which the present book writes. But in the anagogical sense, that is, in the higher sense, it suggests the building of the holy Church, made up of souls saved from diabolic captivity and recalled to the knowledge of their Creator; in which building of the Church, every chosen person ought to resound with a song of praise and confession, with strong and desirable hand, that is, to the Lord Jesus Christ, sincerely understanding that without His grace, nothing good can be done. To this very title, the psalm corresponds: Sing to the Lord a new song, sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless His name, proclaim His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples (Psalm 95), etc. Therefore, we are first commanded in the building of the house of the Lord to sing a new song to the Lord, that is, to retain His love within our hearts and show our observance of His commandments outwardly; and this not by a few, but by all the earth, through which the holy Church is spread. Then, we are commanded to evangelize His salvation, that is, Christ (for in Latin, to evangelize means to announce good news); and this not to a few listeners, but to all peoples among whom the Church is spread throughout the world;

not that one individual can evangelize to all nations, but that all of us in our respective times and places can and should wish for the eternal salvation's joy for all, saying: Praise the Lord, all nations, and laud Him, all peoples. For His mercy is confirmed upon us (Psalm 116), etc.

[Ezra 2:66] -- Their horses were six hundred and thirty-six, etc. A mule is born from a donkey and a mare, a she-mule from a horse and a she-donkey. Hence, among the people who ascended from captivity, the animals, which facilitated their journey, are also listed; both their number and that of the people are indicated in the prophetic book. For certainly

there are many in the Church who are either slower in understanding or even carnal in mind, who nevertheless humbly submit to the spiritual teachers and diligently support the burdens of fraternal necessity. These, along with the other elect, are delivered from the confusion of diabolic captivity and strive towards the walls of the celestial city. Their number, as well as that of the more perfect ones, is preserved intact in the eternal memory of the inner witness. Thus, from the perspective of the holy universal Church, it is said to God: "Your eyes saw my imperfection, and all were written in Your book" (Psalm 139). And in another psalm: "You will save both men and animals, Lord; as You have multiplied Your mercies, O God" (Psalm 36). But immediately concerning the more perfect ones: "The sons of men shall hope under the shadow of Your wings" (Ibid.), etc.

[Ezra 2:68] -- And of the leaders of the fathers, when they entered the temple of the Lord, etc. It is a great sign of devotion when someone, not only offering the due oblations, which are commanded by the law of the Lord, but also in addition to these, offering other things which are not commanded but are advised, freely offers his gifts to the divine majesty. For it is commanded: Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness; honor thy father and mother, and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself (Matt. XIX). The voluntary offering, however, is: If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor. And what the Apostle says: Concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give counsel (1 Cor. VII). And concerning himself: The Lord has ordained that they who preach the gospel should live by the gospel, but I have used none of these things (1 Cor. IX). And to the Thessalonians: Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought, but worked with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be burdensome to any of you; not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an example for you to follow (1 Thess. IV). Therefore, it is rightly said that the leaders of the fathers freely offered gifts for the construction of the house of God;

because the more someone abstains from what is forbidden and even from what is allowed, the more effectively he builds the Church of God; when all who know their examples of perfection fear falling into illicit acts themselves, seeing that these men do not use even lawful things fully; they rather say, All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient (1 Cor. VI). It is also rightly said that they gave according to their ability for the expenses of the work. For this is the measure of human perfection, to labor for the Lord according to one's ability and to establish the state of the holy Church, first by rightly conducting one's own life, and then by correcting others. And those who live in this way among the people of God are rightly called leaders of the fathers; because by the perfection of their lives and teachings, they rule over those who, by the merit of their pious care, deserved to be called fathers in the Church, living more excellently and transcending the general commandments of the law. They gave voluntary offerings: gold, silver, priestly garments. In the gold, we perceive the brightness of wisdom; in silver, the purity of eloquence; in priestly garments, the works of justice, transcending much the manners of the common people and worthy only of hearts consecrated to priesthood and God. For the desirable treasure rests in

the mouth of the wise; and the words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in a furnace of earth;

and let thy priests be clothed with righteousness (Ps. XI, XVII, CXXXI). Thus, the leaders of the fathers offer gold, silver, and priestly garments according to their ability for the expenses of the works of the temple, when holy men, whatever wisdom, eloquence, or good deeds they possess, use them all well for the building up of the faithful of Christ. There is indeed a certain weight of gold and silver, a certain number of priestly garments recorded in holy history, so that following the preceding exposition of the numbers of vessels, men, and animals, we may remember that the Lord can always observe all our thoughts, words, and actions, and reward them with worthy merit. Among all these, it should be noted how much the people of God benefitted from the injustice of captivity and long servitude. Those who were in a very small number carried away captive, that is, the souls of men, as Jeremiah writes, four thousand six hundred, while others were either killed or widely scattered in fear of the enemy, or certainly left in their homeland by the mercy of the same enemies, now multiplied among the enemies, almost fifty thousand men returned to their homeland. Those who were stripped of their wealth and equally subjected to every kind of servitude, now not only freed but also returned enriched with gold and silver, garments, servants, substance, and beasts.

And because it greatly pertains to the matter, they who lost their homeland due to the multitude of false gods, so that it was said to them by the reproaching prophet, According to the number of your cities were your gods, Judah (Jer. II); now return to the same homeland, not only rejoicing in the faith of one true God but also united in the same faith and worshiping with unanimous devotion and soul, submitting themselves with a religious mind and tongue to sing His praises; so that those who once were distinguished by the divided names of Israel and Judah due to the diversity of religion, now are all called by the ancient name of Israel due to the unity of piety. The worship of piety, which they spurned in the holy land while the prophets proclaimed and demonstrated examples of justice, they now embraced in a foreign land serving idol-worshipping enemies. What then is to be looked at in these things? What is to be commended to memory? Except that those whom freedom and abundance of all things in their homeland made neglectful and oblivious of heavenly commandments, were brought to the service of their Creator and Redeemer by servitude abroad and poverty. For it is a familiar thing that the human heart is dissolved by wealth and freedom, but is recollected by hardships and poverty. Therefore, what was once done for one people is now usually performed daily for all those repenting after sin;

while those who through negligence fell into the snares and temptations of the devil, with divine aid through the diligence of penance rise again; those who were stripped of the riches of virtues by the ancient enemy and departed from the society of the Church, often return to its communion more practiced in virtues than they had previously lost; because evidently, the more grievously they remember having erred, the more ardently they strive to labor in good works.

[Ezra 2:70] -- The priests and Levites, therefore, dwelt among the people, etc. The whole of Israel is mentioned, not only the ten tribes that were once called Israel, to distinguish them from the two tribes that were called Judah; but all who generally ascended from captivity, whether from Judah and Benjamin or tracing their origin from other tribes. For when the ten tribes were taken into captivity by the Assyrians and the Samaritans replaced them in their land, whoever remained broke and destroyed all idols, and with a whole heart began to serve the Lord and to offer their sacrifices in the temple, as clearly shown by the words of the Chronicles where it is written: So Josiah removed all the abominations from the land of the children of Israel and made all who were left in Israel serve the Lord their God; all his days they did not depart from following the Lord God of their fathers. And a little earlier under the same king, when the house of the Lord was being restored, it says: After the money that had been brought into the house of the Lord, which the Levites and the doorkeepers had gathered from Manasseh and Ephraim and all the remnant of Israel, from all Judah and Benjamin, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, they delivered it into the hands of those who were over the work in the house of the Lord.

Therefore, those who remained, along with the tribe of Judah and Benjamin with whom they had been joined, were taken captive to Babylon together and then released to their homeland together, and each one returned to their cities, which they found empty with the fields and small villages. For no colonist had entered these lands while they served in Babylon, just as no one entered the lands of the two tribes, as Scripture says: If anyone had escaped the sword, he was taken to Babylon and served the king and his sons until the king of Persia came to power, and the word of the Lord was fulfilled through Jeremiah, and the land enjoyed its Sabbaths. For all the days of its desolation it kept Sabbath until seventy years were completed (2 Chronicles 36). So after this very long Sabbath, the land of Judah along with the rest of Israel received back its inhabitants. However, the greater part of the ten tribes, who had been taken by the Assyrians beyond the mountains of the Medes, never returned home; even if they did return, they could not have entered their cities because the Samaritans possessed them. About these, the Jews today make many Jewish and unbelieving claims that when their Christ comes and reigns, these too will return with the rest of their nation to Judea and reign over the entire world;

not understanding the words of the prophets, who promised the kingdom and riches of the city of Jerusalem, not to one carnal nation of the Jews, but to all nations in Christ spiritually, which is now happening throughout the world. These things are said on the surface level of the text. But in a spiritual sense, the priests, Levites, singers, doorkeepers, and Nethinim dwell in their cities, and all Israel in their own cities, returning from Babylon; when both the ministers of the holy altar and the teachers, and the people of God themselves, each in their respective ranks, serve God faithfully; whether those who in the same rank have once been defiled or lost through sins but are corrected through repentance; or who, coming newly from the kingdom of the devil to the Church, have acquired a good rank by serving well. For the Levites or the children of Israel entered into their cities, not only those who had once been taken captive and lost these cities, but also those who were born from the

lineage of captives and learned that they belonged to those cities by paternal succession. Thus, in a spiritual sense, the Levite receives his city, from which he had been exiled by the Chaldeans when a deacon of the holy Church, having once lost the virtue of perfection seduced by the devil, is restored by the grace of the Lord.

For example, one who through drunkenness, lust, or pride had become unworthy of the rank he had received, and then again through continence, frugality, humility, and other marks of a better life, returns to the same rank more worthily. Again, a Levite born in Babylon enters his city in the land of Judah when someone regenerated in Christ sheds the guilt of original sin and, newly instructed in the Church, keeps the rank of deacon which he once received with regular moderation. For as he has been freed from the bondage of Chaldea through the grace of his Redeemer, so also through the execution of good works, in which the predecessors of the same rank have lived, he ascends to the walls of his own city. But those sons of Israel who were led away captive in such a way that they never returned to their homeland but left their cities and lands for others to possess; they certainly signify those who, by sinning so leave the Church that they never return by repentance, but rather leave the promised rewards to others who are worthy of them; to whom, in fact, the Lord in the Apocalypse, urging repentance says: Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works. Or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent (Apocalypse 2). And again, suggesting to another who stands firm in faith not to fall: Behold, I come quickly;

hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown (Apocalypse 3).

Chapter 3

The people gather in Jerusalem in the seventh month, and after building the altar they celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and other festivals of the Lord.

[Ezra 3:1] -- Now the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel were in their cities, etc. The seventh month, which is called October among us, was entirely more solemn than other months due to legal observances; in which even the dedication of the temple was celebrated. Therefore, it was appropriate for the devotion of the faithful, who had come up from captivity, that when they first entered their cities each one with his livestock and the money they had brought, and provided suitable dwellings for themselves and their families, they would all flow together to Jerusalem, and there construct an altar to offer burnt offerings to God; and this at the same time of the year, in which the temple itself, with the altar and all its vessels, was once consecrated, to which they regularly used to come to the day of its consecration annually. In the deeper sense, the seventh month suggests the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is described as sevenfold in the prophet Isaiah and in the Apocalypse of Saint John. In this month, indeed, after captivity from our cities, we come together in Jerusalem, when after having washed away the filth and errors of sins, after beginning the supports of good works, we are enlightened by the greater grace of the same Spirit, and thus in the love of heavenly peace, which is contained in true unity, we are kindled: for Jerusalem is said to be the vision of peace.

And it is well said that all Israel congregated as one man in Jerusalem in the seventh month; for this is daily done in the spiritual Israel, when, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, all the elect throughout the globe worship God with one and the same faith, and pant for the joys of perpetual peace and fidelity with one and undivided love; and as much as they can, even now by loving and enduring each other they imitate this. But it is well added:

[Ezra 3:2] -- And Joshua, the son of Jozadak, arose, etc. For Joshua and Zerubbabel, both of whom, as we mentioned above, fulfill one and the same figure of our Lord and Savior, were engaged in the work of divine worship. Joshua conspicuously for the priesthood, Zerubbabel for the kingdom; because the former descended from a priestly lineage, the latter from a royal lineage. Our Lord, however, is the true king of Israel, that is, of all who see the Lord; and also the true high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. He is a priest, evidently, because He cleanses us from our sins through the sacrifice of His body, and even

after His passion and ascension, He intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father (Rom. VIII). He is a king because He equips us in the present for spiritual warfare, and helps us to conquer, and grants an eternal kingdom to the victorious in the future. Not only Joshua and Zerubbabel, but also their brothers were set over the people in the building; these brothers concerning whom our King and Priest, after the glory of His resurrection, appearing to the women who sought Him, said: Go and tell My brothers (Matt. XXVIII). These brothers, namely the more eminent ones in the Church who adhere more intimately to their Redeemer, build His house with Him, as they strengthen the hearts of the faithful with their words and examples, with His help. And it is fitting that he calls them brothers of Joshua priests.

For the apostle Peter says to all the churches: But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood (1 Pet. II). Likewise, concerning the whole Church, John says in Revelation: Blessed and holy is he who has a part in the first resurrection: over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and Christ (Rev. XX). For when the elect are members of the supreme priest, and offer their members as a living sacrifice, and render their contrite spirit as a sacrifice to God, they rightly deserve both the name of brotherhood and priesthood. Moreover, with great religious providence, the sons of the exile first built the altar of God, so that even though the temple of God was not yet founded, they would have a place where, by offering holocausts and sacrifices, they could show their devotion. We also do this spiritually today in the Church, when above all, we place in our hearts the faith of the Lord's incarnation and passion, when we teach our listeners to receive this above all else and to root it deeply in their hearts, according to what the Apostle says, speaking to the still-infant Corinthians in Christ, For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (1 Cor. II). On this altar, we ought to offer our holocausts, that is our perfect thoughts and actions;

for truly it is only in this way that the vows of our deeds can be pleasing to God the Father, if we partake in the sacraments of our Redeemer, if we are kindled with the fire of His Spirit as if on a sacred altar; for a holocaust means entirely burnt, by which name they called those sacrifices from which nothing was to be used for human purposes, but everything was to be given to God and consumed by sacred fire. These mystically expressed the life of those faithful who seek nothing of their own, but expend all their living in the service of the inner arbiter. Who not only trample underfoot the pleasures of their soul or body for the Lord's sake, but also rejoice to lay down their own soul for Him, who can say with the apostles, Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us? (Matt. XIX). To whom He responds: And everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for My name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. This holocaust of a more continent and sacred life is to be offered on the altar of the God of Israel, for it is only through the faith of our Redeemer, as we have said, that our good works can be acceptable to God the Father.

For Diogenes and his followers who adhered to foolish philosophy, even though they relinquished their own things and led a bare and poor life in the world, did not follow the Lord. They seemed indeed to make a holocaust, but they did not do it on the altar of the God of Israel; for while they made themselves strangers to their own pleasures, they did not know how to have Jesus Christ as an advocate with the Father. Concerning this altar, it is fittingly added:

[Ezra 3:3] -- They placed the altar on its bases, etc. For the bases are indeed the hearts of the elect, prepared by the commandments of preceding teachers, like the tools of craftsmen, to receive the sacraments of the faith of the Lord. And it is well said that there is one altar, but there are many bases that support it; for there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God (Ephesians IV), but there are many hearts of the faithful, established by the one rule of truth, as if gathered in equal measure, bearing the heavenly burden of the sacraments with common devotion. Otherwise, whoever entrusts the sacraments of faith to those less instructed and still not caring to abandon former vices, places the altar of the Lord on the ground without bases, because they hand over heavenly matters to earthly minds. This place also agrees with what the Lord says in the Gospel: Neither do they light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a lampstand, so that it gives light to all who are in the house (Matthew V). Just as the Lord is rightly called the altar, because he cleanses us from our iniquities, because receiving the vows of our prayers, he commends them to the Father; so also the lamp can not unfittingly be called, because he placed the light of eternal divinity on the vessel of assumed humanity.

The bases are, however, put under the altar, and the lampstand is put under the lamp, when the faithful with humble intent submit their hearts or bodies to practice by working what they believe. It is well said, when it was mentioned that they placed the altar on its bases, that the peoples of the lands were deterring them around; because with the undertakings of the pious faithful to God, the contradiction of wicked spirits or men will immediately be present, who strive to hinder the good work lest it be perfected. Hence such peoples of the lands are well called, in distinction from those who say: But our conversation is in heaven (Philippians III). But although the peoples of the lands deter, it is necessary for the citizens of the heavenly city to persist in virtuous works begun. For it follows: And they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord morning and evening. For we offer burnt offerings to the Lord on his altar, when, with unwavering devotion established in our hearts by his faith, we give effort to good actions. And we do this morning and evening, when we certainly remember that we received the beginnings of a saving intention from him, and that we can only complete the good things we have begun through the help of his grace; and thus with burning desire we offer to him vows of gratitude in all things with a pious life.

Again, we make a burnt offering in the morning, when for the light of spiritual knowledge received, we repay our Creator with good living. We make a burnt offering in the evening, when for the eternal rest, which we hope to receive from him after good works, we burn with incessant zeal. It can also rightly be taken according to the letter, that we offer burnt

offerings to the Lord morning and evening, when we strive to please the divine majesty at all times, so that rising at dawn, we do not first proceed to perform the necessary duties of human frailty, before, inflamed by the fire of divine charity, with devout prayers we commend ourselves to the Lord, according to the one who said: And in the morning my prayer shall come before you. Similarly, after completing the day's work, we do not give sleep to our eyes, or slumber to our eyelids, before we consecrate a place to the Lord in ourselves with a more diligent instance of prayers, according to what the same prophet says: Let my prayer be set before you as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice (Psalm 140).

[Ezra 3:4] -- And they kept the feast of booths, etc. The Feast of Booths, which in the Gospel is called in Greek Skenopegia, that is, the pitching of booths, was a festival of seven days, beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, during which the Lord commanded all the people to make booths for themselves from leaves and branches of the most beautiful trees, and to leave their houses and stay in these booths for seven days, daily studying the decrees of the divine law, and offering burnt sacrifices to the Lord in fire. They were ordered to do all this in memory of the time when they had once come out of Egypt and dwelt in booths in the wilderness, with Moses preaching the law and the divine presence frequently appearing to them, looking forward for a long time to when they could enter the promised land, so that the grace of this great benefit would never fade from their minds. Therefore, those who had come up from Babylon to Jerusalem, with great devotion to carry out all the commands of the Lord, took care to celebrate this feast on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, performing every day of that week the things commanded by the law. All of which we ought to do spiritually with equal devotion.

For we too have come out of Egyptian slavery through the blood of the Lamb, so that we might come to the promised land, having been baptized into the sacraments of the Lord's passion, casting off the heavy yoke of trespasses, so that, having been adopted into the liberty of the glory of the children of God, we might be heirs of the heavenly kingdom. For we were dwelling in booths and tents, journeying for a long time through the desert, until we might come to our homeland, when in baptism renouncing not only Satan as the king of Egypt, that is, of darkness, but also all the pomps and works of this age, we promised to be like foreigners and pilgrims in this world, citizens of another life which we hoped for from the Lord. In memory of this hope and promise, we must dwell in booths in the seventh month, that is, being illuminated by the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is described as sevenfold, leaving this world with our whole mind as if it were alien and pressing on us, and fixing our intention on hastening to the unwithering joys of paradise; and we must do this for seven days, that is, during the whole time of the present life, which is circled by as many days, without ceasing, and every day of this week we must make a burnt offering and the work of the day in its day;

a burnt offering, that is, a whole burnt sacrifice in things that properly pertain to divine service, such as prayers and fasts. And the work of the day in its day, in those things that pertain to the service of fraternal love; such as giving bread to the hungry, drink to the

thirsty, clothing to the cold, hospitality to the traveler, visitation to the sick, burial to the dead, teaching to the wandering, and comfort to the grieving. And it is well that he said they should make a burnt offering on each day according to the command of the law, and the work of the day in its day, he interposed, In order; because whatever is done in the service of divine or fraternal love out of order, loses the merit of its perfection. For "the honor of the king loves judgment" (Psalm 99); for whatever we do devoutly in honor of the highest king, it is necessary to distinguish with the discretion of judgment when or how much it should be done; lest if we do our proper work disorderly, we spoil the rule of its correctness. Paul implied these mystical feasts of booths, that is Skenopegia, when he was preaching and occupied in the work of tentmaking (Acts 28). For he was making tents, that is, booths, both to teach himself to be an inhabitant of the world and a pilgrim, and to teach those he instructed to be pilgrims in this life and hope for a future homeland.

For we are accustomed to use booths and tents when traveling or making a journey; which the same Apostle testifies that the saints do in this life, when he says: "While we are in this body, we are pilgrims away from the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5). And to the Hebrews: "For we do not have here a lasting city, but we seek the future one" (Hebrews 13). Since he wanted those who perfectly alienate their minds from the world and faithfully confess themselves as citizens of the homeland which is above, to immediately open the entry to all virtues, it is rightly added:

[Ezra 3:5] -- And after these things, the daily burnt offering, etc. He calls it the daily burnt offering, which was offered in the morning and evening. Moreover, he calls the Kalends the beginnings of the months, that is, the rising of the new moon; from which the Hebrews always began their months, as they had no months except the lunar ones. Hence the Greeks, instead of Kalends, better call them "neomenias," which means "new moons. Now, if by the month, because of the thirty days by which they are completed, they designate the fullness of the works of light, when in faith in the Holy Trinity we fulfill the commandments of the Decalogue; what are the beginnings of the months, in which the moon, to shine again for us, is said to be newly lighted by the sun, except that they designate the beginnings of each good work, which through the grace of our Creator, we perceive as if by the presence of the Sun of Righteousness? Because of this symbolism of divine illumination, without which we can neither begin nor complete anything good, the Lord commanded all Kalends, that is, the beginnings of the months, to be celebrated and the ceremonies of sacrifices to be observed. This is why the Psalmist says: Blow the trumpet at the new moon, on our solemn feast day (Psalm 81). Which is openly to say: Rejoice, ye righteous, in the Lord, and in the word of doctrine sounding to your neighbors;

as soon as you consider yourselves to be regarded by Him in order to do good deeds in the notable light of internal inspiration; by which you are called away from the desire of this world, and are more deeply dedicated to divine matters. Well then, it is said that after the feast of tabernacles was completed, the children of the exiles made the daily burnt offering, both on the Kalends and on all the Lord's consecrated solemnities, and in all where a gift was

voluntarily offered to God. Because after the mind has once perfectly renounced this world, it must constantly devote itself entirely to the service of the divine will, which we have said the burnt offering was to designate; and this it should do both in the initiation of each good work and in the devout execution of those virtues which the Lord has commanded, as well as in those in which a pious mind, apart from general commands, delights to spontaneously serve the Lord. About which the Lord Himself, giving counsel rather than commanding, says: If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have (Matt. 19). And when He was disputing about taking a wife, He said not by commanding but by advising: He who can accept this, let him accept it (Matt. 19). But Paul too, boasting about these things which he offered to the Lord as a spontaneous gift, says: Do we not have the right to eat and drink?

Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife (1 Cor. 9)? and so forth, in the same place.

[Ezra 3:6] -- From the first day of the seventh month they began the burnt offering, etc. It has often been said that the seventh month designates the sevenfold illumination of spiritual grace. Hence it is well said now: Because from the first day of the seventh month they began to offer a burnt offering to the Lord, since indeed from the very beginning of divine inspiration, it is necessary that the human conscience be transformed, and disregarding lower pleasures, it must burn with thoughts only of the Lord's matters. From the first day of the seventh month, that is, from the first illustration of heavenly grace, they were offering the burnt offerings of virtues to the Lord, who, with the Holy Spirit coming upon them in fiery tongues, immediately, as if changed from what they had been, began to burn with new flames of intimate love, and to proclaim the great works of God with the tongues of all nations; and they are so dedicated to this burnt offering, or rather they themselves are made a burnt offering, that it would be easier to be killed by those who thought oppositely than to be turned from their intention. Hence deservedly the same seventh month is called the new year among the Hebrews; indicating to us by its name that through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the faithful are given the power to fulfill the new commandment of mutual love, and to resound the new song of heavenly praise in the building of the house of the Lord.

About whose observance of this month the Lord thus mystically commanded: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you will have a sabbath memorial, with trumpets sounding, and it will be called holy; you will not do any servile work on it, and you will offer a burnt offering to the Lord (Leviticus 23). Indeed, a sabbath memorial, that is, the first day of this month will be a rest, when the mind inflamed divinely, abstains from temporal allurements and strives to contemplate the will of God. The priests blow trumpets when the faithful strive to preach to the neighbors that fervor of internal sweetness which they have begun. No servile work is done on such a sabbath when the mind, as much as it can in this life, keeps itself free from every pleasure and contagion of sin to please God; for servile work is sin. Because whoever commits sin is the servant of sin (John 8). And therefore rightly a burnt offering is offered to the Lord on the same sabbath, because indeed he is truly rendered free from the service of sin whose whole heart is inflamed with the fire of love.

However, it must be noted, according to the letter, that in the seventh month, the people having been gathered in Jerusalem and everyone there gathered, Joshua and Zerubbabel with their brothers are said to have built an altar, and from the first day of that same seventh month to have offered a burnt offering to the Lord.

From which it is inferred that this altar was made with rather quick work from unpolished stones and not as formerly made of wood and covered with bronze plates. For otherwise, even with the crowd of builders in full force, it could not have been completed and prepared for offering a burnt offering on the same day on which it was begun. For it is also proven in the book of Maccabees that it was made of stones, where it is mentioned to have been profaned by the Gentiles and after six years to have been renewed by Judas Maccabeus (1 Maccabees 4). And, it says, they took whole stones according to the law, and built a new altar according to the one that had been before. It should also be noted that the beginning of the fifth age of the world, just as the four preceding ones, is consecrated by burnt offerings offered to the Lord. For in the first age, blessed protomartyr Abel, first of all the elect, offered burnt offerings to God from the firstlings of his flock and of their fat, dedicating the entrance of the nascent world, both with the offerings of the firstlings of beasts and ultimately with his own blood. The beginning of the second age was consecrated by Noah, offering burnt offerings to God from all clean beings contained in the ark.

The third age was consecrated by Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God, and by Abraham the patriarch, this one with bread and wine, the other with his own son offered to God, consecrating its very beginning by erecting an altar and calling upon His name when he came into the Promised Land. King David consecrated the fourth age to the Lord by building an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite and offering burnt offerings to God, by which he sought to appease His wrath, which he had incurred by numbering the people (2 Samuel 24). In that place also, it is said that Abraham once offered his son; and later, with the temple built by Solomon, the altar of burnt offerings is established there. The beginning of the fifth age is now consecrated by Joshua, the son of Jozadak, the great priest, and Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, by building an altar in the same place and offering burnt offerings to God as soon as they returned to Jerusalem after a long captivity was broken, and thereafter they took care to placate the Lord daily with constant burnt offerings. All these occurrences prefigured Him who was to come in the sixth age in the flesh and was to redeem the whole world with the offering of the same of His flesh and blood. Therefore, after building the altar and offering burnt offerings to God, the Scripture continues, saying:

[Ezra 3:6] -- Furthermore, the temple of God was not yet founded. The foundation of the temple of God typifies those who have recently converted to the faith, preparing a place and dwelling for the Lord in their heart and body, as the Apostle says: ”Do you not know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you? (1 Corinthians 6). And again: ”that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (1 Corinthians 6). Thus, those who had been liberated from captivity and came to Jerusalem intended to build the temple, which they later indeed accomplished; but first, by building the altar, they commended themselves

to the Lord through daily burnt offerings, so that they might thereby become more purified and worthy to approach the building of the temple. Similarly, in spiritual edification, it is always necessary that anyone who has decided to teach others should first teach himself; whoever intends to instruct his neighbor in the fear or love of God should first make himself worthy of the teacher's office by serving God more devotedly, so that he does not hear from the Apostle: "You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach not to steal, do you steal? (Romans 2). Hence, the Apostle says about himself: "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, so that after preaching to others, I myself should not become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9).

For this reason, it is fitting that the sons of the dispersion are found to have offered no other sacrifices or victims than burnt offerings, that is, entirely consumed offerings, to God: for it is necessary that anyone who, by living well and even abstaining from lawful things, gives himself wholly to his Creator, who, by teaching, wishes to restrain others from unlawful acts, should, by the merit of good action, obtain abundant divine assistance in preaching, and also more effectively urge his listeners to follow what he teaches by his example of good deeds. It can also be mystically interpreted that, having built the altar, they offer burnt offerings to God, but do not yet build the temple, those who recently converted to the Lord, as soon as they recognized His faith, burn with such love for Him wholeheartedly that they may already be counted among the perfect, even if they have not yet received the time or ability to accomplish and perfect the good things they desire to do. Blessed Abraham offered this kind of burnt offering to the Lord, even if the temple was not yet built, when he was already perfect in faith and before he carried out the acts of faith, as Scripture says: "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Genesis 19). When therefore he added the fullness of good works to his perfect faith, offering Isaac his son on the altar, as if the temple had also been built, he offered more perfect burnt offerings to God;

for indeed, each act or step of pious devotion is like an order of polished stones with which we construct in our heart a beloved house and dwelling place for God. However, how the sons of the dispersion, after building the altar and offering burnt offerings to God, came to build the temple is subsequently shown.

[Ezra 3:7] -- However, they gave money to the stonecutters and the builders, etc. The stonecutters are hewers of stones. Hence it is written in the book of Chronicles: And David commanded that all proselytes from the land of Israel be assembled, and appointed some of them as stonecutters to cut stones (II Chron. XXXII). Builders are those who make cement for binding stones from gypsum or lime. Hence another translation for stonecutters and builders is hewers of stones and craftsmen. Therefore, note the pious ingenuity of the people, that sparing no expense, from what was necessary for them, and from what they lived on, they either bought materials for the building of the temple or hired workers. Joppa, however, is a maritime city of Palestine, about forty miles from Jerusalem. But Sidon and Tyre were the most noble cities of Phoenicia, having Mount Lebanon nearby. Hence, the children of the exile, obtaining their aid, asked for cedar wood to be cut for them from Lebanon

and transported by rafts through the sea to Joppa, from where they could again carry it by land to Jerusalem for the work of the temple, which is established to have been done in the same order at the first construction of the temple. And because Solomon, with royal power, obtained whatever he desired from his friend King Hiram without any labor. But now exiles, returning home after many years, since they did not have the power of the kingdom, obtained all that the desired work required by means of payment.

In a spiritual sense, the stonecutters in the building of the house of God are those who, by teaching or reproving, shape the hearts of their neighbors; whom, when they teach to stand steadfast among the partakers of the same grace, they fit them as hewing stones to be neatly joined. For as a square, whichever way you turn it, it will stand. And the mind of the elect, while it remains unmoved among all the adversities or prosperities of the world, demonstrates that it possesses the form of invincible virtue. In this sense, it is also described that Noah's ark was made of squared timbers (Gen. VI). For the same Church, which the temple made of stone signifies, also the ark made of timbers represented. The same was also shown by the tabernacle composed of boards and curtains (Exod. XXXVI). Builders, however, are in the house of the Lord, the same holy preachers who, while they bind those whom they instruct with good works in the bond of charity to each other, they join with the infusion of cement, saying: Be prudent and watchful in prayers, above all having unfailing mutual charity among yourselves (I Pet. IV). And the apostle Paul, commanding us to have the bowels of mercy, kindness, humility, modesty, patience, and the like, immediately added: But above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfection (Col. III).

But also the Sidonians and Tyrians, who cut the cedar wood from Lebanon for the temple structure, figuratively denote the same holy preachers, who cut down the men once elevated and shining in the glory of this world with the axe of God's word from the state of their former conversation so that, having them prostrated salutarily, and as if dried out from the corruptive moisture of innate senses, they correct them from all vice's tortuosity and raise them loftily for the ornament or defense of the holy Church. Concerning this, it is said in the Psalm titled, At the completion of the tabernacle: The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars (Ps. XXVIII). For the voice of the Lord breaks the cedars that the tabernacle may be completed when the hearts of the proud are humbled by divine inspiration, so that, with them also corrected, the number of the holy Church may be perfected. Hence, the Sidonians are interpreted as hunters, the Tyrians as constrained. For the holy preachers are hunters, capturing the wandering and errant senses of the wicked with the nets of faith to subjugate them to Christ, as He says: Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men (Matt. IV). They are also constrained because they have tribulation in the world, yet confident because the Lord has overcome the world (John XVI). Therefore, stonecutters and builders, preparing stones and cement;

Sidonians and Tyrians, bringing cedar wood from Lebanon to the temple work, suggest holy preachers, who instruct the minds of their listeners to the fellowship of the Church by teaching. The princes of the fathers, namely Joshua and Zerubbabel and their brothers, give

money to the same stonecutters and builders so that they might be more eager to work when those who have preceded the teachers of the word in time, merit, and learning, by Christ's authority either propose examples of their virtues or grant the pages of the divine scriptures, whose exhortations or promises fortify, so that they may not weary in the heavenly labor. They also give to the Sidonians and Tyrians food, drink, and oil, that they might bring the cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa when they recommend spiritual gifts, among the greatest of which is charity, to be emulated by the same teachers to make them capable of preaching (II Cor. XII). Or certainly when our Lord, whom we also taught to be designated by Joshua and Zerubbabel, distributes spiritual gifts to the ministers of His word, by which illuminated inwardly, they may become stronger to combat by preaching the pride of the arrogant and the foolish wisdom. For it does not need to be taught how food, drink, and oil signify the internal nourishment of our mind, who says well that of the Psalmist singing to the Lord: You have prepared a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me.

You have anointed my head with oil, and my cup inebriating, how splendid it is (Ps. XXII). Therefore, money is given to the stonecutters and builders, food, drink, and oil are given to the hewers of wood, so that they might prepare materials for the building of the house of the Lord when the abundance of virtues is divinely bestowed on the preachers of truth, by which assisted, they may suffice to correct the perverse hearts and fit them for the reception of heavenly goods. They bring the cut wood to the sea, not to be submerged in it, but to be carried through it to Joppa, which means beauty; when the same teachers announce to their listeners called to faith, the temptations of the world will occur to them but can be overcome by faith, so that first, either the waves of vices or of wicked men must be endured and thus they may reach the most beautiful fortifications and port of virtues. We can also understand that the wood intended for the temple building is carried through the sea to Joppa so that we renounce the devil, who is called by the prophet the dragon, king of all that are in the waters, that is, of the wicked, whose conversation is not in heaven but in the perturbations of the fluctuating sea of the world.

We renounce all his pomps and works, and then we come to the beauty of the faith, by which we confess the Holy Trinity, one and true God, the dispensation of the Lord's incarnation, the unity of the holy Church, the remission of sins, and the resurrection of the flesh. Therefore, rightly in this city Peter raised Tabitha, a woman devout to God, from the dead (Acts IX); because certainly in the perfection of this faith, and generally the whole Church is raised from the death of sins through baptism; and when after baptism we again fall into the death of sin, we must revive through that same faith by repenting and be returned through the reconciliation of the priests of the Church again to the assembly of the faithful.

Chapter 4

In the second year of their coming, the house of the Lord is founded, but the people of the land hinder its completion.

[Ezra 3:8] -- In the second year of their coming, etc. He says they came to the temple of God, not because they found it already built, since it was foretold that it had not yet been founded; but it is said that they came to the temple of God, to the place of the temple of God, to the work they desired to rebuild as a temple. Modern Jews are mistaken, who are accustomed to say that the walls of the temple were never overthrown, but only the roof by the Chaldeans; since Ezra clearly writes that the children of the captivity made the temple from its foundations. However, when it is said above that they came to Jerusalem in the seventh month, and here it is added that in the second year of their coming, in the second month, they began the work of the temple; it is clear indeed that in seven months they prepared stones, cement, wood, and other necessary works; and at the beginning of the eighth month they began to apply themselves eagerly to the desired work. For six months were of the first year and the seventh of the following; which, indeed, anyone learned can easily find was done in a great mystery. For the seven pertain to the sabbath, in which the Lord either rested from all His works after creating the world or rested in the tomb after redeeming the world through His passion. The eight pertain to the first of the sabbath, in which He Himself rose from the dead.

The seven refer to our hope of a sabbath after death. The eight look forward to the joy of our eternal blessedness after the resurrection. Therefore, because the work of all the elect, who are the temple and house of God, is begun and perfected by the grace of the Holy Spirit and is carried out with every regard and intention of future rest and immortality; it is rightly considered that those who search out the temple, having offered holocausts to God from the seventh month, began to prepare the expenses for building, and, with the preparations made in seven months, commenced the work itself in the eighth. Neither is any other number found at all in the preparation of such a great work than that which symbolically denotes either the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit, by which we are assisted while working, or the rest of souls, or the resurrection of bodies, which we, hoping well, work for. Moreover, what the time of forty-six years signifies, in which the temple was built, as also the scripture of the Gospel testifies, is explained in its own place. However, the great

devotion of that entire people is shown to us as well to be diligently imitated, since not only the elders, namely Zerubbabel and Joshua, and the remaining priests and Levites, but also all who came from captivity to Jerusalem from the greatest to the least, appointed Levites to hasten the work of the Lord. For they rejoiced to have returned from Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem;

and as much as they had loathed the idols and wickedness of the proud city they had escaped, they desired to see the beauty of the city consecrated to the Lord, to which they had merited to come. As much as they abominated the temples of idols, among which they had long been present, they desired the temple of their Creator, which they mourned to be destroyed and from which they had been exiled as captives for so long, to be quickly restored. In the same order, even now, not only bishops and priests but also the congregation of the faithful, that is, the house of God, should diligently teach and appoint those teachers who diligently fulfill the holy work of the Word by counseling. Also, the people themselves, called from the captivity of vices to the vision of true peace, should demand the ministry of the Word from those who know how to impart it. These ministers of the word, that is, Levites, are said to be appointed from twenty years old and above; because it is fitting that those who are presented to preach the word of God to the people should not only show the example of the law by work in action but also keep it undefiled in the purity and integrity of heart before their Creator.

Nor should there be any doubt that the state of the Church will take prosperous progress where both the prelates rightly keep their grade by regularly appointing teachers of truth to the people who will instruct them, and the people compel the appointed teachers, by diligently listening and obeying their teachings, not to cease from speaking. But alas, alas! the negligence of our times offends both the greater and the lesser, hindering them, the former from preaching the word, the latter from hearing it, and both from doing it, because we consider less diligently either how great the bitterness of the demonic captivity from which we are rescued is, or how great the solemnity to which we are called, the heavenly Jerusalem, the mother of us all, of which we have already received a pledge in the present Church. Let us, however, consider the excellent works of the Fathers, that we may the more be confounded by our own smallness in action. It follows:

[Ezra 3:9] -- And Joshua stood and his sons, etc. In this place, Joshua does not refer to the son of Josedek, the high priest, but to one of the Levites, of whom it had been foretold that they would be appointed from twenty years old and above to attend to the work of the Lord, among whom were also Kadmiel and the sons of Henadad, who were recorded as having taken heed of the same work, along with their sons and brothers; indeed, earlier in the catalogue of the people of Israel, these, after the priests, are the first Levites mentioned by name. ”The Levites,” he says, ”the sons of Joshua, and Kadmiel of the sons of Hodaviah, seventy-four” (Ezra 2). From both passages it can be gathered that they were chiefs and patriarchs of the Levites of that time. Here, the sons of Judah are rightly interspersed among the Levites, who together took care in restoring the temple of the Lord; and these,

on account of the same agreement in piety, are remembered as having stood as one. For this is the order of virtue previously mentioned, always to be imitated by us, that each person in their own way may build up the holy Church, all the ranks dedicated to God, and the devotion of the entire people. And it is to be noted and more frequently remembered how much good was bestowed upon the people by the evil of captivity;

from which being freed, they are all shown to have given such great attention to heavenly services as never before. But even today, it has benefited many who had lived negligently in the peace of the Church to suddenly err and fall into some sins, while after their fall, being lifted up by penance, they began to serve the Lord more diligently; and those who seemed sluggish and slothful in standing innocent, when reminded by their accidental fall, girded themselves more vigorously for their own protection against all the snares of the ancient enemy; so that those who had previously offended by neglecting their own life, afterwards even cared for the safety of their brothers along with their own rise. Therefore, all the people returning from Babylon to Jerusalem took care for restoring the temple, but especially the Levites and the sons of Judah, namely because of the priestly and royal dignity of the holy Church. For the royal and especially the priestly tribe builds the temple; because undoubtedly all those who form the hearts of the faithful, either by teaching or by good living, belong to the body of the eternal king and priest, that is, our Lord and Savior. Hence, even the leaders of the work, Jesus from the priestly tribe and Zerubbabel from the royal tribe, took their origin from both tribes.

[Ezra 3:11] -- So, with the foundation of the temple of the Lord laid by the masons, etc., great devotion of all persons is shown. With the foundation of the temple of the Lord laid, both priests and Levites and all the people, according to their respective statuses, praised the mercy of the Lord. The priests, indeed, adorned with holy garments as they were accustomed while the temple still stood, sounding the trumpets and stirring the hearts of the people to the sweetness of the heavenly praise; the Levites, strumming well on cymbals, singing hymns to the Lord; and the people, exhibiting their hearts' affection in common clamor in praising the Lord. The Levites also praised the Lord by the hand of David, either on the instruments which he made or the psalms which he established, or because David, in the placing of the ark, appointed Asaph and his brethren to give thanks to the Lord, as the words of the days testify, concerning whom it is again said: "Because his sons were under his hand, prophesying according to the king. (1 Chronicles VI). Rightly, also in this place, when the sons of Asaph praised and gave thanks to the Lord by the hand of David, that is, they are to be understood to have done this according to his arrangement.

According to the mystical sense, indeed, with the temple of the Lord founded by masons, the priests stand in their attire with trumpets, when converted sinners from the error of sins, and with faith and love of Christ established in their hearts, all who hear the masters of the churches rejoice. They themselves, moreover, decorating themselves more diligently with good works, sound the trumpets of saving doctrine, so that both by the example of virtues and by the exhortation of sermons, they might aid the good beginnings of those who

either recently by repenting have come to the grace of Christ or have recently taught others to turn to the grace of Christ. The Levites also stand to praise God with cymbals when even ministers of the second order serve their Creator with pious deeds for the instruction of neophytes, and this in the mutual sweetness of charity. For cymbals, which strike each other to sound, most fittingly express the works of charity, with which the holy ones excite each other to the praise of their author. They also praise Him through the hand of David, the King of Israel, when they diligently consider and strive as much as they can to imitate the works that the Lord and Savior carried out in the flesh.

[Ezra 3:12] -- Many also of the priests and Levites, etc., who had seen the first temple founded, and this temple before their eyes, were emitting voices partly of weeping, partly of joy. Joy indeed, because the temple of the Lord, which had been destroyed, had now begun to be restored. Weeping, however, because they were grieving, seeing how much the wall that had begun at that time differed from the most magnificent power of Solomon, by which the first temple was founded. They rejoiced greatly because, having been freed from captivity, they had received the ability to rebuild the temple. But they wept with a loud voice, because they knew that the first temple had been destroyed due to their own crimes, whose greatness nor glory they were able to match at all. For the prophet was saying: ”Great will be the glory of this last house of the Lord, more than the first” (Haggai 2), because it pertains to a greater matter, not to the magnitude or ornament of the house; because it was a greater miracle and a more evident display of divine power that a few remnants of captives, even with enemies resisting, were able to complete such a work, than that the most opulent king, having no adversary at all, indeed having the most powerful and wealthy king of Tyre as a helper, did this with the most learned craftsmen as he desired. Also, the glory of that last house will be greater than the first;

because in the former house, the devotees of the Old Testament proclaimed to the people the writings of the law and the prophets. In the second, however, Christ and the apostles evangelized the grace of the New Testament and the entrance of the heavenly kingdom. But even in the rebuilding of the spiritual temple, both weeping and joy are born among the leaders. For the holy teachers rejoice in the salvation of the penitent; they mourn because they have ever committed sins to be repented of, and have not always persisted in the will of their Creator. Those who have risen from the death of the soul through repentance rejoice in their salvation; they mourn having ever lost the life of the soul through sin. The neophytes also rejoice that they have been gathered by the grace of their Redeemer; they grieve that they, along with all humankind, perished in the first parent and, as if the temple of God was corrupted by enemies, were transferred to Babylon, that is, the confusion of the present exile, in the state of the immortal body and soul. But because, as the progress of the good increases, so does the envy of the wicked, and there will never be a lack of temptations from the depraved during the growth of the pious, who either by feigning good or openly inflicting evil, try to harm the saints, it is rightly added:

[Ezra 4:1] -- The enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard, etc. The history is known; because it speaks of the Samaritans, the enemies of Judah and Benjamin, whom the king of Assyria transported into their cities and lands from various nations of the ten tribes in captivity. These, after receiving the law of God, partially observed it, while still serving the same idols as before. These people, regarding the true worshipers of God with disdain, promised them help with the work, intending to bring about harm once accepted into partnership. It is clear to anyone that such people figuratively represent false brethren, that is, heretics and bad Catholics. They are enemies of Judah, that is, of confession and praise, which the Church offers to the Lord in the present through true faith and worthy works of faith. They are also enemies of Benjamin, that is, the sons of the right hand, while they segregate those who listen to them from the faithful people's lot, who are to receive blessing and the eternal kingdom at the right hand of the Judge in the future.

Such people say to Zerubbabel and the elders, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God like you do," as heretics desire the same authority of preaching to be granted to them among Catholics, promising to hold and love the same true faith and actions as them, so that, having gained the power to teach amidst the good seed, from which the Apostle Paul derived the name to be called a 'seed-speaker,' that is, a seed-sower, they may intersperse the tares of secret doctrine. Some did this at the Council of Nicaea, who subscribed to the true faith among Catholic fathers with a non-Catholic mind; so that being more familiarly mixed with the faithful, they might more freely build a place for receiving the Arian perfidy. Likewise, Pelagius in the Palestinian Council anathematized his own heresy, by which he most fiercely attacked the grace of God, in confession and writing, not from the heart, lest he be anathematized himself by Catholic priests, and thus lose the place of teaching in the Church and the ability to sow his error. "Behold," they say, "We offered sacrifices from the days of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, who brought us here. You offered sacrifices, but unclean ones because you did not renounce idols. For what fellowship has righteousness with iniquity? Or what communion has light with darkness? What agreement has Christ with Belial? (II Cor. VI).

For you have entered the land of the sons of Israel, not introduced by Joshua, not subjected to the rule of Jerusalem, but brought into their land by a perfidious king, an enemy of the people of God, not to serve the Lord in this, but the same adversarial king. Thus, heretics and false Catholics, when they attack the peace of the Church, either by living perversely or also by teaching, are wholly alien to the kingdom of Jerusalem and belong to the lost lot of the Gentiles, whose sins they do not abandon; indeed, to speak more openly, such people, not led by the Lord Jesus but by the devil, of whose figure Esarhaddon king of Assyria held, enter into the borders of the holy Church. For what but the instigation of the devil leads someone to receive the sacraments of the Church, not so that they may sanctify themselves to God for healing, but so that consecrated to God, they may corrupt others out of familiarity, to be condemned more fiercely? Simon the Magician acted this way (Acts VIII), who received baptism in the Church, not out of zeal for his salvation but to know the Church's affairs more

surely from proximity; which he demonstrated by his end, for he most severely troubled the Church not as a false brother but as an open enemy. It follows:

[Ezra 4:3] -- It is not for you or us to build a house for our God. Heretics are not to build the house of the Lord, which is the Church, from which they themselves are proved to be strangers; but only those who, adhering to Christ the true King and Priest, have deserved to be called the leaders of the fathers, due to the devout care which they have for those who desire to see God, which is the meaning of Israel.

[Ezra 4:4] -- Thus, it happened that the people of the land hindered them. He rightly calls those who disrupted the workers of the truth and tried to hinder the work of the Church the people of the land. But the people of Judah, that is, those confessing and glorifying Him who with a whole heart sought to build for the Lord God, sought to convert all minds and mouths they could to doing His will, to seeking His glory. How often have heretics not only in individual cities but also in entire provinces, either by perverse teaching or by hostile violence, impeded the doctrine of true confession, let us not know. For instance, let us remain silent about the teacher of the nations, who, bound for two years in Caesarea due to the persecution by the Jews (Acts 23), had his tongue restrained from the duty of building the house of God. Behold, through the snares of subsequent heretics, blessed Athanasius was exiled from his homeland for many years, Ambrose was besieged in his city, Hilary was relegated to exile, Eusebius suffered martyrdom; many bishops in Africa, having had their tongues cut out, were ejected from their province, others were tormented or killed by various punishments, the house of God, which they had built, was handed over to be profaned by the people of the land, that is, by men seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ; until, at the divinely appointed time, there should again be a supply of wise architects to rebuild that house after the captivity; that is, until the Catholic Fathers were given the ability to restore the Church after the heresies had been discovered and overcome.

[Ezra 4:5] -- But they hired counselors against them, etc. The distinction of the words is noteworthy; because they indeed hired counselors against the builders of the temple with a price given, in order that their plan might be destroyed; yet he does not say that their plan was destroyed, nor that they ceased from their work, until the letter of accusation was written to Artaxerxes, and by his command, as the Scripture says, with arm and strength. For it follows there: Then the work of the house of God in Jerusalem was stopped, and it did not continue until the second year of Darius, king of Persia (I Esdr. IV). Whence it is gathered, that indeed during the whole time of Cyrus, they pursued the work, although more slowly than justly, but upon his death, not being hindered by wicked counsel, they were openly repelled from working. For the enemies did not dare, while Cyrus was still living, who had ordered that work to be done, to openly oppose, although covertly suggesting or counseling, to go against his decrees. The allegorical sense, however, is readily apparent: because heretics, as the opportunity of the time permits, now pursue the Church with the counsel of wicked doctrines, now with the more bitter fight of swords, and sometimes even do not fear to harass it with the support of gentile rulers. For they impede the hands of

the people of Judah, when they delay the Church in its weaker members from the works of pious profession. They strive to destroy the plan of working when they also endeavor to divert their spirits from the very intention of good action. They accuse them to kings, when they also seek the protections of earthly rulers against the Church. How much this harms the faith became as clear as light during the time of the Arian perfidy.

Chapter 5

The Samaritans write letters of accusation to the kings of Persia, and by the decree of royal letters they prohibit the work of the temple. [Ezra 4:6] -- In the year of the reign of Ahasuerus... they wrote an accusation, etc. Josephus (Antiquities XI, 2, 3) believes that this Artaxerxes, who received the letter of accusation from the Samaritans and forbade the construction of Jerusalem and the temple, was Cambyses, the son of Cyrus, who, after his father ruled for thirty years, reigned himself for eight years; and after him, the Magi ruled for one year, then Darius, the son of Hystaspes, succeeded to the throne. In his second year, the angel permitted the temple to be built, saying through Zechariah the prophet, interceding for the people: Lord of hosts, how long will you not have mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which you have been angry? This is the seventieth year (Zech. I). As for Ahasuerus, to whom it is said the letter of accusation was equally sent, it is perhaps silent on whether he replied or responded because either he died in the same year he began to reign, leaving the rule and these matters to Artaxerxes; or he was indeed contemporary with Artaxerxes but, being of lesser power, allowed him to handle and decide these things more.

[Ezra 4:11] -- This is a copy of the letter, etc. Artaxerxes, who is persuaded, and who, being persuaded, commanded that Jerusalem should not be built, holds the figure either of some pagan ruler, certainly an enemy and persecutor of the Church, or of the ancient enemy of all good things, and adversary of the Jews, who accused the ecclesiastical men before the king: the Samaritans, who accused, always represent heretics. Hence, they call Jerusalem, with suitable expression, a rebellious and wicked city. For such do the heretics judge the Catholic unity which they attack. In truth, however, it is rebellious and constructs its walls and walls of the right faith with the stones of celestial testimonies against the weapons of attacking errors, of which Isaiah says: ”And salvation will occupy our walls, and praise your gates” (Isaiah 60). But it should not be called wicked, except only by those who are completely averse from the best opinion. Among which it should be noted that from that time, the people of God began to be counted by the name of the Jews, because those who first ascended from captivity and restored the walls of the city of Jerusalem and the work of the temple, and possessed the province emptied of inhabitants, having again defeated the enemies who held the neighboring places, were chiefly from the tribe of Judah.

[Ezra 4:12] -- Now, therefore, let it be known to the king, etc., thanks be to God, that the enemies of the city of the Lord, which is the Church, confess the truth about that city; for if it were built after captivity and its walls made of living stones, that is, holy souls, raised against the arrogance of this world, the citizens of that city, that is, the people of the elect, will not give further tribute of hateful servitude by sinning to malignant spirits. Rather, the building of piety will harm the princes of the power of this air, as more of those who, through the washing of regeneration, are taken away daily from the kingdom of the devil, having been born into the service of that kingdom due to the guilt of the first transgression; who, by the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord, no longer pay unjust tribute to the enemy, but justly offer proper tribute of due servitude to their Creator, and return to the giver of gifts, from whom they received, by living well and giving thanks, the annual dues of their firstfruits and tithes, which are done through the beginning and perfection of good works.

[Ezra 4:14] -- We, therefore, mindful of the salt which we have eaten in the palace, etc. The Samaritans eat salt in the palace, when heretics are educated with the flavor of worldly philosophy, with the sweetness of rhetoric, and with the cleverness of dialectical art. They also consider it impious to see the king's injuries completed, when they cannot endure if anyone tries to attack the kingdom of the devil with pious faith or action, and they fear wars stirred up in the Church, lest their heresies and deceptions, along with the doctrines of the Gentiles, are defeated by its defenders, led undoubtedly by Him who said: "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10). And again: "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled" (Luke 12)? Namely, the sword of His word, with which He strikes down adversaries; and the fire of charity, with which, by kindling the hearts of His own, He burns away all the arms and shields of the opposing faction.

[Ezra 4:16] -- We announce to the king, that if that city is built, etc. He names the Euphrates river, within which is Syria. Which rightly indicates the stream of holy baptism, either because it is one of the four rivers which, rising from one source in paradise, irrigate the whole world; indeed in the figure of the four evangelists, who, inspired by the one source of life, that is, the Lord Savior, proclaim with a harmonious voice to all nations the washing of salvation; or because Euphrates is interpreted as fruitful; which name most aptly fits that sacrament by which the world, washed and sanctified, customarily brings forth the fruit of souls thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold to God. Therefore, the king of the Persians, who are interpreted as tempters, seeks possession beyond the river, when the ancient enemy, by stirring up the incursions of temptations, tries to break into the boundaries of the Church, and to subjugate to himself even those who are redeemed by the sacred font. The Samaritans help him, as heretics who attack the Church fight for the kingdom of the devil, and as if they are said to be grieving: Because if that city is built, and its walls restored, through true faith and the religious works of the righteous, he will not be able to have possession and place beyond the river, that is, in the hearts of those who are already reborn to God through baptism. They are also understood who do not understand the true faith,

that one and the same mind cannot be possessed by light and darkness, iniquity and justice, Christ and Belial.

[Ezra 4:17] -- The king sent word to Rehum the commander and to Shimshai the scribe, etc. The sense of the letter is clear, and so is the allegory; because the profane king, namely the ancient adversary, most gladly supports the wishes of those who persecute the Church, and prohibit it from being built. But the enemies of Jerusalem dwell in Samaria, which is interpreted as guardian; not because they can in any way keep the precepts of faith and truth, who are proven by obstinate mind to oppose the true vision of peace, but because they themselves boast that the custody of virtues remains with them when they fight against the walls of peace through heresy. [Ezra 4:23] -- Therefore, the example of the decree of King Artaxerxes was read, etc. Moreover, the sequence of history is clear, that the enemies of the people of God first obstructed the holy work by persecution, then attempted to dissipate the plan of their righteous intention with wicked counsels, and yet they were not able to entirely withdraw them from the work of the house of the Lord until, fortified by royal assistance, they opposed them with public authority. Notable is their deceit in accusing, as they complained that those who were building the house of God were constructing a city against the kingdom of the Persians; and with the king commanding that the city should not be built, they immediately, having received the authority of the royal letters, resisted the rebuilding of the temple with harmful power; although they had only accused them of building the city, not of constructing the temple, and the king had only prohibited the city from being built.

Chapter 6

At the exhortation of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, Zerubbabel and Joshua build the temple of God; and Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the river, seeks Darius' decision on what should be done about it. (1 Esdr. V.)

[Ezra 5:1] -- And the prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesied, etc. These things are more fully written in the books of these prophets; with words by which they either reproved the laziness of those who had been more negligent towards the work of the temple, or stirred them to work with the promise of God's aid; by which devotion at their exhortation, Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the people set themselves to the work of building the house of the Lord. And indeed the prophet Haggai begins thus: In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet saying: Speak to Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and to Joshua, the son of Jozadak, the high priest, saying: Thus says the Lord of hosts: This people says, The time has not yet come to build the house of the Lord. And the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet saying: Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? (Haggai I). And shortly after: And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, the son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people;

and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius (Ibid.). And in the following, which we placed above: The glory of this latter house will be greater than that of the former, says the Lord of hosts (Haggai II). Likewise, Zechariah begins thus: In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet (Zech. I). From which title it is clearer how Ezra names him the son of Iddo, evidently because he was the grandson of him. But Iddo himself is to be understood as a noble prophet, of whom Zechariah, as a distinguished prophet, is rightly called his son. Among these, it must be noted the great spirit of these prophets, who ordered the temple to be built against the decree of such a great king and the Samaritans, and all the surrounding peoples hindering the construction of the temple. Zerubbabel and Joshua, and the people who were with them, are likewise proven to have been of no less faith, as they listened to the prophets commanding rather than the king forbidding.

But since we have often spoken in this volume about Zerubbabel and Joshua, or Jesus (for it is the same name), how they designated the Lord Savior, the king and high priest both by lineage and act, it seems appropriate to explain their names as they signify Him. Zerubbabel is therefore called a garden in Babylon, or master of Babylon; Shealtiel, my request is God; Jesus or Joshua, savior; Jozadak, the Lord is just. And indeed openly, as the son of Nun clearly signifies the Lord Christ Jesus. Hence each led the people into the promised land, that one from a long stay in the wilderness, this one from the longer captivity, in a figure of the true Jesus, who, delivering His chosen from all evils, leads them to the joys of the promised heavenly kingdom; who is the son of Jozadak, that is, of the Lord's just one, about whom it is sung in the psalm: The Lord just shall crush the necks of sinners, be ashamed and be turned back, all who hate Zion (Psalm 128). Zerubbabel, called a garden in Babylon, refers historically to him because he was born there, being of the lineage of David, who was born in Bethlehem. According to allegory, it pertains to the Lord; who, that He might lead from the confusion of errors, deigned to arise and dwell for a time in Babylon, that is, in the confusion of this world.

He is also called the master of Babylon, not that he teaches the things of Babylon, that is, of this world; but because he instructs those whom he found oppressed by the yoke of Babylon to the grace of freedom, and leads the instructed to the walls of the heavenly homeland. His father is Shealtiel, that is, my request is God, who himself says in the psalm: Request of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance (Psalm 2). But also, each faithful one invoking the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when seeking none other than God himself from Him, can rightly be named Shealtiel, that is, my request is God, according to the dictum of the Psalmist: For what is there for me in heaven, and what have I desired on earth besides you (Psalm 73)? and the rest, until he says: But for me it is good to be near to God. Our petition is therefore God, when we seek only Him from Him, so that we may be deemed worthy to enjoy the eternal vision of Him.

[Ezra 5:3] -- At that time, Thathannai came to them, etc. The sense of the letter is clear, because the leaders of the Jews, strengthened by the words of the prophets, were not able to be hindered by the persecution of the enemies from the holy work, which they had ceased from for fear of the enemies while the prophets still rested. What is now carried out in the holy Church in the same manner, while those who had become more lukewarm towards good work due to the snares of evil men or spirits remained for a while, suddenly corrected by the words of either faithful teachers or divine Scriptures, begin to boil over with good endeavors to such an extent that they cannot be overcome by any machinations of temptations, nor can they be recalled from their intended purpose. However, it is rightly asked how it was said, "To which we responded to them," as if he who wrote was present at that time, since Ezra is said to have written this book, who is found not to have been in Jerusalem at this time but came much later during the reign of Artaxerxes. Either he was truly there at that time when the temple was being built and returned to Babylon after the temple was made to lead more of the children of Israel back to Jerusalem; or certainly, even if he was not there while the temple was being built, he nonetheless joined with those who were building, because

he considered everything that was done concerning his brothers or that they did as his own. Similarly, the Apostle also, for the sake of fraternal concord, in a way associates himself with the saints who will be at the end of the age: "We," he says, "who are alive, who remain, will not precede those who have fallen asleep at the coming of our Lord" (I Thess. IV).

[Ezra 5:7] -- And it pleased them that the matter should be referred to Darius, etc., until the end of the letter. This letter that Thathannai writes to Darius is very different from the letter that Rehum and Samsai wrote to Artaxerxes. For that letter was filled with accusations against the people of Jerusalem, whereas this one is full of praise not only of the people but also of Almighty God. Indeed, it begins thus: "To King Darius, all peace. Let it be known to the king, that we went to the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is being built with unpolished stone, and timber is being laid in the walls, and this work is being diligently built, and it grows in their hands. Therefore, we questioned these elders, and thus we said to them: Who gave you the authority to build this house? etc. In these words, it is also noteworthy how it is said, the house of God is built with unpolished stone; since it is evident that such a work could only have been done with polished stones. But "unpolished stone" should be understood to mean new stone, which they indeed found unpolished, but by polishing, they made it fit for building the house of the Lord:

for even if some of the old stones, which, as Jeremiah lamentingly shows (Lamentations 4), were scattered at the head of every street, remained, it is nonetheless doubtful that new stones had to be polished, from which the work of the temple could be completed. In which indeed there is an evident mystery, since we see the Church of God being built, not only from those who repentantly return to the life of holiness which they previously lost by sinning; but also from those who recently have been called to faith, composed under the instruction of teachers like the rule of craftsmen, and placed in the building of the house of the Lord in a suitable order. Although it can also be rightly understood this way, that the temple was built of both old and new stones, of long-polished and more recently unpolished stones; since from both peoples, namely the Jews and the Gentiles, one Church of Christ is gathered; one, which was long polished in knowledge and observance of God's law; the other, which was enslaved to idolatry, had shed the deformity of a rustic and earthly mind by no industry of spiritual architects, by no cult of piety. And what follows in the same letter: And timber is placed in the walls. The timber that was placed for the monument or ornament of the walls of the temple signified the same life of the saints in the ornament of the holy Church, which the stones also signify, as we have taught above.

These timbers the prophet mentions in a psalm, in which the house of the Lord is built after the captivity: "Then all the trees of the forest will rejoice before the face of the Lord, because he comes, for he comes to judge the earth" (Psalm 96). Indeed, the hearts of the once proud rejoice because they were cut from the impious mount of ancestral tradition, and have deserved to be transferred into the construction of the house of the Lord. They rejoice before the face of the Lord, because he comes to judge the earth; whose strict judgment they have anticipated by a healthy fear, and whose coming once they dreaded as sinners, now

corrected and justified, they eagerly desire. That former letter, therefore, was written with insidious intent, this one with friendly letters; and rightly so, because the former was from the Samaritan enemies of the Jews everywhere; but this one was sent by the governor of the region beyond the river, that is, lower Syria and Phoenicia, and by his associates, who had no domestic enmities against the Jews, but only wished to know and execute the will of the king, from whom they received the authority of governance. Hence, the Samaritans, who wrote the first letter inciting the king's anger against the builders of the temple, are rightly compared to heretics, who often so defile the Church with vile plagues that they even make it hateful to the Gentiles and arouse their fury against it.

Nevertheless, this governor of Syria, who does not accuse but consults the king about the work of the house of God, rightly represents those who, still situated in gentile life, marvel at the faith and works of the Church; nor do they deny that they would believe if they could understand that this is the true and just worship of divinity. Finally, hearing from the elders of the Jews, when they gave an account of their construction: "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are building the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and completed. But because our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house; and the rest, which they answered about the renovation of the same temple, which was commanded by Cyrus. Having nothing further to contradict with his advisers, nor wishing to impede the builders, he was simply inquiring whether Cyrus had indeed ordered the temple to be built, and whether Darius himself wanted it built. Having recognized the will of both kings, along with his own, he diligently aided the construction of the temple that the entire work might be completed, as is written subsequently. All these things harmonize with the mind and action of those who, previously living a gentile life, suddenly witnessing the conduct of the holy Church, desire to hear and learn the rationale of the same religion;

and at last, recognizing that this originated from the God of heaven and earth, who is the only true God, they themselves, believing, rejoice to assist its building. But let us see what King Darius did when he received the letter from the governor and his advisers.

Chapter 7

Darius, after reading Cyrus's letters, ordered the temple to be built, which was completed in the sixth year of his reign. (I Esdras VI.) [Ezra 6:1] -- Then King Darius commanded, etc. Josephus (Antiq. XI, 3) mentioned the name of the place where these letters of Cyrus were found thus: And a book was found in Ecbatana in a constructed tower, in the region of Media. Moreover, another translation has it thus: In Ecbatana, in the safest building of the region of the Medes. Hence it seems likely that the name Media signifies nothing other than Media. What follows is:

[Ezra 6:3] -- And as for laying the supporting foundations, etc., it is not for us to explain; because neither in the earlier building of the temple nor in the later one is any of these measurements or such work found. Hence it is inferred that Cyrus uttered this of his own accord, and noted the measurement or order of the work as seemed appropriate to him; inasmuch as the temple, as the Words of the Days recount, in the first measure, that is, within the inner walls, had sixty cubits of length, twenty cubits of width. Furthermore, as the history of Kings writes, the height was up to the upper chambers thirty cubits; then another thirty cubits up to the upper chamber, as the height of the porticoes ascended, as Josephus testifies (Antiq. VIII, 3); then another sixty up to the top of the roof; that is, altogether one hundred twenty cubits, as the Words of the Days teach. But how does he say that three courses of uncut stones are to be laid, and thus the courses of new wood, when the whole temple was lined inside with cedar? unless perhaps it was the custom of the Persians to build temples in a varied work such that there were three courses of stones along the walls, and the fourth of crafted wood: and he also thought that this should be done in the same way in the temple of Jerusalem.

Or perhaps it should be understood that he spoke of the court of the priests, which was made around the temple in a circle, had three courses of polished stones, and a fourth of cedar wood, and it was up to the chest height of those standing by; or certainly the house of the Lord, which was in front of the temple, about which the Scripture, when the palace of King Solomon was being built, thus recounts: He also made the greater court roundabout of three courses of hewn stones, and one course of hewn cedar, and likewise in the inner court of the house of the Lord, and in the porch of the house (1 Kings VII).

[Ezra 6:5] -- But the golden and silver vessels of the temple, etc. It states that the vessels were then placed in the temple of God, signifying the temple of the Babylonians, in which Nebuchadnezzar had placed them, as is more clearly read above, from which Cyrus had ordered them to be taken and returned to Jerusalem. So far, the letters of King Cyrus, which were found in Ecbatana; to which were suddenly added, in a new and unusual manner, from the persona and authority of King Darius: [Ezra 6:6] -- Now therefore, Thathannai, governor of the region, etc. Thus the sequence of the text is such, as if Darius himself had read the letters of Cyrus, and immediately confirmed them with his own authority upon reading them, thereby restraining all their adversaries, and ordering the temple of God to be built in its place, as it was read to them, and assisting its worshippers in all things with the most devoted mind to serve according to his will. Therefore, Artaxerxes, who forbade the building of the house or city of God above, signifies those lords who opposed the construction of the holy Church with persecutions leading to death; amidst these disturbances, the same Church flourished most especially by the victory of the martyrs. Darius signifies the pious devotion of those kings who, recognizing the will of the Christian faith, not only did not resist it but also took care to assist it with their own means. Many of these, after the prohibitions of the previous persecutions had been lifted, desired to consecrate themselves and their subjects with the sacraments of the same faith; the persons of whom fittingly correspond to what is subsequently added in the words of King Darius:

[Ezra 6:8] -- But also it has been commanded by me, etc. For who could explain how much the Church has been aided or even enriched throughout the world by the liberality of royal gifts? Although it can also be understood allegorically, that expenses from the king's treasury are allotted to the work of the temple, when some from the family of secular princes come to the faith of Christ, with the princes themselves favoring them; who, as it were, were in the king's treasury, while they were privy to royal secrets. But they are given to the elders, that is, the senior Jews, for the expenses of the work of the temple, while to those who have preceded in the confession of Christ, entrusted to the teachers for education, and uniting to the members of the Church; such as Cassiodorus, formerly a senator, suddenly a doctor of the Church; who, while carefully considering what Ambrose, what Hilary, what Augustine, what Cyril, what John, what other brothers said in the exposition of the Psalms, which he made excellently, undoubtedly proved himself taught by the senior Jews, that is, the confessors and praisers. The subsequent statement is similar to this:

[Ezra 6:9] -- But if it shall be necessary, also calves, etc. For who does not know that calves, lambs, and kids, which are clean animals, also grain, salt, wine, and oil, which through the law were offered to God, are often understood in the Holy Scriptures as signifying good men, or perfect works, or spiritual gifts? All of which are now, by the king's command, offered as a burnt offering to the God of heaven, while, with the favor of the powers of this world, the holy matters of the Church increase, and the peoples subject to them from all sides are gathered into the one and the same faith of truth to be consecrated to Christ, and whatever good each one has naturally heard divinely, whatever beneficial he has learned from the men of the Churches, he expends all this in the service of divine worship. Concerning which it is

aptly said that according to the custom of the priests who are in Jerusalem, they should be given, because surely the vows of those offering are made acceptable to the Lord only if they are offered according to the situation of catholic peace. For whatever good things are mixed either with pagan superstition or with heretical contention ought in no way to be considered as good. But the same priests offer them for the life of the king and his sons, according to that of the Apostle: I urge therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life (I Tim. II).

[Ezra 6:11] -- Therefore, a decree was established by me, etc. The sense of the letter is clear: because he wished to impose the most severe punishment, if anyone attempted to change the decree of his religion; that is, the loss of everything he could possess and his soul, which he would lose even confined to a cross, with the torment of prolonged suffering. The spiritual understanding is also clear, because our works are all compared to wood: good indeed to fruitful trees, but bad to barren and worthy of fire. The wood is taken from his house, who tried to oppose the Lord's burnt offerings; and it is raised, and he himself is nailed to it, when the works of those who resist the peace of the universal holy Church are manifest to all as useless and perverse; and they are shown to have sought not the joy of life in these works, but rather a snare of death. The house of such people is also made public, that is, written into public record, when even their bodies in which they remained longer in this life are handed over to the most savage exactors to be punished perpetually at the resurrection, that is, to spirits. However, Darius rightly and faithfully desires that his decree be confirmed with the help of divine power, as he abruptly adds in prayer, saying: "May the God who caused His name to dwell there scatter all kingdoms and people who stretch out their hand to oppose and destroy that house of God which is in Jerusalem."

[Ezra 6:12] -- I, Darius, have established a decree, etc. And he himself, therefore, as a man temporarily endowed with the kingdom, for the peace of the house of God, does everything he can with public law, breaks those who contradict as much as he can: and God, since he has eternal and omnipotent power, he truly asks to accomplish the same thing, and desires with pious devotion that His name may remain perpetually in His house; and whoever dares to attack this, may they be deprived of the kingdom and life forever. Which in the same order is also conducted now in the holy Church, when earthly powers converted to the faith issue public edicts for the state of the same Church, and with the Lord's help, and placing all enemies under His feet, desire always to have tranquil peace and quiet. [Ezra 6:13] -- Therefore, Thathannai, the governor of the region beyond the river, and his associates executed it diligently, etc. And now also, with people flocking to the faith, and sometimes even from those who are outside, favoring its peace, the elders of the Jews, that is, those who are worthy of the seat of teaching, build and prosper their Church daily either by word or by example; for even if the ancient enemy attacks occasionally, nevertheless the word of God finds some in whom it may prevail and, with the adversaries driven away, may construct the walls of truth.

[Ezra 6:14] -- And they prospered according to the prophecy, etc. For the same prophets had foretold that if they persisted in building the temple, they would soon, with the Lord's granting, complete the work itself and also abundantly abound in all good things as a reward for their devotion. Among these is the saying of Zechariah: The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands shall also finish it; and you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you (Zech. IV). This means that when you see the temple completed by that same Zerubbabel who laid its foundation, then you will understand that I was sent by the Lord and that what I spoke, I said by His command. Also Haggai says: From the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the temple of the Lord was laid, consider: Is the seed yet in the barn? And do the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree still not yield? From this day, I will bless you (Haggai II). And the outcome of events showed that what was truly predicted had come true. Moreover, all the prophets, indeed all the sacred authors of Scripture, promise prosperity to the builders of the holy Church, that is, to the teachers, if they, not wearied by adversities, do not rest from their holy labor.

For divine help shall be present, whereby the house of the Lord, begun in the heart of the listeners by believing and living well, will be completed. To those same architects will come the blessing of the fruits of the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree, that is, a more abundant supply of spiritual gifts, which will undoubtedly be granted to us more abundantly by the Lord as we more diligently strive to build the habitation of His glory, whether in ourselves or in the hearts of our neighbors. Nor should anyone consider contrary what Haggai says, that the foundation of the temple was laid under King Darius, to this sacred history we are expounding, which states that in the second year of King Cyrus the temple was founded by the masons, with the people greatly rejoicing and praising God (I Esdr. III). For then the foundation of the temple itself was described, that is, the interior house of holiness, whose measurements are especially referred to in the histories of Kings and Chronicles. But now, along with the building of the house itself, the buildings of the porticos and treasuries, which surrounded the house in a circle on every side, are narrated as founded, of which mention is made in the book of Chronicles as follows: He also made the courtyard of the priests, and the great vestibule, and the doors of the vestibule, which he covered with bronze (I Chron. IV).

In this vestibule surrounding the temple, both the people used to stand to pray and the guards and doorkeepers of the temple used to keep watch through their shifts day and night, as the book of Chronicles abundantly teaches there. Sometimes this house generally is counted with the temple itself; as in the Gospel, where the Lord, teaching in the temple, was brought a woman caught in adultery by the Pharisees and Scribes (John VIII), whom they could have brought only into some portico of the temple; at other times, separately under the name of treasuries, or chambers, or porticoes, or courtyards. Hence the Psalmist says: Who stand in the house of the Lord, in the courtyards of the house of our God.

[Ezra 6:14] -- And they built and constructed, etc. He says Artaxerxes, who reigned after Darius, during whose time Ezra ascended from Babylon to Jerusalem. However, it is questioned how it is said that, by order not only of Cyrus and Darius but also Artaxerxes, the house of God was constructed, when it is immediately stated that it was completed and dedicated during the reign of Darius. Unless it should be believed that Artaxerxes, having sent much gold and silver to Jerusalem, also ordered that anything lacking in the building or decoration of the temple, or in its vessels, be completed from the money he had sent and given. For it is written that the same king, along with his princes and counselors, sent much gold and silver and precious vessels to the temple while Ezra was hastening there. Among other things, it is mentioned in the copy of the king's letter: But whatever else is needed for the house of your God, which you have to provide, you shall do so from the king's treasury and finances (1 Esdras VII). The month of Adar, on the third day of which the house of the Lord was completed, is called March by us, which the Scripture usually calls the twelfth month according to the lunar cycle. It is not without mystery that the house of the Lord, which began in the seventh month with the building of the altar, was completed in the twelfth month. For it began at the start of the seventh month;

because we begin all good works with the grace of the Holy Spirit preceding us, and, with it accompanying us, we strive for perfection. It was completed in the twelfth month due to the significance of perfection contained in this number, especially due to the sum of the apostles, in whose faith and doctrine the church is perfected. Similarly, the number twelve signifies the perfection of correct faith and action because whether you multiply three by four or four by three, you will complete twelve. The number three is rightly related to faith because of the confession of the Holy Trinity; the number four to good works because of the same number of excellent virtues, prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice; of which the Book of Wisdom, in praising Wisdom itself, mentions, saying: For she teaches soberness and prudence, righteousness, and courage; nothing in life is more useful than these (Wisdom VIII). Therefore, it is right that the house of the Lord, begun in the seventh month, was completed and dedicated in the twelfth month; because the mind of the elect is illuminated by the grace of the Holy Spirit so that it may reach the perfection of good works with faith in the holy and undivided Trinity, and thus joyfully awaits the dedication of blessed reward.

And since this same reward pertains to our future celebration at the time of the universal resurrection and in the vision of the same Trinity in which we now believe, it is rightly mentioned that the house of the Lord was completed not only in the twelfth month but also on the third day of it; because the Lord rose from the dead on the third day, our resurrection can rightly be designated by the three days' number, of which the prophet says: He has torn us, but he will heal us; he has struck us, but he will bind us up; after two days he will revive us; on the third day, he will raise us up (Hosea VI). The building of the temple began in the first year of King Cyrus and was completed in the sixth year of Darius; which are, according to the Chroniclers, forty years. For Cyrus reigned for thirty years, after him, his son Cambyses reigned for eight years, who in this volume, as Josephus asserts, is called Artaxerxes; after him, the Magi, who killed him, ruled for one year, after which Darius

until the temple's completion and dedication, six years; which are, as we said, forty-five years. However, it is questioned how, with the Lord saying to the Jews under the figure of the temple about his passion and resurrection: Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up; they responded: It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days? (John II);

when no more than sixty-five years are found from the first year of Cyrus to the sixth year of King Darius. But if we read in Josephus' History, where he adds three years after the temple's completion and dedication, in which the construction of the surrounding fortifications and other remaining parts were completed; we will see that the sum of forty-six years can be correctly calculated for the construction of the temple with all its prominent structures completed. However, adhering to this chapter of the Gospel, we should bear in mind that the temple built by Solomon and rebuilt by Zerubbabel and Jesus has multiple representations. It signifies each chosen soul, which, because of Christ dwelling in it, is rightly called Christ's house and temple; and the entire church, that is, the congregation of all the elect, both angels and humans; and the Lord's own body, which was born of the virgin, lived without sin in the world, was released from death by the impious but was resurrected by him on the third day to life. This figure is particularly fitting to that which says the temple was built in forty-six years. For physiologists report that the human body in the womb grows from conception to the complete formation of its members in this number of days.

And it was fitting that the house, which was to have the figure of the Lord's body, should be founded in Jerusalem in the same number of years in which the Lord's own body was to be formed in the sacred womb of the virgin, who is rightfully named Jerusalem, that is, the city of the great King and the vision of peace, of whom it is said: He is our peace, who made both one (Ephesians II). Just as what is written about the same temple: The door for the middle story was in the right side of the house; and they went up with winding stairs into the middle story, and out of the middle into the third (1 Kings VI); specifically prefigured the Lord's body, of which it is written: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and immediately there came out blood and water (John XIX). For the door of the middle story was in the right side of the house, meaning starting from the eastern corner of the southern side to the earth, and through its inner part by a hidden way rising gradually to the higher stories; because our Lord and Savior wished to open for us the door of salvation in his body's right side, through whose sacraments, being washed and sanctified, we might enter the higher hall of the heavenly kingdom.

We ascend through the door of the middle story into the upper room when, consecrated through the water of baptism and the cup of the Lord's chalice, we pass from this earthly conversation to the heavenly life of souls. From the upper room, we also penetrate into the third story when we accumulate the bliss of souls with the perception of immortal bodies.

Chapter 8

The sons of the captivity dedicate the house of God and celebrate the feast of Passover.

[Ezra 6:16] -- Now the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, etc. The sons of the captivity rightly rejoice that they are worthy to both cast off the yoke of captivity and to build the house of God, which was destroyed. They offer a great number of sacrifices in the dedication of His house as devout servants to God. They also offer sacrifices for the sin of all Israel, not only for those who could be present, but also for those who were still placed in Babylon or in other provinces, living among enemies outside the promised land. They pray to God to be merciful to them as well and to protect them from evils among the enemies or to bring them back to the desired homeland. Because the rebuilding of the house after their captivity, as often said, signifies the correction of those who have strayed from the path of truth through sin after having initially started it, the well-restored temple is rightly dedicated by the priests and Levites and the other sons of the captivity in joy. For when those who have sinned are corrected, there is great joy in heaven before the angels of God (Luke XV). There is joy also for the teachers who have labored for the salvation of the erring; and for all those who have migrated from Babylon, that is, the confusion of sins, to the height of virtues—the promised land in thought and deed.

Therefore, both the priests and Levites and all the people rejoice in the dedication of the restored house of the Lord because all orders of the holy Church must rejoice together in the reconciliation through penance of those who have sinned. They offer sacrifices in this dedication when they render thanks to God for the conversion of the erring, when many, seeing their devout life to God, also gird themselves to works of greater virtues, not wanting to be slothful in good works, in which they had remained more innocent, by sinning less. This can equally be understood of those who have recently come to faith, to receive the sacraments of Christ, that many who were advanced in the faith often emulate the more fervent zeal of the newcomers and follow their examples in good works. Not only do the priests, Levites, and the people offer sacrifices for the dedication of the house of the Lord which they had renovated, but also for the sin of all Israel. For just as it is fitting to favor the good deeds of those who are with us, and to make their good deeds our own by imitation, so it is necessary with diligent care to pray to the Lord for the state of the whole Church which is scattered throughout the world, according to the example of the Lord's prayer;

in which no one asks for daily bread, or for the forgiveness of sins, or to be delivered from temptation and evil, only for himself, but rather for all who have the same Father in heaven. Likewise, after the temple has been built, dedication follows when the total number of the elect shall at the end of the world reach the grace of heavenly rewards. Many acceptable sacrifices to God are offered in this dedication; those, indeed, of which the same house of God, that is, the holy Church, rebuilt through the glory of immortality after the long captivity of mortal distress, sings to its Creator and Redeemer, saying: "You have broken my bonds, I will sacrifice an offering of praise to You" (Psalm 115). And since the same sacrifice of praise is to be offered to God, not only for the gifts of virtues given, but also for the purged and removed stains of vices: correctly, after bulls, rams, and lambs were offered in the dedication of the temple, goats are also said to have been slaughtered for the sin of all Israel; for the grace of God, which confers the benefits of virtues, also removes the iniquity of sins. No Pelagian has a place in the house of God, who persuades that by the freedom of his own will he can either be freed from evils or confirmed in good. Indeed, goats for sin are offered in this life when the elect of supreme piety supplicate to be freed from sins.

They are also offered in the future when the same ones give thanks because, by the grace of God, they have been freed from sins; and therefore, they will sing the mercies of the Lord forever (Psalm 100); for they will never forget that they were once miserable and have been made blessed by His gift.

[Ezra 6:18] -- And they appointed priests in their orders, etc. The order demanded devotion, so that after the Lord's house was built and dedicated, priests and Levites who would minister in it were immediately ordained; lest the house shine in vain if those who serve God within were lacking. This should be frequently impressed upon those who, constructing monasteries with magnificent work, do not at all place teachers in them who would encourage God's people to the works of God, but rather serve their own pleasures and desires there. But what he says about priests in their orders and Levites in their turns being appointed signifies the shifts of weeks; in which the whole assembly of each rank was distributed into twenty-four parts, so that each order would minister its turn during its week, specifically from Sabbath to Sabbath in the temple; and then, for twenty-three weeks, free from the temple's duties, they would take care of their own household affairs, as the Words of the Days narrate. For around the inner sanctuary, they had already made the porches of the temple, at the gates of which the Levites kept watch in turns, as it is also written there. But what is said, "As it is written in the book of Moses," does not refer to the shifts of the Levites, but to the works of God; for Moses wrote what the priests and Levites ought to do in the house of God;

but the shifts of the Levites and the orders of the priests into twenty-four lots, as we mentioned, were described not by Moses, but by King David with the prophets, priests, and Levites of that time. And now too, with Christ's Church being built and dedicated through the regeneration of new peoples to the faith, it is fitting to appoint priests and Levites in their orders and turns over the works of God; and the people are initiated not only into the

sacraments of faith but are also instructed to perform the works of God by the examples and teachings of the righteous ones preceding in Christ; and this not by the capture of human ingenuity, but as it is written in the book of Moses. To which the Lord's saying agrees: "Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28). Therefore, we must teach our hearers not our own precepts, but those which are the commands of the law and the Gospel, if we care to reach the rewards which the Lord promised, together with those same hearers.

[Ezra 6:19] -- However, the sons of the exile made the Passover, etc. What was the point of recounting the celebration of the Passover after the house of the Lord was built in the historical narrative? When it had long been promised that from the first day of their arrival in Jerusalem, they would offer the legitimate sacrifices and holocausts in all the festivals of the Lord. Unless perhaps he wished to recount the Passover being celebrated particularly to remind the reader that the sons of the exile completed the building of the temple with the same devotion of spirit with which they had begun. For it was already predicted there that the people gathered as one man in Jerusalem, and Joshua the son of Jozadak rose up, and his brothers, the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brothers, and they built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it. And now, with the temple dedicated, already in the forty-sixth year, the same piety of religion is remembered to be in the hearts of all, when it is said that the priests and Levites were purified as one, all clean to sacrifice the Passover. For what greater perfection can there be in this life than the unity of a clean multitude? For there were many priests, many thousands of Levites, who were all purified and clean to sacrifice the Passover. Nor with differing intentions of souls, but, as Luke writes about the early Church of the New Testament, with one heart and one soul, which is found true in faith and love of God, nor is there a differing unity of love and chastity in the people. When it is said to sacrifice the Passover to all the sons of the exile and their brothers, the priests, and to themselves, it is immediately added:

[Ezra 6:21] -- And the children of Israel ate, etc. Therefore, the Passover was sacrificed for all the children of the exile, all the children of Israel ate, not only those who had returned from captivity, but also all who had previously been situated elsewhere, who had at that time purified themselves from the defilements of the people of the land to come to them. This can also be rightly understood of the proselytes, who, though naturally Gentile, were converted to the people of God, having received circumcision and being purified by legal sacrifices, so that they too were worthy of participating in the saving sacrifice. And it is to be noted that he calls the people of the land those who serve the defilers; so that by contrast, he might teach that the people of heaven are those who, being separated from them, serve the Lord in unity and chastity, and celebrate his solemnities with a sincere heart. Nowhere else, unless I am mistaken, is the same people of Israel found to have existed with such devotion with the priests and Levites, their teachers that is, since they came out of Egypt through Moses; but this devotion was made by divine chastisement, for when they were delivered to be afflicted by their enemies for their sins, afflicted by adversities, they were

turned away from sins by repentance; by the merit of repentance and conversion, they were freed from their enemies: and being destined to serve God better, they were called back to their own homeland.

But up to this point, we often see even those who have frequently defiled the temple of their body by sinning, and thereby have been taken captive by the devil, returning to the Lord through repentance. And rightly so, with greater diligence than they were accustomed to before, they have striven in good works to prepare again in themselves a dwelling place for their Creator. It is to be noted indeed that Solomon first completed the temple in the greatest peace of his kingdom, in a very short time, with no one contradicting in any way; but now, having been destroyed on account of sins, the children of the exile, with great contrition of heart, labored in a long work, often delayed by the enemies, and finally, divinely aided, restored it. For it is easy indeed for anyone converted to faith and recognition of the truth, to renounce the devil and confess the living and true God, to receive the sacraments of Christ; and being initiated by these, to become His temple in remission of all sins, and to keep the received innocence of life with accompanying grace. But it is of great labor for anyone who, having received the sacraments of faith, contemptuously sins, to recover their former dignity;

for to such a one, cleansing cannot easily be given again through the water of baptism, but the sin tainted must be washed out with the long labor of repentance, with copious flows of tears, with the more stringent efforts of continence, by whose cleansing the very habits of vices also resist like an enemy crowd of Samaritans; the more difficult to overcome, the longer they have possessed the land of the heart devoid of virtue. It can also be said that therefore, particularly with the house of God rebuilt and dedicated, remembrance is made of the Passover, since none would doubt that people of such religion would want to celebrate the Passover in its due time; so that it might mystically be insinuated that this is the sum of all perfection, when, having transcended all the desires and allurements of the world, we always with entire intention of mind ponder the entrance into another life. For Passover is interpreted as passing, having its name from this, that either the children of Israel in it, through the sacrifice of the lamb, passed from Egyptian slavery to the joys of freedom, or the spotless Lamb Himself, that is, the Lord Christ, sacrificed for our redemption, passed from this world to the Father. Which we also imitate, when we pass from base pleasures to seek heavenly things. Indeed, we perfectly perform this when, released from the prison of the flesh, we enter the heavenly kingdom. To which sense apt is what follows:

[Ezra 6:22] -- And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread, etc. The Apostle teaches us how we ought to keep this feast spiritually, saying: ”Let us therefore feast not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5). This is to be observed for seven days; because throughout all this world’s time, which runs for as many days, we ought to lead our life in sincerity and truth, indeed in the sacrifices and holocausts of all good works. And because our Lord, at the time of the Passover, conquered death, tasted momentarily with the eternal power

of resurrection; the celebration of the Passover may be referred typologically to the time of our resurrection; so that the building of the temple designates the present state of the Holy Church, the dedication signifies the future life, which happens in the exultation of the holy souls, when they leave the body. The sacrifice of the Passover hints at the glory of the resurrection, when all the elect, no longer believing in the sacrament, but seeing in reality and truth, will be refreshed by the flesh of the spotless Lamb, that is, of our God and Lord. Hence, in this Passover, it is stated that all the priests and Levites, the entire assembly of the people, all who had flocked to them from the nations, were pure, as if they had all attended as one;

for then the Lamb of God truly takes away the sins of the world. And as the Apostle John says: "The blood of Jesus, the Son of God, cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1). Then there will be true unity when God will be all in all (1 John 1; 1 Cor. 15). Then the true feast of unleavened bread will be celebrated in joy, when no leaven of malice or wickedness remains in the elect, and all will cling to the divine vision in truth and sincerity of heart. And this not in the seven days of the passing world, but in the one day of everlasting life in the courts of the Lord, which is better than thousands in the light of the Holy Spirit, whose sevenfold grace the prophet commends to us (Ps. 84).

[Ezra 6:22] -- They celebrated the feast of unleavened bread for seven days, etc. For this is the greatest joy of the righteous, both in this age and in the future, that the work of the Church is complete, with even the Gentiles who once resisted being converted, aiding its state and confirming peace of the Christian Church's religion throughout the entire world. Thus far, it is written about the return from Babylon to Jerusalem of the people who had been taken captive; the return of the vessels that had been taken away; the restoration and dedication of the temple that had been burned; the celebration of the festivals, and the singing of the songs of the Lord, which could not be sung in a foreign land, under the leaders Zerubbabel and Joshua. All these things contain one and the same knowledge of human salvation in Christ, both those who came into the world with the sin of the first transgression, purified by the sacraments of faith, are saved; and those who corrupted the faith they had received by sinning, repent and return to their senses, and both, through one and the same Savior, the true king and priest, celebrating as if the most blessed Passover, pass from this world to the Father, from death to life. Truly, because the temple was burned and the city of Jerusalem destroyed, the holy Scriptures that were kept there were also destroyed by the hostile calamity, and these, by the mercy of the Lord and his return to his people, had to be restored; so that, having restored the buildings that had been torn down, they would have something from which they, being admonished, might learn to be restored inwardly in the faith and love of their Creator. Hence it well follows:

Chapter 9

Ezra the priest ascended from Babylon, bearing the honorable letters of King Artaxerxes to all the keepers of the public treasury beyond the river; with which he also honored the temple of the Lord. (1 Esdras VII.)

[Ezra 7:6] -- After these words, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, etc. Josephus (Antiq. XIII, 5) considers this Artaxerxes, under whom Ezra ascended from Babylon to Jerusalem, to be Xerxes, the son of Darius, who reigned after him. Furthermore, the books of Chronicles believe that the successor of the same Xerxes, who is also called Artaxerxes by them, is here designated. Now Darius, under whom the temple was built, reigned thirty-six years; after him Xerxes reigned twenty years; after whom Artabanus for seven months, which chronographers count as a year; after whom Artaxerxes for forty years. Ezra, a swift scribe in the law of Moses, because he restored the law which had been consumed; not only the law but also, as common tradition of the elders says, he rewrote the entire series of sacred Scripture which had been equally consumed by fire, as he saw fitting for the readers. They say in this work, he added some words which he deemed appropriate; among which is this: ”And there arose not a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face,” etc. Words indeed which only one who lived long after Moses could say. And in the book of Samuel: ”Formerly in Israel a man going to inquire of God would say, Come and let us go to the seer. For he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer” (1 Sam. IX). Moreover, he left untouched some entire volumes, which were once held among the people of Israel;

of which now only the memory of the name remains in sacred Scripture; as it is said in the book of Numbers: ”Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the Lord” (Num. XXI). And in Joshua: ”Is this not written in the book of Jashar? (Jos. X). But also in the volume of Kings and Chronicles, the historical books of the prophets Ahijah the Shilonite, and Shemaiah, Iddo, and Nathan, as well as Isaiah, and Jehu the son of Hanani are mentioned (1 Kings XVI; 2 Chron. IX); concerning whom it is said that he wrote the book of the kings of Israel; and many others, of which it is said no traces can be found today. The Hebrews also report, and there is no doubt among them about this matter, that the same Ezra invented lighter letters against the names of those they had hitherto used, by which he swiftly restored such a great amount of books that had been consumed. Therefore he is known not

only as a scribe but also as a swift scribe. However, the earlier letters remained with the Samaritans, with which they used to write the five books of Moses, which they alone had received from the sacred Scripture.

[Ezra 7:7] -- And they ascended from the children of Israel, etc. Because on the first day of the first month he began to ascend from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, he says they came to Jerusalem by anticipation. Moreover, in the following he describes more fully in order how they came, and where they assembled their army. It should be noted that at the beginning of this volume it is written that they ascended from Babylon according to the promise of Cyrus, with leaders Zerubbabel and Joshua, of the sons of Judah and Benjamin with the priests and Levites, all whose spirits God had stirred. It is also added of them that they were of the captivity which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried to Babylon. However, here under the leadership of Ezra there is no mention of Judah and Benjamin, nor of those carried away by Nebuchadnezzar, but only of the children of Israel, and of the priests and Levites who went up with him. Whence it seems likely that those who were called back to Jerusalem at that time were from Judah and Benjamin, who had been carried to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. But those who are now read to have been led back by Ezra were from the ten tribes, who were specially called Israel after the division; whom the kings of Assyria had long before the times of Nebuchadnezzar taken captive and made to dwell beyond the mountains of the Medes.

Thus, for the most part, two tribes returned home and laboriously restored the temple. But the ten tribes, who had less care for the temple and religion, neglected to return to their homeland though commanded by the king, because with the empire of the Chaldeans destroyed, they lived freely under the kings of Persia, who favored their people. Yet, when they learned that the temple had been rebuilt and that the envy of the Samaritans was curbed, some of them finally consented to return home; although many remained there, whose descendants are said to still be detained in those parts today, serving the Persian nation. Just as often mentioned, Zerubbabel and Joshua designate the Lord and Savior, who by his grace releases the captivity of the human race and builds his own house in us by sanctifying and possessing us; so also Ezra, both priest and swift scribe, plainly announces the same Lord, who did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Matthew V). He could rightly be called a scribe of the law of God, or a swift scribe in the law of Moses, because he gave the law to Moses through an angel, he taught the holy prophets all truth by the grace of his Spirit, and as soon as he touched the minds of all the elect with his love, he kindled them to understand and do the will of God the Father. Hence, promising the grace of the New Testament, the prophet said:

”And this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says the Lord; ”I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts” (Jeremiah XXXI, Hebrews XV). The psalmist beautifully remembers this scribe, saying: ”My tongue is the pen of a swift-writing scribe” (Psalm XLIV). For the tongue of the prophet was the pen of a swift scribe; because what the Lord inwardly taught him by illuminating him without

any delay, he himself declared outwardly to men in time by his tongue's service. Ezra, whose name means helper, openly demonstrates this. He is indeed the one through whom alone the faithful people are usually introduced to be liberated from tribulations, and as if from Babylonian captivity to the freedom of Jerusalem, from the confusion of vices to the peace and serenity of virtues, advancing by the steps of merits. In the second psalm of Ascents (Anabathmon), he shouts to all who aim for the highest, showing by whom they should aim and reach: "My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm CXX). Ezra also held this figure in his actions, when he led a considerable part of the people back from captivity to Jerusalem, and brought money and sacred vessels to the glory of his temple, purging the people from foreign wives with pontifical authority. All these things also indicate what has been or will be done by the Lord in the holy Church, which is clear to an educated reader;

but we too will strive to make it apparent even to simpler people. For just as Ezra ascended from Babylon, and with him the children of Israel, and the sons of priests and Levites; this signifies the pious dispensation of our Redeemer, who appearing in the flesh entered the confusion of this world, himself free from the confusion of vices, to lead us back with him, freed from all confusion, to the tranquility of heavenly peace; whose pledge of eternal peace we have received in the present Church, as the Lord says: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you" (John XIV); that is, I leave temporary peace to those traveling on earth, I give eternal peace to those reaching the heavenly homeland. It is also blessed that he began to ascend from Babylon in the first month, and came to Jerusalem in the fifth month with the sons of the captivity whom he led. For the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem is completed in four months; because through the four books of the holy Gospel, we learn the faith and sacraments of truth, by which we ought to ascend from the captivity of the ancient enemy, led by the Lord, to the freedom of the glory of the sons of God. In the same four books are contained the commandments of works, by whose as it were daily steps we can reach the promised heights.

Nor was it without the figure of mystery that on the first day of the month he began to ascend from Babylon, and again on the first day of the month he came to Jerusalem; for the beginning of the month, in which the moon is believed to borrow new light from the sun, designates the new beginning of heavenly grace. And fittingly Ezra ascended from Babylon on the first day of the first month with those he saved from captivity; because the beginning of a holy way of life, in which we renounce Satan and his kingdom, is brought about in us by the illumination of divine grace. Also, he came to Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for this too is not done by the freedom of our will, but by the inspiration of heavenly light, that, having heard the oracles of the Gospel, we are incorporated into the members of the holy Church. A noble and healthy custom in the Church, grown from the teaching of the fathers, is that those who are catechized should have the sacrament of the four Gospels explained to them, and their beginnings be recited. Again on the first day of the fifth month, he came with those who had been freed from their enemies, to Jerusalem;

because when we enter the heavenly kingdom, having completed the precepts of the four holy Gospels, we celebrate as it were the new beginning of the month, because we already see the joys of the new light in the Sun of righteousness, and after the four months of luminous action, as a pilgrim in the way of life, we celebrate the fifth month of perpetual reward in the light of the heavenly homeland.

[Ezra 7:9] -- And on the first day of the fifth month, he came to Jerusalem, etc. That is to say, he was confirmed by divine grace and protection, because he was completing a successful journey. Likewise, in the mystical sense, the mediator of God and men, according to the good hand of his God upon him, that is, according to the disposition of divine power, which was in him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself (II Cor. V). Indeed, that hand was over him, according to the fact that he was made man. Hence he said: The Father is greater than I (John XIV). For greater is the divinity, not only of the Father but also of Christ Himself, and of the Holy Spirit, which is one. By that same hand of divine power, exalted in passion, he ascended to the walls of the heavenly city, showing this ascent path to his followers who humbly follow him.

[Ezra 7:10] -- For Ezra had prepared his heart, etc. Oh, what great virtue of this saying, what sublimity of merit, for a man to prepare his heart for the obedience of the divine will, and to be able to say: "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready; I will sing, and I will chant a psalm to the Lord" (Psalm LVI)! That is, I will exult in the Lord with my whole soul, and I will accomplish in the execution of works what has been commanded by Him. Therefore, he prepared his heart to investigate and rewrite the law of the Lord, which the devouring flame had consumed. He also prepared so that he himself might first fulfill this by doing, and thus open his mouth to teach others. This can similarly be understood of the Lord Jesus; for He prepared His heart to investigate the law of the Lord, as He divinely provided for Himself a man He would take up, who would not only be without sin but also full of grace and truth, because with no law of sin conflicting in Him, He would keep the law of God without any contradiction of mind or flesh. Hence, He says in the Psalm: "In the volume of the book it is written of me: I desired to do your will, O my God, and your law is in the midst of my heart" (Psalm XXXIX).

Likewise, the Lord investigated the law of God, because, setting aside the traditions of the Pharisees, He taught how the Holy Scripture was to be understood mystically, what spiritual secrets were hidden under the cover of the letter; because He showed that the decrees of the Gospel, which He brought to the world, were more perfect, more acceptable to God the Father, than those He had previously sent through Moses. Hence, He Himself says: "You have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy': but I say to you, love your enemies; and so forth.

[Ezra 7:11] -- This is a copy of the letter of the edict, etc. Artaxerxes, who with the most devoted mind venerates the temple and the priests of God according to his ability, and offers prompt service to him, indicates the Christian princes, just as his predecessor Darius did. And it is not surprising if we say that the successors of Cyrus, who built the temple of the

Lord and the city, who loved and helped his servants and law, bear the figure of the kings of Christians, since the Lord himself through the prophet said that Cyrus comes as a figure of his son, and deigned to honor him with that name, saying: This says the Lord to my Christ Cyrus (Isa. XLV); and the rest which we have more fully set forth above about him. [Ezra 7:12] -- King of kings Artaxerxes to Ezra the priest, etc. He names him the most learned scribe of the law of the God of heaven, because even to the king himself the fame of divine virtue had reached, through which he had renewed the Law, burned by the Chaldeans, in the same words as before, although in a different character of letters. He also names the God of heaven, to distinguish from those whom he knew that the foolish madness of wretches had instituted among dead men, or certainly some. I beseech, however, that it may not be burdensome to the reader to briefly run through the text of the letter, and to see how much it fits the persons of Christian kings.

[Ezra 7:13] -- From me a decree has been made, etc. He grants permission to all who wish to go to Jerusalem, he compels no one to go: and Christian princes, compelling no one, lest the will of faith be uncertain or doubtful, permit all who are pleased from their kingdom to worship Christ.

[Ezra 7:14] -- For you have been sent from the presence of the king and his seven advisors, etc. And in the book of Esther, we read that it was the custom of the Persian kings to use the counsel of seven wise men in all matters to be done or decided. The faithful use seven advisors when in all things they do, they follow the precepts and decrees of the divine Scriptures. Of which the Psalmist says: The words of the Lord are pure words, silver refined in a furnace, purified seven times (Psal. XI). This is perfected by the holy sevenfold illumination of the Spirit. But if anyone finds it incongruent that something good could be figured in the holy Church from the advisors of that Persian king by whom the people and prophet of the Lord are released from captivity and sent back to their homeland, let them read the small works of the Fathers, who figuratively said that the holy actions of our Redeemer were designed through the actions or cases of reprobate kings Saul and Jeconiah: namely, Saul anointed as king but killed due to his own crimes, interpreted as the innocent death of King Christ: and Jeconiah's translation from Judah to Bethlehem, which he held due to his sins, relating typologically to the grace of our Redeemer, by which He deemed it worthy to migrate for the salvation of nations around the world, leaving the Jews behind due to their perfidy.

They taught that the actions or deeds of Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar should be understood typologically in relation to the enemies of the Church. For example, Pharaoh commanded the male infants of God's people to be killed in the river, but to spare the females; because the devil desires to extinguish strength in us and nurture what is frail and weak. Likewise, Nebuchadnezzar ordered all the peoples subject to him to bow down and worship his statue upon hearing the sound of symphony and music. And the devil strives to bend the hearts of mankind away from righteousness through the allure of earthly pomp and toward following desire, which is the servitude of idols, deceiving their hearts. Therefore, if the evil deeds of

the reprobate happened as a figure not only of evil but also of good, why could not the good deeds or words of the good, contained in the prophetic volume, prefigure the good acts of their followers? Also, let us consider the works of Saint Augustine, who said that even the seven men of one woman who died without children, about whom the Sadducees, denying the resurrection, tempted the Lord, have a certain figure of ecclesiastical sacrament, as well as the woman, her sterility, and death. He also taught that the deaths of those same men were figures of memorable things since neither the Lord Himself nor any of the evangelists narrated this story from their own perspective;

but the evangelists included in their writings what the impious had spoken against the Lord with blasphemous lips because of the most sacred response of the Lord. Thus, Ezra is sent from the presence of the king and his seven advisors to visit Judea and Jerusalem. And since the leaders of the world have been converted to faith and are also strengthened by the exhortations of the holy Scriptures, they desire Christ the Lord to come to save His Church and to gather from the nations through daily aid, which the name Ezra signifies, shouting earnestly: O Lord God of hosts, come back, look down from heaven, and see and visit this vine (Psal. LXXIX). That You may visit, he says, Judea and Jerusalem in the law of Your God, which is in your hand. For the law of God was in Ezra's hand; since he not only preached it with his tongue but fulfilled it in action. Likewise, our Lord, appearing in the flesh, had the law in His hand, not only because He followed the precepts of the law in all things but also because He had the decrees of the law in power; and truly He once established it through Moses as He willed, and now He changes it as He wills and transfers it to more perfect things. Hence He said: You have heard that it was said to the ancients, but I say to you.

And it is remarkable how the word, which the prophets used, is found in the letter of Artaxerxes, stating that the law of God is in the hand of His servant. For it is written: The word of the Lord came through the hand of Haggai the prophet; and the Lord did what He spoke through the hand of His servant Elijah; and, The Lord bore witness in Israel and in Judah through the hand of all the prophets (Haggai I). For indeed the prophets not only preached the things of God by speaking but also by acting.

[Ezra 7:15] -- And to bring silver and gold, etc. Note the faith and wisdom of the king and his counselors, who understood that the gifts they wished to offer to the Lord should be offered through him who had the law of God in his hand, that is, fulfilled it in deeds. It is wondrous to say, how faithfully and learnedly the king declares that he has a tabernacle in Jerusalem, whom he previously called the God of heaven; for we are accustomed to use a tabernacle on a journey, and the God of heaven has a tabernacle in Jerusalem; because he who has an eternal seat in the heavens deigns to dwell for a time with the saints who are on pilgrimage in this Church. Hence that passage of Revelation, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men" (Rev. 21). Indeed, because the blessed Ezra represented not only the preachers of the holy Church, among whom he was one, but also the Lord Savior, to whose members he belonged, it is as if we offer our gifts through him, whose help we need in all

things, so that the good works we do may be acceptable to God the Father. For no one, he says, comes to the Father except through me (John 6). And concerning him, John says, "He is the atonement for our sins" (1 John 2).

[Ezra 7:19] -- And all the silver and gold whatsoever you find, etc. The story is clear, that for this reason the king and his counselors gave money to Ezra to be carried to the temple of the Lord, and they also desired others to give, so that sacrifices, and offerings, and libations might be bought from this money, which would be offered upon the altar of God: and if any money remained, it would be distributed not otherwise than according to the will of God. And it should also be noted here, when he mentions the priests offering in the house of their God, he clearly teaches that even if some of the priests and Levites had ascended to Jerusalem with Ezra, nevertheless some still remained in Babylon with the rest of their people. The allegorical sense is also clear, because the faithful desire their good works to shine in the holy Church for this reason, so that through these they may also merit to have a part with the saints, and others may be edified by their examples. For just as our sacrifices, libations, and offerings of silver and gold are made to offer to the Lord, so too, by the shining example of our works, our neighbors are converted to the duty of piety, by which they too, living well, may be consecrated to the Lord. But if any silver and gold were left over, from which offerings could not be bought, this too was ordered to be arranged according to the will and pleasure of God.

For there are certain magnificent virtues of the saints which cannot be shown to everyone as an example of work, but are only recited to glorify the grace of God; as is the case where Daniel and Jeremiah prophesied as children, that John was not yet born, that Cornelius with his household, not yet baptized, received the Holy Spirit, and numerous miracles of the saints shine like silver and gold in the house of the Lord; yet from the same silver or gold, offerings to be placed upon the altar cannot be bought; because when we hear of such things, we ought indeed to marvel at them as divine, but we are not able to imitate them as if they were possible. Sacrifices, however, were properly called those which were offered from the fruits of the earth, such as bread, fine flour, ears of corn; libations, however, were those which were made from wine and liquid things.

[Ezra 7:19] -- The vessels also which are given to you for the service of the house of your God, etc. Not only silver and gold of various weights, but also vessels are given to Ezra to be carried to Jerusalem. But our Lord in a figurative sense, namely Ezra, entrusted the vessels which are given to him by men, such as the vessel of election Paul, and of which he speaks, the vessels of mercy, he has delivered all in the sight of God the Father in the heavenly Jerusalem (Rom. IX). Regarding these vessels, he speaks in the Gospel: "Or how can anyone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house" (Mark III). For the king of Babylon was strong, that is, the devil dominantly ruling over the wicked; but defeated and bound by the Lord, he lost the vessels, that is, the hearts of the elect, which he unjustly possessed.

Neither could he contradict the one who took these away and brought them back to the heavenly city, to which they originally belonged.

[Ezra 7:21] -- And by me, I, King Artaxerxes, have ordained and decreed, etc. And Christian rulers command all who are subject to them to promptly give whatever the Lord and our high priest asks of them, without any delay or reservation, but swiftly fulfill the commands of the divine will. Let them give gold in the confession of true faith, wheat in the demonstration of good works, wine in the fervor of love, oil in the exhibition and cheerfulness of mercy. And all these are commanded to be given to the great priest and the scribe of the law of the God of heaven under a number of one hundred; that is, to the Lord Jesus Christ, who bringing the heavenly mandates from the Father to us, has promised rewards in the Father's house to those who follow heavenly pursuits; and we ought to insist on no other actions than those of good works rewarded by the grace of heaven. For the number one hundred, which in the counting of fingers moves from the left to the right hand, usually signifies the joys that are in the right hand, that is, in eternal life. Moreover, it is said that the talent has a measure of three kinds: the least being fifty pounds; the medium seventy-two pounds; the highest one hundred twenty pounds; a chorus being thirty measures, and a bath, which is also an ephah, being a tenth part of a chorus, that is, three measures.

[Ezra 7:22] -- But salt without measure. Everything that pertains to the rite, etc. It is agreed by all that salt signifies wisdom, whence in common speech dull-witted people are called tasteless; but it matters what kind of salt it is. For the Lord also commanded that in every sacrifice salt be offered (Levit. II), and in the Gospel He says: Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another (Mark IX). Nor is it in vain that David is read to have struck the Edomites in the Valley of Salt, because surely we are commanded to offer the salt of heavenly wisdom, by which catechumens are initiated, in all our works' sacrifices. David indeed strikes the Salt Pans of the valleys with their inhabitants, as Christ destroys weak and worldly wisdom along with its followers. Hence it is well ordered now that salt be given diligently without measure in the house of the God of heaven; because it is surely necessary that whatever wisdom anyone has, they should exhibit it all in service to their Creator. And it is to be recalled that the Samaritans, writing to another Artaxerxes, were said to have mentioned the salt they had eaten in the palace, and therefore could not tolerate that the temple and the city of God be built against his interests. But now here Artaxerxes commands all the guardians of the public treasury, among other donations, to give their salt to the house of the God of heaven as much as is needed. For it is recognized there that heretics sometimes are emboldened to attack the Church with the deceitful taste of human wisdom. But here it is implied that those converted to the faith at the same time as wisdom often assist that very faith through the discipline of the same secular wisdom, as they more powerfully conquer its adversaries through it.

[Ezra 7:24] -- And we make known to you concerning all the priests, etc. This privilege, by which priests, Levites, and the other ministers of the house of God are rendered free from taxes, is clearly shown, in that the rest of the people of the children of Israel, upon

arriving in the homeland, paid tribute to the king. This is known to be done by the king with well-considered provision, so that those who were always occupied in divine service might be free from their servitude; and those who possessed nothing of their own on earth, but lived from the tithes of the people, from these no one should demand the payment of tributes. From all these things, it is most clearly proven that the king not only loved, but also very well learned what the worship of divine service required.

[Ezra 7:25] -- But you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God, etc. The king repeats the word he had spoken and confirms the truth he had recognized with a repeated statement. For previously, he had said that the law of that very God was in the hand of Ezra. Now, however, he says, the wisdom of his God is in his hand. Because, indeed, the wisdom is the law of God, as the Psalmist says: "The mouth of the righteous will meditate on wisdom, and his tongue will speak of judgment. The law of his God is in his heart" (Psalm 36). And the righteous has the law of God and wisdom in his hand, while in all that he does and speaks, he shows himself to be mindful of the divine will. Therefore, the sense of the letter is clear, and the spiritual understanding is clear, that evidently our Lord and Savior has the wisdom of God in his hand. For He is the power of God and the wisdom of God, by whose sole authority it is to appoint judges and overseers of the Churches, who judge all things according to His will and preach His faith to the unlearned throughout the world. And everyone who despises the decrees of His law will be punished according to their own error, either by present punishment or future justice.

Therefore, Artaxerxes, writing to Ezra and expressing in writing the love he had for religious worship, clearly manifested what Christian kings, devoted in future times, would do concerning the faith of the truth. Hence, we have briefly taken care to recall his letter, leaving out certain parts, so that the reader might understand how much it concords with the deeds which Christian princes have done for the peace of the holy Church with the revealed grace of the Gospel. Indeed, we can figuratively refer the person of Ezra not only to the Lord Christ but also to any overseer or teacher of the Church; to whom often kings and princes have sent letters for the status of the faithful. And fittingly Ezra himself, to whom this letter was given, subsequently bursts forth in praise of God, saying:

[Ezra 7:27] -- Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, etc. And who would doubt to confess His holy and mystical words, which the prophet, divinely inspired, recounts, by whom he also affirms the house of the Lord to be glorified?

Chapter 10

The number of those who went up with Ezra, and how they obtained the aid of the Lord for their journey by fasting and praying. [Ezra 7:28] -- And I, strengthened by the hand of the Lord my God, etc. He calls the hand of God the power of God, which works all things. Rightly does he gather those whom he will lead from Babylon to Jerusalem, who themselves are known to have the hand of God, by which they are strengthened. Because indeed, thus anyone becomes fit to bring others to God through his teaching, while first he himself is inwardly strengthened in his mind by God's grace against all things that impede the holy work. [Ezra 8:1] -- These are therefore the chiefs of the families, etc. Until the end of the genealogy, he carefully enumerates the chiefs who went up with him from Babylon and explains their genealogy. He also endeavors to add the number of those, which reaches one thousand four hundred and forty, so that he may thus suggest that the names of those who ascend from the confusion of this world are written in the book of life of the Lamb. But also, each of the teachers, namely the chiefs of the families of God's people, receives eternal rewards to the extent of the number of souls they have brought to the Lord, according to that parable in the Gospel, where, with the good and prudent servant saying: Lord, your pound has gained ten pounds (Luke XIX), the master responds to him, saying: And you will be over ten cities; that is, you will appear more glorious in the heavenly kingdom from the lives of those whom you have taught.

[Ezra 8:15] -- But I gathered them at the river that flows to Ahava. I do not remember reading this name of the place anywhere else. However, when it is later written, And I proclaimed there a fast by the river Ahava; and after some further writing, We set out from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month; it seems probable that Ahava is both a river and that another river flows into it, at the confluence of which Ezra gathered those who went up with him. Moreover, Josephus substitutes the Euphrates for this name. Whence Ahava can not incongruously be understood as some tributary of the river Euphrates. [Ezra 8:15] -- And we stayed there three days, etc. Ezra acted prudently, so that before beginning such a journey, he carefully ensured he had a supply of ministers of the house of God, through whom, upon arriving in Jerusalem, he could complete what was necessary for the temple's use.

[Ezra 8:17] -- And I sent them to Iddo, etc. The Caspian Sea, as Orosius writes, rises from the northern region of the ocean, whose shores and deserted places around the ocean are uninhabited and uncultivated. From there, it extends southwards through long narrow passages, until, expanded over great distances, it is bordered by the roots of Mount Caucasus. It has many Hyrcanian and Scythian tribes from the east to the ocean, wandering widely due to the unfruitful spread of the lands. To the west, it has many tribes. But in general, the region far beyond Albania under the Caspian Sea and mountain is called by the name of the Amazons. It should be noted here that while historians write "Caspium," Ezra in this passage calls it "Casphiae." For the Hebrews, not having the letter P, use the letter Ph in Greek or barbarian names, such as Phetrus, Philatus. Therefore, it is also proven that the sons of Israel reached the places of Casphiae through the captivity by the Assyrians or Chaldeans, as Ezra sends there to bring ministers of the house of the Lord, namely Levites and Nethinim, whom Josephus calls sacred servants. It should be noted that they lived very freely in peace, even though they were among foreigners, who immediately at the command or request of Ezra could send such a large group of soldiers. For two hundred and fifty-eight chosen men were on that expedition, as their following catalog shows; to which Ezra being added, it is found that his army almost had the total of seventeen hundred men.

[Ezra 8:21] -- And I proclaimed there a fast, etc. An example of fasting and praying, when we want to commence something of great virtue: and because the faithful hope in the Lord never fails, nor can it happen that we do not obtain what we justly seek from a pious and just helper through abstinence and prayers with faith. But we must carefully observe that fasting is prescribed first, and thus prayer is subsequently instructed. For first he says, And I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before the Lord. And then he adds: And we asked for a straight way for us and our children, etc., up to the conclusion of the sentence: But we fasted, and we prayed to our Lord for this, and it turned out well for us. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that whoever enters to beseech the mercy of the Lord should first live more abstinently, to show themselves worthy to be heard; and thus, praying to the Lord, they should not doubt that what they request will turn out well for them.

Chapter 11

Ezra weighed out the offerings of the king and his counselors, to be carried to Jerusalem by the chief priests, who upon arrival there would offer burnt offerings to the Lord. [Ezra 8:24] -- And I separated twelve of the chiefs of the priests, etc. It has been frequently said that the silver and gold and vessels sent from Babylon to Jerusalem signify souls, which are converted to the Lord from the confusion and errors of this world. Hence, Ezra appropriately entrusts such vessels to the priests, who are to carry them to Jerusalem; for it is necessary that through the hands of the priests, those who desire to reach the companionship of the holy Church are washed in baptism and consecrated to the Lord. Likewise, those who have separated themselves from the society of the Church through sin, and have fallen into the service of the devil, into the captivity of the Babylonian king by persevering in sins, must be reconciled to the holy Church through repentance by the ministry of the priests. And fittingly, there are twelve priests to whom this duty is assigned, on account of the twelve apostles, through whose teaching the Church was initially founded throughout the world, and who continue to build it up through their successors until the end of the age. To whom applies the statement that Ezra made to those same priests:

[Ezra 8:28] -- You are holy to the Lord, and the vessels are holy, etc. For it is fitting that the teachers of the Church should never forget the holiness by which they themselves are consecrated to the Lord through the Holy Spirit, in the day of redemption, for which they also prepare their hearers to receive; so that those who have already been offered to the Lord through the rudiments of faith are further confirmed by the examples and admonitions of those who have preceded them in faith, and become worthy of entrance into the heavenly city. They must be watchful in all things and ensure that none of the souls, namely the vessels of the Lord, entrusted to them is lost, but that they bring them in their entirety to the gates of the holy city.

[Ezra 8:29] -- Be watchful and guard, until you weigh, etc. We weigh the silver and gold, and the vessels which we received from Ezra, before the leaders of the priests and Levites, and the heads of the families of Israel in Jerusalem, and into the treasury of the house of the Lord, when by teaching and instructing those whom the divine order has entrusted to us, we present them such that they may be found blameless and fit for the treasury of the heavenly court, that is, the seats of internal peace and light; and this not by the judgment

of any men who may easily be deceived, but by the scrutiny of the blessed apostles, and other exalted men, who are with the Lord and are to judge our actions. These are indeed rightly understood to be the leaders of the priests and Levites, and the heads of the families of Israel, that is, the men or souls who see God. Concerning whom the Psalmist says to the Lord: "You will appoint them leaders over all the earth" (Psalm 45). And about whom Solomon, in the praises of the Church, says: "Her husband is noble at the gates, when he sits with the elders of the land" (Proverbs 31). At the gates, he speaks, in the context of the final examination.

[Ezra 8:31] -- We therefore moved from the river Ahava on the twelfth, and all the rest full of mysteries. For it is read above that on the first day of the first month they began to go up from Babylon; and now it is said that on the twelfth day of the same month they moved from the river Ahava. Therefore, on the first day of the month, they went out from the gates of Babylon, but until the twelfth day, they waited by the mentioned river until they called Levites and Nathinneos from the region of Caspia to themselves and commended themselves to the Lord more diligently through fasting and praying due to the dangers of the long journey. So, when we teach the new people of the Church to renounce the devil and believe and confess the true God, it is as if we depart from Babylon at the beginning of the first month with money to be consecrated to the Lord; because we show them the beginning of a new conversation, which leads those who are snatched from the devil to the heavenly kingdom. Hence, the same month is usually called the month of new or new fruits in the Holy Scripture. For in the same month, under the same signification of new conversation, the fathers were brought out of Egypt by Moses.

But when we give the symbol of faith to these same listeners of the new life, which was arranged by the twelve apostles and is comprehended by as many sentences, it is as if we stay twelve days in the first resting place; and so, we undertake the journey begun to the promised land, which by the acceptance of the knowledge of faith, we show them that a path of virtues must be entered upon to reach life. In these days, Ezra was occupied with fasting, prayers, and gathering Levites and Nathinneos with the children of the migration, because it is necessary that when we propose to acquire new people for faith, then we ourselves must especially give our attention to diligence in virtues, by which we commend ourselves more familiarly to the Lord, and offer an example of good action to those we instruct: we also call in a religious cohort of brethren to assist us, so that helped by them, we may more effectively transfer the souls of the faithful to the fellowship of the elect and to the summit of a more perfect life, as holy vessels to the temple of the Lord. It is aptly subjoined that those who came to Jerusalem from Babylon stayed there for three days, and then the silver, gold, and vessels they had brought were offered and weighed in the house of the Lord. Indeed, the three days of stay in Jerusalem represent the virtues that should be held by all the faithful, faith, hope, and charity.

Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to show these virtues first in themselves, and then to offer those they have taught and instructed in these same virtues to be tested by the

foremost fathers in Christ. For when the holy Church finds those we catechize to be proven in faith and action, as the vessels we offer in the temple, by the hands of the priests, it will find them to be of pure metal and perfect weight. This is also done daily in this Church through the chosen ones in the examination of the life of believers, and in the heavenly Jerusalem, it is more perfectly fulfilled in those who have merited to enter it, as we have said above. In this life, holy teachers, staying as it were for three days in Jerusalem, on the fourth day offer the silver and gold they have brought to be weighed by the priests, when they show themselves to be strong in faith, sublime in hope, fervent in love, and also demonstrate that their listeners shine like tested silver by the confession of true faith, gleam like pure gold through the purity of inviolate sense, and excel like vessels consecrated to God by accepting spiritual gifts. In the heavenly homeland, these same teachers first receive the grace of reward for their faith, hope, and love, and then also for those they have taught, as they are honored more for the precious and worthy vessels they have brought, as after the joy of a three-day stay in Jerusalem.

But there is a difference between the vessels that Ezra offers with the priests in Jerusalem and those that above Zerubbabel and Joshua are said to have offered; because those were transported from the temple of the Lord to Babylon and afterward brought back to Jerusalem; but these were made in Babylon itself, but in devotion were sent to Jerusalem by the king or princes of Persia, or even by the people of Israel who lived in those parts. Therefore, those vessels signify those who, after receiving the knowledge and sacraments of faith, and after beginning virtuous works, are deceived by the ancient enemy and taken into the confusion of errors; but by the mercy of Christ's grace, they are called back to salvation. However, these signify those who were born subject to the death of the first transgression by sin, but through the washing of regeneration by the ministry of priests, they were cleansed and gathered as children of the holy Church. Those represent penitents from their errors, these persevering nations in the beginning virtue. Concerning which it is well subjoined:

[Ezra 8:34] -- And every weight was recorded in that time. For the priests in the temple record all the weight of silver and gold, and of the vessels offered to the Lord, just as diligent teachers examine the lives of those under them, and discern by careful inquiry how much each one has progressed in faith or work, and according to the measure of their capacity, they arrange each in the house of God by their fitting steps. But even if now the laziness of overseers lies dormant and either ignores the lives of those entrusted to them or pretends not to know them, the internal judge is present, who keeps intact the number of believers and the weight of each one's soul in the balance of His examination, so that He may render to each according to his work. It can also be said; because when holy preachers reach the heavenly Jerusalem with those whom they have instructed, all the weight of their good action is recorded at that time in the book of life and they are rewarded in heaven with deserving retribution.

[Ezra 8:35] -- But also those who came from the captivity, the sons of the exile, etc. A great devotion and religiosity is shown by those who, when they came from captivity, arriving at the temple and altar of the Lord, first of all offered burnt offerings, not only for themselves but also for all Israel, that is, both for those who had already returned home and for those who were still enduring exile from their homeland, so that the mercy of their creator might protect them all. The spiritual meaning is also evident, that those who truly and perfectly escaped the captivity of the ancient enemy, by sinning they were held, but by repenting they freed themselves, who with firm intention submit to divine service, who wholly detach themselves from low desires, and are inflamed by the flame of heavenly desire to ascend to the heights. This is to offer burnt offerings, that is, wholly burned sacrifices or victims to the Lord, thinking or doing nothing but His will in all things. It is also a sign of a perfect mind when someone sacrifices for all Israel, that is, for the general well-being of all the faithful, as if mindful of unity and brotherhood in all, he supplicates the heavenly piety.

[Ezra 8:36] -- They also delivered the king's edicts to the satraps, etc. Another edition has: And they glorified the people and the house of God. Therefore, they uplifted the people by making royal authority, with which Ezra was exalted, honorable to all. They also uplifted the house of God by adorning it more splendidly with vessels and gifts which the king, his counselors, and his princes sent to it; and by freeing its ministers and priests from tributes and taxes, except to the Lord alone. Mystically, however, the people and the temple of God held one and the same figure of the holy Church; which Ezra and the sons of the exile uplift, by bringing from Babylon the vessels sacred to God, when holy preachers, gathering to it, by the Lord's gift, the assemblies of believers, make it honorable to all even strangers and show it as awe-inspiring. Likewise, the same preachers, when they elevate those whom they instruct either by their examples in good conduct or by words towards the perception of the heavenly rewards, they now uplift the people and the house of God, because they indeed bring great joy both to those dwelling in the heavenly homeland and to those still journeying on earth.

Chapter 12

Ezra, hearing that the people of Israel had been defiled by foreign wives, takes on the habit of mourning and prays to the Lord for forgiveness of their guilt. (I Esdras IX.)

[Ezra 9:1] -- After these things were completed, etc. The guilt of this transgression is also clearly described and reproved by prophetic authority in the prophet Malachi; because evidently those who returned from Babylonian captivity, both princes and priests and Levites, as well as the rest of the people, took wives of Israelite descent, who, suffering from the hardship and infirmity of long life, and the fragility of their sex, had been worn out and contracted weakness and deformity of body, and they married foreign women who were either flourishing in age, or more beautiful in body, or daughters of the powerful and rich. This should be understood not about those who were then with Ezra, but about those who had already ascended from captivity with Zerubbabel and Jeshua; for those who had come with Ezra could hardly have so quickly despised the doctrine of such a great leader and prelate, as it is understood, that after scarcely five months in their homeland, they had left their own wives and taken foreign wives; of whom these princes, who brought this crime to Ezra to be punished, were more likely to have been. Nor is it surprising that the people of Israel, along with priests and Levites, are said to have committed this crime, since that transmigration was more from Judah and Benjamin than from the ten tribes which were called Israel.

For it should be known that when Israel, that is, the ten tribes, was taken into captivity, the traditional name was also indiscriminately applied to the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, calling them Israel. Therefore, the people of Israel in this place is to be understood not in the distinction of Judah and the ten tribes of Benjamin, but in the general distinction of the peoples of the lands, understanding the people of God, who polluted the dignity of their heavenly name with the society of earthly ones. For also the same prophet Malachi, whom the Hebrews assert to be Ezra himself, recalls such transgression in his book of prophecy: ”Judah has been unfaithful, an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, because Judah has desecrated the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and married the daughter of a foreign god. May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob anyone who does this—an advocate or master and student—even though he brings an offering to the Lord Almighty” (Malachi II). Where, referring to Judah, he clearly indicates that the people of the first transmigration were polluted by this crime. And when he adds, ”May the Lord cut

off from the tents of Jacob anyone who does this—an advocate or master and student," he taught that both the leaders and the people, polluted by this transgression, and if they do not correct it, should be eradicated from the fellowship of saints.

And when he added, "Even though he brings an offering to the Lord Almighty," he warns that they offer sacrifices to the Lord in vain, who do not fear to submit themselves to the devil by sinning. Among these, the admirable faith and excellent purpose of the people freed from captivity, who called other nations the peoples of the lands in distinction to themselves, should be noted, so that they clearly implied that they themselves, although born from the earth, believed they had their conversation not on earth, but in heaven, since they believed in the God of heaven above all other nations and hoped to obtain blessings from Him. From this, they rightly grieved that their sanctification was contaminated by people of the nations; and what is more serious, they confessed that their leaders, from whom they should have been corrected, were the first to err. It should be carefully noted, and taken as an example for conduct, that what the leaders sinned and made the people committed to them sin as well, other leaders who lived more sanctly strive to correct. But because they cannot do it by themselves, they refer the cause to the pontiff, that is, their archbishop, by whose authority such a grave, multifaceted, and long-lasting sin would be expiated. No one doubts that foreign wives figuratively represent heresies and superstitious sects of philosophers.

When these are incautiously admitted into the Church, they not only contaminate the holy seed of Catholic truth and pure action with their errors, but also all the sins with which the Gentiles are accustomed to be polluted, while Christians are not ashamed to imitate them, become like foreign wives, degenerating from the holy seed of the word of God, by which they were born, as the apostle James says: "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth" (James I); and as if they produce profane offspring from the daughters of foreigners, while following the attractions of those who go astray, they bring forth perverse acts into the knowledge of everyone.

[Ezra 9:3] -- And when I had heard this word, I tore my garment, etc. Ezra reveals the deepest sorrow of his heart, he tore his clothing, plucked the hairs of his head and beard; he sits in mourning, so that by such dishonoring of his body and clothing, along with the sorrow of his face, he might more quickly rouse all hearts to repentance either for their own or their brothers' sins, because clothing is often used to signify our deeds, which either bring us to glory if clean, or to destruction if soiled, and do not commend themselves with the splendid love of the bridegroom. By the hairs of the head are meant thoughts, which arise from the hidden root of the heart, as if from the inner chambers of the brain. These, if upright, should be preserved: but if reproved, ought to be cut off. Hence, about Samuel, who was to be holy, his mother says: "And a razor shall not come upon his head" (cf. 1 Sam. 1:11). And to the apostles, the Lord says: "And not a hair of your head shall perish," because surely all the thoughts of the saints are worthy of eternal remembrance before the Lord. But truly, the sinner, that he may be cleansed from his iniquities, must cast away from himself reproveable thoughts, that is, the sources and incentives of evil deeds.

Hence, the leper in Leviticus, when he has received healing, among other ceremonies of purification, is also commanded to shave off all the hair of his body, so that being thus cleansed, he might be worthy to enter the camp (cf. Lev. 14). Because then we are perfectly cleansed from the foulness of vices when we strive to expel not only harmful actions but also thoughts from ourselves. The beard too, which is a sign of male sex and age, is customarily taken to signify virtue. The high priest tore his cloak and tunic, to signify that the people he ruled had less perfect deeds, and whose deficiency needed to be mended through repentance and renewed in better behavior. He plucked the hairs of his head, so that he might signify to the same people that wicked thoughts must be uprooted from their hearts, and room given for useful ones to be born anew. He also plucked the hairs of his beard, so that even in the virtues they seemed to possess, they might be humbled, and reminded that these small or non-existent things were mixed with vices and not esteemed in the examination of the inner judge. He sat in mourning, to teach that through the lamentations of repentance, forgiveness for such a great offense ought to be sought. Nor is it to be wondered at if the actions of such a good leader soon bore great virtue among the subjects. Consider what follows:

[Ezra 9:4] -- And all those who feared the Lord gathered to me, etc. O, what a great change of things! It was previously said that the treachery of princes and magistrates led many to luxury, and now with a good prince turned to lamentation, and indicating through his grief and tears what should be done by sinners, it is said that all those who feared the word of God, which threatens to punish transgressors, gathered to him. O, how much pious examples help good teachers! Ezras spoke nothing at all, but, having only heard of the crime, it is written that he was turned to tears and weeping, and drew the crowd of the faithful to him not by shouting, but by mourning. It is added:

[Ezra 9:5] -- And in the evening sacrifice I rose from my affliction, etc. Ezra had prepared himself through the contrition of his heart and the affliction of his body, so that he might be made worthy to hear divine compassion, and thus he broke forth into the words of prayer. He bent his knees, spread his hands, and poured out prayers to the Lord at the time of the evening sacrifice; not doubting that this sacrifice would be more pleasing to God—because it was offered in a spirit of humility and a contrite soul—than if it had been offered with the flesh and blood of sheep. Symbolically, by bending his knees with his garment rent, spreading his hands to God, and pouring out prayers and tears, he turned the minds of many to repentance, as it is written in what follows, showing the Lord Savior, who deigned to pray for our sins both before His passion and at the very time of His passion; and who, with His hands extended on the cross, willed the garment of His flesh to be torn and mortified with wounds for our restoration, so that He, as the Apostle says, who died for our sins, might rise for our justification (Rom. 4). This was suitably done at the time of the evening sacrifice, either because the Lord, at the end of the world, offered the sacrifice of His flesh and blood to the Father and commanded us to offer it in bread and wine; or because, with the completion of the legal sacrifice, He freed us by His passion and, separating us from the peoples of the earth, made us heavenly, and granted that we might cling to Him with

pure heart and body. The prayer itself, by which he, though just, associated himself with the sinful people, saying:

[Ezra 9:6] -- My God, I am confounded and ashamed, etc. It befits the humility of our Redeemer, who appeared in the likeness of sinful flesh to take away the sins of the world. Hence, even in the Psalms, which according to the testimony of the Gospel, are written about Him, He clearly calls the sins He took upon Himself as ours, saying: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Psalm 21:1). And adding: Far from my salvation are the words of my sins (Psalm 21:2). And again: O God, you know my foolishness, and my sins are not hidden from you (Psalm 69:5); not because He could have sins or foolishness in Himself, who, as the Apostle says, was made wisdom and justice and sanctification and redemption for us from God; but because, taking on the cause of those He came to save, He deigned to transfer upon Himself even those things that truly pertained to their frailty.

Chapter 13

While Ezra prays and weeps, the people also turn to repentance, and with unanimous counsel they separate from foreign wives. (1 Esdras 10) [Ezra 10:1] -- Therefore, as Ezra prayed and implored, etc. The effectiveness of Ezra's prayer, weeping, and lamentation is shown when immediately a very large assembly of both sexes and all ages is reported to have gathered to him. They wept, either those who had sinned, repenting of their guilt, or those who had remained chaste, grieving over the transgression and fall of their brothers. But whether these, or those, or both wept, they are all shown greatly troubled by the prayers and lamentations of their priest, such that even women, along with children, are said to have been present. It can also be understood with this discretion, that first the innocent and upright gathered to him, when he said: And all who feared the word of the God of Israel assembled to me because of the unfaithfulness of the exiles (1 Esdras 9); now even those who had sinned with their wives and children gather to act in repentance.

[Ezra 10:2] -- And Sechenias responded, etc. Josephus says that this Sechenias was the first of the Jerusalemites, and he himself, as befits a leader, with the greatest authority, soon helped Ezra's intention, both by confessing that the people had sinned together with him, and by advising that repentance should be made, by casting off foreign wives, along with the children born from them. [Ezra 10:2] -- And now if there is repentance in Israel concerning this, etc. He says, if the people perfectly repent of this transgression, first let us turn to the Lord and promise correction, and ask for pardon; then turning back to ourselves, let us root out and excise from us all the actions and roots of the crime committed, namely by casting out the wives along with all their unlawful offspring; for this is truly to repent, and to turn wholly inwardly in the heart to the Lord, and outwardly to cut off all matters of sin from their very origin. And what follows:

[Ezra 10:4] -- Arise, it is your task to decide, etc. He very fittingly teaches how it should be conducted among the elders in council, so that each person may state what seems best according to their understanding, or what they have seemed to have understood; and yet leave the decision to him who has the power, ready to obey all that he has determined to be done according to the will and law of God. [Ezra 10:5] -- And Ezra rose before the house of God, etc. Eliasib was the high priest of that time, since after Jesus the son of Jozadak, his

son Joachim, and after him his son Eliasib, carried out the rank of high priest, as both the subsequent sections of this sacred history and the Jewish history of Josephus prove.

[Ezra 10:6] -- He did not eat bread, etc. Here they will have an excellent example not only of weeping and praying, but also of fasting for those who have sinned; and since blessed are those who mourn, who weep for their own sins, because after receiving remission, they are comforted, how much more are they to be believed blessed, who also mourn for the errors of their brothers; and this to such an extent that they do not even want to touch bread and water, which is the nourishment of those who abstain, nor enter their house, or ascend to their bed, but rather prefer to pray throughout the night in the courtyards of the house of the Lord. For there was the house of the priest, which, as evening came, Ezra is reported to have entered. Finally, another Edition instead of Johanan's bedchamber, has Johanan's vestry, by which name Scripture often refers to the porticoes surrounding the temple on all sides, in which the ministers and guards of the same temple used to reside. They also mourn now for the transgression of those who came from captivity, who grieve for those who, having been recently rescued from sins through repentance, have again fallen into sin, by which they might be once more captured by the devil. Regarding whose seducers, as about parents of impure wives, the apostle Peter speaks: For, speaking arrogant words of vanity, they entice by lusts of the flesh, those who have barely escaped (II Peter II). And a little later he speaks about those who, as if ascending from captivity, are nonetheless captured by luxury: For if, he says, those who have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first (Ibid.).

[Ezra 10:7] -- And a voice was sent into Judah and Jerusalem, etc. While it is said that the sons of Judah and Benjamin gathered, it is clearly evident that those who were defiled by the marriage of foreign wives were from the first migration, which was from these tribes, and through Jesus and Zerubbabel, they were recalled to the house, as we have previously mentioned.

[Ezra 10:9] -- He is the new moon, on the twentieth day of the month, etc. The ninth month is the same which the Hebrews call Casleu, and the Romans call December, which comes in the middle of winter and is rainy and stormy, as anyone would know. Therefore, it should be noted more diligently that when the people gathered in mid-winter, they were reminded to tremble from sin and rains. For when they saw that rains were falling even more than usual during the season of rains, they returned to their conscience and understood this to be due to their crimes and feared the celestial wrath that would come, being warned by the disturbance in the atmosphere. Therefore, they did not presume to conduct their affairs in private houses but gathered in the square of the house of the Lord, having assumed the habit of penitence and humility. This is mentioned for those who, although the elements are disturbed, and either by the noise of the winds, the flooding of the rains, the heaps of snow, the heat of drought, or even the ruin of men or animals increasing from above, and with the same Judge by clear signs threatening the force of His wrath, do not inquire at all about

the correction of morals, by which they might please the Judge and evade the impending plague, but only diligently consider by what skill they might either avoid or overcome the adversities that rage outside due to sins.

But the people sat in the square of the house of God, that is, around the priest's court, which was surrounded everywhere by the house of God itself, as we taught above; having around it on every side in a square the spacious houses of the courts, in which the people could stand when necessary due to the rains and still see what was happening at the temple gates or around the temple. For the inner walls were made with columns up to the ground, and the outer walls were solid.

[Ezra 10:10] -- And Ezra the priest arose and said, etc. This passage corresponds to what was previously mentioned: And Ezra arose before the house of God and went to the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib, and he went there, he did not eat bread, and he did not drink water; for he was mourning. Here the devotion of the high priest is to be noted, who, mourning, praying, and fasting for the transgression of the people, remained for three days in the courtyards of the temple; nor did he wish to enter his own house before he saw the people, having given their consent, wholly repentant and turned to the Lord with all their heart. The other leaders also seem to have shared in his devotion, as they are said to have gone to the houses of their fathers after the assembly was finished. For if the sacred history writer did not wish to signify this with that statement, what was the point of writing that, after the discussion was completed, Ezra and the heads of the families went from the courtyards of the temple to the houses of their fathers, when everyone would know that they would do this even without Scripture saying it? What was the point of adding, And all by their names, when this too would be well-known to all, except that he wanted it to be understood that they were such whose names and deeds should rightfully be kept in memory and handed down to be known by posterity?

[Ezra 10:16] -- And they sat on the first day of the tenth month, etc. Note that the number three is very commonly used in mystical figures. It was previously said that in three days all the sons of the diaspora should come to Jerusalem; and now in three months, namely the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth, they are punished by foreign wives. For there are three virtues without which we cannot attain life: faith, hope, and charity. Coming into the world at the third time of the age, the Lord bestowed upon us the grace of the Gospel. For the first time was before the law with the patriarchs, the second with the prophets under the law, in the third He Himself came with grace; because redeeming us by His passion, He rose from the dead on the third day; through whose grace, both by being joined in fellowship with the holy Church and by being cleansed from the allurements of vices, aptly the sons of the diaspora, having to be corrected from their errors in three days, convened in Jerusalem, and in three months completed their task of correction. But also literally, the leaders of the families and the Levites worked opportunely and salutarily so that before the beginning of the first month all those who were stained by profane marriage were completed; that is, they were cleansed from such a crime, so that they could enter the first month, in which the

Passover was to be held, pure, and could celebrate the Paschal feast pure, and could begin and continue the year pure. This is also suitable for us to imitate every year in Lent in preparation for Easter, so that as the solemnities of the Lord's Resurrection approach, we cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, so that we may also be able to be partakers of the Resurrection.

Chapter 14

Summary of those who cast out the foreign wives they had taken.

[Ezra 10:18] -- And there were found among the sons of the priests those who had taken, etc. The Hebrews apply to this place the prophecy of Zechariah: And the Lord showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him (Zech. III). And a little later: And Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spoke to those who stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And he said to him, See, I have taken away your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes. And put a clean turban on his head (Ibid.). They say rightly, Satan stood at his right hand to oppose him because the accusation was true, as he too, along with the others, had taken a foreign wife. But what is said, that Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, is interpreted in three ways: either because of the unlawful marriage, or because of the sins of the people, or because of the squalor of captivity. The angel, before whom Joshua stood, commanded the other angels in the person of the Lord to remove from him the filthy garments, which we mentioned. When they had completed the command, the same angel again speaks to Joshua: See, I have taken away your iniquity from you; these are the filthy garments; and I will clothe you with rich robes, that is, I have united to you an Israelite wife.

And what follows: Put a clean turban on his head; which many call a mitre; in this they understand the dignity of the priesthood, that with the stains of sins cleansed, he has a pure priesthood. But we should note that Ezra does not write that Jesus himself had taken a foreign wife, but says that some of his sons and brothers were defiled with this crime. Although the guilt of the sons reflects on the father, he cannot be perfectly righteous who neglected to correct his delinquent sons while he could. Whence some say that the aforesaid prophecy about Joshua is not to be referred to the son of Jozadak but to the Lord the Savior. Who, though He is the brightness of glory and the express image of God's substance, accepted filthy garments for a time out of compassion for our frailty, as Isaiah says: But He was wounded for our iniquities and bruised for our sins (Isa. LIII); to whom Satan stood at the right hand to oppose Him, always seeking to oppose His right hand and His virtues, as the sacred history of the Gospel reports. And the apostle says: He was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb. IV). From whom the filthy garments are removed, and He

is clothed with rich robes, when He cleansed us from our sins in His own blood, so that what the apostle says may be fulfilled: For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Or He who had filthy garments in His passion, received rich robes in His resurrection, so that we may truly say of Him: Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer (II Cor. V). He also received the turban on His head, for He was proven to have an eternal priesthood, according to the Psalmist: You are a priest forever (Ps. CIX). As for what Ezra says, that the brothers of Joshua the son of Jozadak also took foreign wives, we should understand them not as his carnal brothers, but as relatives according to the custom of Holy Scripture; nor could his brethren in the flesh have lived until then and devoted themselves to pleasure, since more than a hundred years had passed since Cyrus began to reign and sent Joshua and Zerubbabel with the captivity of Judah and Benjamin to rebuild the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. It follows:

[Ezra 10:19] -- And they gave their hands, to cast out their wives, etc. First, they reject the illicit wives from themselves, and thus they offer a ram for themselves, so that, with the crime removed, they could approach the altar in purity. Indeed, it is difficult for the sacrifice of him to be accepted by God, who has not first endeavored to abandon the fault for which he offers, as Isaiah says: Cease to do evil, learn to do well (Is. 1). And because the sons or brothers of the high priest, who were the first to sin, rightly offer a ram from the flocks for the punishment of the crime, so that by such a sacrifice they might indicate that they were offering themselves, who appeared to be the teachers of the people and leaders like the leaders of following flocks, from their former life, to slaughter and purify themselves and offer worthy penance to God through a better life. It is noteworthy how skillfully the devil always battles against the faithful, never leaving them a secure time without combat. Behold, those who could not be overcome by adversities are overcome by blandishments; they overcame public enemies by building the temple of the Lord and dedicating it, but they were overcome by the love of foreign women, so they might not keep the temples of their hearts or bodies, dignified for the indwelling of God.

Of which matter the figure was completely fulfilled in our times, since we see the minds of the faithful much more dangerously tempted inwardly now, drawn and enticed by their own desires, than they were once outwardly, when the fierce adversary raged against their steadfastness with iron and fire. But the piety of the Lord will assist, which, just as it then granted them the virtue of patience against the open battles of the raging ones, so it may also grant us the caution to guard against the snares of creeping flattery. Finally, through the diligent action of the industrious pontiff and all those who feared the Lord, those who had sinned were pricked in their hearts and cast away foreign wives; and thus, with the foulness of lust expelled, the honor of chastity returned, and in the city of the Lord, with the rubbish of vices cast out, the flowers and aromas of virtues were scattered. Up to this point are the words of Ezra, by which he described the deeds of Zorobabel and Jesus, and afterwards his own. And he himself also clearly held the type of the Lord Savior, in that he

renewed the holy Scripture, recalled the people from captivity to Jerusalem, elevated the house of the Lord with greater gifts, appointed leaders beyond the river Euphrates, and corrected the sons of the captivity from foreign wives.

For the Lord restored the sacred Scripture, which the Scribes and Pharisees had either defiled with their traditions or taught was to be understood only according to the letter, showing it as full of spiritual sense, as it was written by Moses or the prophets. And He also had the New Testament described by the apostles or apostolic men, sending the Holy Spirit from above. He led the people out of Babylonian captivity and brought them to Jerusalem and the promised land liberated, because He, having suffered once on the cross, redeemed the world with His blood, and descending to the underworld, led out those He found there as true Israelites, that is, the elect, bringing them to the walls of the heavenly city, and granted them the joys of the promised inheritance of old. And daily, gathering the faithful from the turmoil of this world, He calls them to the fellowship of the holy Church and the everlasting kingdom. He adorned the temple with gold and silver and precious vessels, which either the people of Israel or the Persian princes had sent there through him, because He never stops adorning and glorifying the Church with the faith and works of those who believe from both peoples, namely, Jew and gentile.

He appointed leaders and overseers for all the people beyond the river, who knew and taught the law of God, because in the holy Church, which is also washed with the river of sacred baptism, and transcends the river of Babylon, that is, the turmoil of the fluctuating world by the sincerity of faith, He placed apostles, evangelists, pastors, and leaders. He corrected the sons of the captivity from foreign wives, because He forbade those who had renounced the world by profession of faith to serve again the enticements of the world. He also cast out the sons of such foreign mothers from the congregation of the captivity, lest, when they grew up, they might follow the faithlessness of their mothers rather than the faith of their fathers, because our works, even those that seem good to men, if they are mixed with carnal delights, or have taken their origin from the contagion of human favor, He taught to reject, nor to deem them worthy of the fellowship of those who, perfectly renouncing the world, with full mind progress to heavenly things; who do not allow themselves to be enfeebled by temporal blandishments, but rather are exercised by adversities, and prepared for eternal rest with joy. But if anyone wishes to object, saying that it is not written that the sons of the adulteresses were cast out, but only the women themselves, it is though Shecaniah, suggesting and saying:

Let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives and those born of them, was followed by the prompt, And Ezra rose and adjured the chiefs of the priests, Levites, and all Israel, to do according to this word, and they swore, he should understand that if they did not cast out those children born to them by foreign women, it was because they taught them to renounce maternal infidelity, and consecrated to the Lord through circumcision and a saving sacrifice, making them companions of their faith and chastity. It is clear indeed that the mystery of this matter is evident, because good works, which we do for the sake

of temporal advantage, or favor, or delight, either are to be counted as among evil works, or must be distinguished by the lowest intention and done solely for heavenly recompense. For he who, for example, fasts, prays, gives alms with the intention that he may be seen and praised by men, such a one indeed, the offspring of a good deed, is as it were born of an unclean mother of a filthy conscience; hence it cannot have a part with the congregation of those who ascended from Babylon to Jerusalem, because a justice, or rather a simulation of justice, which has received its reward in the present, will lack future recompense in heaven.

But if such a worker of a deed, converting his mind to better things, begins to do for heavenly reward what he did for the desire for empty praise, consecrating his offspring, even if unworthily born, to the Lord, he makes it a citizen of Jerusalem, because he corrects a work badly begun from the time, making it worthy of eternal reward in heaven.

Chapter 15

Nehemiah, the cupbearer of King Artaxerxes, upon hearing of the affliction of those who were in Jerusalem, fasts, prays, and seeks mercy from the Lord. (Nehemiah I)

[Nehemiah 1:1] -- The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hacaliah, etc. Nehemiah is interpreted in Latin as "the Lord comforts," or "comforter from the Lord"; who, when he had renewed the walls of Jerusalem and freed the people of God from the insults of their enemies, elevated observance of the divine law; it is evident that in both name and deed and person he fittingly designates the Mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who declares himself sent for the comfort of the poor in spirit, when about to ascend to heaven, he says to his disciples: I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that is, consoler (John 14). The Psalmist shows that it is He who builds up the city of God, namely the holy Church, and comforts the mourners when he says: The Lord builds up Jerusalem, and gathers the dispersed of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted (Psalm 147), etc. The figure of Nehemiah also suits the holy preachers, through whose ministry heavenly consolation is conferred upon us, while, after the fall into sin, they promise penitent ones hope of divine pardon and propitiation, as they rebuild the walls of Jerusalem destroyed by enemies. The month of Chislev is the same we call December, and is the ninth month among the Hebrews, the last month of the year with us; whose name, interpreted in Latin "his hope," most clearly matches the desires of him who directed his mind to raising up the ruins of the holy city.

For the first foundation of good action is that we have undoubted hope of the Lord's assistance in accomplishing what we desire. It is the same month in which our Lord was born in the flesh, beautifully prefiguring long beforehand by its name that in it the true Nehemiah, that is the comforter from God the Father, so long hoped for by the chosen, would come into the world for the building of the holy Church. But that Nehemiah writes that he was in the citadel of Susa when men came who reported about Jerusalem. Susa is the metropolis of the kingdom of the Persians, as we read in the history of Esther (Esther 1); which Nehemiah calls a citadel, as does the prophet Daniel (Daniel 8); not because the city is a citadel, but because it is built with such strength that it seems to be one. Susa is interpreted as "horsemanship" or "returning", a name suitably adapted to the fortification of the faithful minds of those especially concerned with the captivity of Jerusalem, that is, the salvation of those who, once snatched from the Church by the devil's snares, have now by penance been

brought back to the Church through the grace of God. Such are in the returning citadel, that is, in the strength of a mind called back from weak delights to the desire for the heavenly homeland, from which they fell in the first parent. Such are in the strong host of holy hearts, who bear God as rider. As the prophet says:

Riding upon your horses, and your ridership is salvation. The Lord indeed ascends upon his horses when he enlightens the hearts of preachers which he governs with the grace of his piety; and his ridership is salvation, because he leads to eternal salvation those whom he governs, and he makes others too, through them, who are equally governed, partakers of the same eternal salvation. Therefore, Nehemiah inquiring about those who had remained from the captivity of Jerusalem, let us see what follows:

[Nehemiah 1:3] -- And they said to me: Those who remained and were left, etc. The sense of the letter is clear, because those who had remained from captivity, although they seemed to live in peace with the king of Persia being their friend, whom he had also sent with letters much earlier, who had power in the whole region beyond the river; nevertheless, they were in great affliction of mind, because their enemies reproached them that the holy city still remained in ruins. But now also in the holy Church, it is justly afflicted, and pricked with salutary sadness, they who, themselves repenting from past crimes, consider that their neighbors still lie under vices, so that through the negligence of those who could have benefited many of the corrected, the devil has a free entrance into the Church as if through the walls of a destroyed city. This is all the more necessary to be lamented, if even those who ought to have benefited others by teaching or example, wrongly living, show themselves as an example over destruction to those who see them. For this is what it means for the gates of Jerusalem to be burned with hostile flames, those who ought to have introduced the worthy into the company of the elect by living and teaching well, and kept away the unworthy, to perish by the fire of avarice, lust, pride, contention, envy, and other vices which the malignant enemy is accustomed to incite. But what seems to us to be done about these things, or what ought to be done, is shown when it is immediately added:

[Nehemiah 1:4] -- And when I heard such words, I sat and wept, etc., up to And direct your servant, etc. For if a holy man, hearing the buildings of stones and wood destroyed, rightly mourned, fasted, and prayed, and for a long time sat in sadness; how much more in the destruction and ruin of souls, which is committed through sin, should continuous mourning, tears, and prayers be insisted upon? So that, with the Lord pitying, those who lay filthy in the longlasting filth of vices, as a reproach against religion, with the enemy triumphing, may be raised to their former health.

Chapter 16

Nehemiah, having received permission and letters from the king, came to Jerusalem to build the city; from this year are calculated the seventy weeks of years which the angel foretold to Daniel, and they reach to the time of the Lord's passion. (II Esdras II.) [Nehemiah 2:1] -- Now it happened in the month of Nisan, etc. Nisan is the first month of the year according to the Hebrews, in which they always used to celebrate Passover, which we call April. Therefore, what was said above, that he mourned, fasted, and prayed for many days, it is evident indeed that for four continuous months, namely the ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth, he devoted himself to this most sacred dedication, awaiting the opportune time in which he could express his desire to the king. And indeed, he was the chief cupbearer, he used to hand the cup to the king, performing the duty of joy outwardly, but inwardly he was weighed down with severe sadness, because he remembered the holy city as destroyed and the people of God given over to reproach and contempt by the enemies of God. Hence, with those like him, he declares speaking in the Psalm: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion" (Psalm 136).

[Nehemiah 2:2] -- And the king said to me: "Why is your face sad? etc. Just as we have clearly recognized, with Isaiah teaching, that Cyrus, the first king of the Persians, holds the figure of the Lord and Savior because he released the people of God from captivity and commanded the temple to be rebuilt; likewise, we can rightly understand his successor in the same empire, Artaxerxes, who commanded with the same devotion that the city of Jerusalem be rebuilt, as a type of the Lord. The Lord constructs for himself a city from living stones, that is, one church from all the elect, through the office of preachers. Therefore Artaxerxes is well interpreted as testing the light with silence. For the Lord is the light of life, who tests the hearts of His faithful with silence, sometimes enlightening them with the sweetness of heavenly grace, sometimes obscuring them with the hardships of the present life, so that, educated by temporal adversities, they may more fervently desire eternal goods. This year is memorable, in which it was permitted to build Jerusalem, and it is already prefigured in the mystic writings of the prophet Daniel, with the angel saying to him that seventy weeks have been shortened over his people and over his holy city. And shortly after: From the going forth of the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. And shortly after:

He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week, and in the middle of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease. These weeks, therefore, begin from the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, when he gave permission for the rebuilding of Jerusalem; at which time, as Julius Africanus writes, the years of the Persian reign were one hundred and fifteen, and the same number of years remained incomplete until Alexander the Great, when he killed Darius; but it was the one hundred and eighty-fifth year of the captivity of Jerusalem; and they reach up to the times of the Lord's passion, by which the end was put to legal sacrifices and offerings. Indeed, each of these weeks has seven years, that is, four hundred and ninety years according to the lunar course; only in such a way that each one, in a new and unusual manner, has no more than twelve lunar months. Hence, the angel carefully says that seventy weeks are not counted but shortened over his people, which are solar years 475. Concerning this entire prophecy, I have taken care to discuss it as fully as I could in the book of Times.

[Nehemiah 2:10] -- And Sanballat the Horonite, etc., heard. And the heretics are grieved, and all the enemies of the Church are saddened whenever they see any elected persons working for the sake of the Catholic faith or for the correction of customs, by which the walls of the Church are to be renewed. Indeed, the diversity of souls and matters is to be noted, for it was said above that those who remained from captivity in Judea were in great affliction and reproach; but also Nehemiah led a long fast with weeping and prayers because the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, and its gates were burned with fire. And now, on the contrary, the enemies of that same holy city are in great affliction and are grieved because its buildings are to be restored, and at the same time, the citizens understand that they are to be lifted from the insults of their enemies. From this, it is to be gathered that even in this life, the sentence of the Lord can be fulfilled; He who said: Amen, amen, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy (John 16). For as the world that rejoiced is weeping, the sorrow of the righteous will be turned into joy when the holy affairs of the Church are seen to grow, and those who had strayed by sinning are recognized to return to it by repenting.

Chapter 17

Nehemiah, coming to Jerusalem, observes the ruined state of the walls by night, and in the morning, revealing the purpose of his journey, strengthens the heart and hands of the people to rebuild. [Nehemiah 2:11] -- ”And I came to Jerusalem and was there three days,” etc. He wanders through various parts of the destroyed city, carefully scrutinizing each, and considers anxiously how they ought to be repaired. Thus it is with spiritual teachers, often rising at night and by diligent investigation examining the condition of the holy Church while others are resting; so that they may vigilantly inquire how those things which are defiled or ruined by the wars of vices may be corrected and raised by castigating. But the wall of Jerusalem is laid waste, and the conduct of the faithful is soiled by earthly and low affections; the gates are consumed by fire, when even those who ought to open the way of life to others through teaching, abandoning the office of truth, become equally torpid with common inertia, and serve temporal cares.

[Nehemiah 2:17] -- ”And I said to them: You see the distress we are in,” etc. These words are plain and very apt in a spiritual sense, because holy teachers, and indeed all who are fervent with zeal for God, are in great distress as long as Jerusalem, that is, the vision of peace which the Lord has left and entrusted to us, is seen to be deserted through the wars of dissensions; and they observe the gates of virtues, which, according to Isaiah, ought to have been occupied by praise (Isa. 60), being cast down and held in contempt by the prevailing gates of hell. Hence they strive, by gathering the ministers of the word into a single endeavor, to rebuild by faith and good action those things which seemed to be destroyed.

Chapter 18

The wall, towers, and gates of Jerusalem are built, starting with the great priest Eliasib. (Nehemiah III.) [Nehemiah 3:1] -- And Eliasib the great priest rose, etc. This Eliasib, the high priest of that time, was the son of Joakim, who, after his father Jesus the son of Josedec the great priest, himself also for no small time held the insignias of the high priesthood. And rightly the restoration of the city began with the great priest and his brothers, so that those who had precedence in rank of order might themselves become an example to all in good works. And it is well joined with the priests who are building.

[Nehemiah 3:1] -- And up to the tower of a hundred cubits, etc. For priests build up to the measure of a hundred cubits, when they kindle all whom they instruct with love and desire for eternal things. For the number one hundred, which in the counting of fingers passes from the left to the right, represents heavenly goods, which, in comparison to temporal and lesser goods, are as the right hand to the left. They are also said to have sanctified the gate they built; for it is the duty of priests to make their works specially worthy of sanctification above others, and to act earnestly so that whoever is joined to them may sanctify the name of the Lord in themselves by living well. According to the letter, it seems that the first gate of the flock was either built or sanctified by the priests because it was near the temple and belonged properly to them; for it also seems reasonable that the building of the city should start from the temple. For it is indeed necessary that we first preserve within ourselves the constancy of faith and love for God, and then add works of piety that pertain to the love of our neighbor; thirdly, that is, lastly, we should take care of those things that pertain to the general provision of this life, concerning which the Apostle says: Having food and clothing, let us be content with these (1 Tim 6).

But it could also seem probable that the gate of the flock is so called because through it the animals that were to be offered in the temple were usually brought in. Therefore, the priests build the gate of the flock at the beginning of the building of the city of God, when holy preachers imbue their hearers, above all, with the truth of faith which works through love, through which they should introduce the sacrifices of good deeds and offer them to God on the altar of their heart. The construction of this gate, extended to a hundred cubits, is sanctified to the tower of Hananeel, that is, to the grace of God, when from the beginning of faith to the firmness of good action, which is accomplished only with the inspiration and

help of God, they extend solely with the intention of eternal retribution. It should be noted, indeed, that our manuscripts have: And they built the gate of the flock. The old translation has: And they built the gate and the pool of Bethesda; of which name John makes mention in his Gospel: Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches; in these lay a great multitude of sick people (John 5), etc. Nor does anything prevent us from understanding that this place is designated here; for the name of the Sheep Gate is not much different from the name Bethesda: for in Greek a sheep is called 'probaton'.

Jerome also mentions this place in his book of Places, writing thus: Bethesda is a pool in Jerusalem, which is called the Sheep Gate, and it can be interpreted by us as pertaining to sheep. It once had five porches; and twin pools are shown, one of which is usually filled with winter rains, and the other, wondrously red, as if with bloody waters, reveals signs of ancient work. For they say that sacrifices used to be washed in it by the priests, hence it received its name. From all these indications, it appears that the Sheep Gate is near the pool of Bethesda, so that by this gate the sacrifices to be washed in that pool were brought in.

[Nehemiah 3:3] -- The fish gate was built by the sons of Asnah. He called it the fish gate, which looked towards Joppa and Diospolis, that is, Lydda, and it was closer to the sea among all the routes to Jerusalem, which now is said to be called the gate of David, and is the first of the gates to the west of Mount Zion. To this opinion seem to agree the words of the Chronicles, in which it is written about King Manasseh of Judah: "After this, he built a wall outside the city of David to the west of Gihon in the valley, from the entrance of the fish gate, around to Ophel, and raised it very high" (2 Chr. 33). In a typological sense, just as the flock of the Lord's faithful is so often called fish, hence as He said to Peter, "Feed my sheep" (John 21); so also He promised the same to Andrew and the other apostles, saying: "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4). Again, He spoke of these fishermen through a parable, saying: "They chose the good fish and put them into vessels, but threw the bad away" (Matt. 13). Therefore, they built the fish gate in Jerusalem when those steps are ordained in the Church by which the elect are separated from the reprobate, like good fish from bad, to be brought into the fellowship of eternal peace.

The fish gate is built when, by the works of virtues, the faithful serve those who see themselves, having been rescued from the waves of turbulence and worldly desire, led into the tranquility and peace of spiritual life. Zephaniah the prophet remembers this gate, saying: "A sound of crying from the fish gate, and wailing from the second" (Zeph. 1). Because what he added, the second, signifies a gate of the second wall in the same area. For in the times of Hezekiah, the wall of the city was doubled, the Chronicles narrate, where it is written: "He built diligently all the wall that had been broken, and raised up towers upon it, and outside another wall" (2 Chr. 32). These things about the literal sense. But according to the allegory of the law, Zephaniah heard the voice of crying from the fish gate and wailing from the second, because he foresaw that both would be thrown down by enemies: for he saw

that the faith and works of teachers, by which it was proper for others to be saved from the waves of corruptible life and led into the holy Church, would be overthrown by the snares of the ancient enemy, that is, by the desire for earthly pleasures which would deprive them of heavenly joys.

Rightly, indeed, he heard a voice of crying and wailing from both the first and second gate, both from the outer and inner, because he saw that both outward works and the hearts of the negligent within would be overthrown by the devil's attack; but since the Lord lifts up those who are cast down (Ps. 145:14), Nehemiah records that the same fish gate was restored after a long ruin: for even if some of the preachers fall by sinning, there will not be lacking those who, up until the end of the world, succeeding in the place of their predecessors, with the Lord's help, open the gates of righteousness by preaching and living rightly. Rightly, however, it is added about those who destroyed this gate:

[Nehemiah 3:3] -- They themselves wove it and set up the gates, etc. Returning also to the others which are said to have been built, the gate is repeatedly mentioned frequently; because it is evidently necessary that whoever has begun the construction of good action, should continue adhering to their beginnings up to the peak of perfection, and being alert, should set up the gates, bars, and locks. For gates are set in doors so that, being opened at a fitting time, the citizens may have the ability to enter or exit. Locks and bars are set so that, with the doors stopped up and closed, the enemy may not be able to enter. Thus, in our good works, gates of kind provision are to be set up so that fellow citizens, that is, our neighbors, seeing these, may glorify our Father who is in heaven, and they themselves too learn to follow our examples and walk with us through the walls of virtues. Also, locks and bars are to be set up against the plots and invasions of the enemies, so that we may be diligently fortified on all sides, lest perhaps the ancient enemy, having been unwisely let in, might take our stronghold of virtue by force. Hence it is well said in Proverbs: "A brother helped by his brother is like a fortified city, and judgments are like the bars of cities" (Prov. XII).

When indeed both peoples, that is, the Jews and the Gentiles, agree in brotherly love in Christ, they build one Church, namely the city of their Creator. And just as the bars strengthen the gates of cities, so the doctrines of truth defend the Churches throughout the world, which make one Catholic Church, from the incursion of the unbelievers. Likewise, we set up locks and bars on our gates, when we carefully guard against disclosing the secrets of our faith to pigs and dogs, that is, to impure minds, or performing our righteousness for the sake of human favor, and admitting through our good works those who bring more danger by their praise than a helpful support by their observation.

[Nehemiah 3:6] -- And they rebuilt the old gate, etc. That old gate is what John mentions, saying: Beloved, I do not write a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning (1 John 2). The old commandment is the word which you have heard. Therefore, the old gate is rebuilt in Jerusalem, when the word of faith and love, which has been handed down from the beginning of the holy Church, is

either recovered in those who have gone astray, or begins to be established in those recently believing. [Nehemiah 3:8] -- And they left Jerusalem, etc. The wall of the broad street in Jerusalem is the firmness and fortification of perfect love in the hearts of the elect, to which its teachers reach by building, when progressing in works of charity, they can say to their Creator and Helper: We have run the way of your commandments, when you enlarged our heart (Psalm 119). Indeed, that enlargement of an enlightened mind, which can love both a friend in God and an enemy for the sake of God.

[Nehemiah 3:13] -- And Hanun built up the Valley Gate, etc. We know that the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which was also called Gehenna, that is, the Valley of Hinnom, was to the eastern side of the city of Jerusalem, through which flows the Kidron stream, mentioned in the Gospel (John XVIII), when it receives waters from rain or snow, flowing from the northern to the southern region. But we also read of the Valley of Gihon on the western side of the same city, as the Book of Chronicles says about King Manasseh of Judah, which we have mentioned above: After this, he built a wall outside the City of David to the west of Gihon in the valley (II Chronicles XXXIII). Gihon, moreover, is the name of the spring where Solomon was anointed king outside the city. Therefore, whether Ezra signifies this one, that one, or any other valley of the same city in this place, the mystery is clear, because the Valley Gate is built in Jerusalem, when for those who have been recently initiated into the knowledge of faith, or for those who have been restored to chastity of faith by the truth's teachers who had gone astray, the virtue of humility, among other virtues, is commanded to be observed, through which they may deserve to be elevated by a greater grace of God, as the Holy Scripture says: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (I Peter V). And in the Psalm:

And the valleys are covered with grain (Psalm LXV), which means, the humble will be abundantly filled with the gifts of heavenly sustenance. And it is fitting that after the Old Gate and the wall of the broad street, the Valley Gate is built; because indeed, after the first principles of the catholic faith, which works through love, humility must be inculcated to us, which is the guardian of virtues, so that according to the wise man's precept, the greater we are, the more we should humble ourselves in all things (Ecclesiasticus III).

[Nehemiah 3:14] -- And a thousand cubits along the wall up to the Dung Gate, etc. They say that the site of the city of Jerusalem is arranged on such a gentle slope, facing north and east, that rain falling there never remains, but flows like rivers through the eastern gates, carrying with it all the filth of the streets, augmenting the torrent Cedron in the valley of Josaphat. From this, it seems likely that the gate is called the Dung Gate, through which filth and impurities are accustomed to be carried out. It is by no means of less strength and usefulness that all impurities should be carried out of the city of the Lord than that which is pure should be gathered into it. Therefore, they build the Dung Gate in Jerusalem, who ordain those into the ministry of the Holy Church, through whom the filth of vices may be cleansed from the minds of the elect. But also corrupt-minded men should be excluded from the borders of the Church, with the help and weakening of all impurity by the shower

of heavenly grace; so that according to the Psalmist, "All who do iniquity may be destroyed from the city of the Lord" (Psalm 10). And since it is a sign of great perfection when someone progresses so much through the merit of humility that they can keenly perceive their errors and effectively cleanse those discovered;

it is rightly said that those who built the Valley Gate also constructed a thousand cubits in the wall up to the Dung Gate. For the number a thousand signifies perfection, and a cubit signifies the operation which is done by hands and arms. And they reach a thousand cubits building in the wall of the holy city from the Valley Gate to the Dung Gate, who, having acquired the grace of humility, devote themselves so industriously to the works of perfection that they cast out from themselves all rubble of not only harmful action or useless speech but even superfluous thought.

[Nehemiah 3:15] -- And Shallun built the gate of the fountain, etc. "Pagos" in Greek signifies a village in Latin. But writers tell that from that front of Mount Zion, which faces the eastern region with a steep rock, within the walls, and at the roots of the hill, the fountain of Siloam bursts forth; which indeed flows southward with alternating access of waters, that is, not with continuous waters, but it bubbles at uncertain [fixed] hours and days, and through the hollows of the earth and caves of very hard rock, it is accustomed to come with great noise, with which, namely, the city is said to use this one spring, and this not perpetual. Therefore, understand the gate of this fountain designated in this place, especially when it is openly added:

[Nehemiah 3:15] -- And the walls of the pool of Siloam in the garden of the king, etc. Therefore, Siloa, which is interpreted as the sent one, where the man born blind and was illuminated, signifies the Lord Savior, who was sent by God the Father for our enlightenment; whose source can most aptly be understood as the same Father, from whom He was born. Concerning which the Psalmist well says: For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we will see light (Psalm 35). And the Fountain Gate is built in Jerusalem when teachers are appointed in the Church, who preach to the people the faith of divine eternity. The walls of the pool of Siloam are also built when the very firm and invincible testimonies of the Scriptures, by which the mystery of the Lord's incarnation is designated, are rooted in the minds of the faithful. These walls of divine utterances reach the king's garden when, with the mysteries of the Lord's dispensation known, we begin to produce the sprouts of virtues with the help of the most high king, our Lord God. They also reach the steps that descend from the city of David when someone learns to advance from the general life of the faithful to heavenly things with spiritual desires. The steps that descend from the city of David to the lower part of the city of Jerusalem are indeed aids of divine inspiration or protection, by which we are gradually raised to reach the walls of the heavenly kingdom.

For David made steps by which we should ascend to his city when divine piety taught us the order of virtues by which we may seek heavenly things, and granted us the gift of performing those virtues. Concerning these steps, the Psalmist undoubtedly said: Blessed is the man whose help is from thee; in his heart he has arranged the ascents in the valley of tears,

in the place he has appointed, etc., until he says: They shall go from strength to strength; the God of gods shall be seen in Zion (Psalm 83). Therefore, the builders of the holy city reach these steps, after building the walls of the pool of Siloam and after the king's garden, when after manifesting the sacrament of the Lord's incarnation, by which the blindness of the gentiles from their birth was washed and illuminated, and after beginning through faith the sprouting of good deeds, the holy teachers more diligently show their listeners the progress of virtues over time; by which they ascend to the vision of their Creator, namely strong in hand and desirable, as David will call. The most reverend father, by name and life Benedict, rightly understood that these progressions consist mainly in humility, when interpreting the ladder of the patriarch Jacob, shown with angels ascending and descending on it, as designating our journey to heavenly things; he meticulously and piously distinguished the steps of that ladder by the increments and advancements of good deeds done through humility.

The city of David, according to the letter, is called Mount Zion, which, placed to the south, stands out as the fortress of the city, and the larger part of the city lies below the mountain, situated in the plain of a lower hill. Hence it is written in the book of Kings: David began to take the fortress of Zion, this is the city of David. And shortly after: David dwelt in the fortress, and called it the city of David (1 Kings 25).

[Nehemiah 3:16] -- After him Nehemiah built, etc. Note that King David is buried not in Bethlehem, as some assert, but in Jerusalem; and indeed not without a certain reason of mystery. For just as in Bethlehem he was born and anointed as a king, prefiguring that the Lord Christ would be born there from his seed and be adored by the Magi under the guise of a king; so also, having died and been buried in Jerusalem, he signified that the same Lord would suffer and be buried in that city, but would rise again from the grave. Therefore, after the gate of the fountain, and the walls of the pool of Siloam, which reach into the king's garden, and up to the steps that descend from the city of David, even up to the tomb of the same David the measure of the holy city extends; because he who preaches the faith of divine eternity, who declares the dispensation of the Lord's incarnation, who relates the fruitfulness of the Church adhering to Christ; of which he Himself says: A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse (Song of Solomon IV); he declares to the faithful listeners that not only do they need to imitate those steps of good deeds by which they ascend to the eternal homeland; but also they must always recall the sacrament of the Lord's Passion to their memory, that they may recognize that through Him who died and rose again for them, they too are to be raised from the region and shadow of death to life, and to ascend to the heavenly kingdom. It follows well, however:

[Nehemiah 3:16] -- And up to the pool, etc. The pool, indeed, constructed with great effort, can not be unreasonably understood as divine Scripture; which, created by the work of the Holy Spirit, provides for us a washing to cleanse sins, and at the same time offers a cup of salvific taste. Which if it has been transformed for us by the Lord into wine, that is, translated into a spiritual sense, it inebriates us with the more pleasant sweetness of truth.

Wherein also is the house of the strong; for whoever has been accustomed to be refreshed by the frequent streams of divine words by hearing and doing, they are rendered strong and invincible against all the snares of the ancient enemy. Therefore, after the tomb of David, in the holy city a pool constructed with great effort is placed, to which the house of the strong is adjacent; because through the passion of the Lord, the abyss of the Scriptures has been revealed to us, by whose abundance the hearts of the faithful are strengthened, and the city of Christ made impregnable to all enemies. For if the waters fail or are obtained by the enemy, the city is easily captured. And if the ancient enemy removes from us the fountain of the word of God, nothing prevents the fierce attacker and destroyer from immediately ascending the citadel of our mind.

[Nehemiah 3:17] -- After him, their brothers, the Levites, built, etc. Up to this point, the first wall of the city is constructed, from here the measure of the second, that is, the inner wall, which we mentioned above, begins. Hence, in this description, it is said that many of the builders built opposite their own house; for many houses of the city were either adjacent to or joined to the inner wall. Therefore, after the construction of the outer wall, the measure of the second wall follows also in our city, when, after the perfection of works and speech—which can appear to men—we strive more to please God in the inner parts of our mind, so that we may not presume to conceive anything in secret that would offend the eyes of the internal judge. And it is rightly said that the second measure is built against the ascent of the most solid corner; the most solid corner indeed is the Lord, who brought together the people of the Jews and the Gentiles in His faith and love; hence in the Psalm (Psalm 117) or Isaiah (Isaiah 28), He is called the cornerstone. Against the ascent of which corner the second measure is built, when through the purity of pious thought we strive to reach the vision of our Creator; even when held in this life, we frequently sigh with longing for His vision. From here follow many orders of builders who are said to have built the second measure, because the greatest structure of the holy Church is in the fortification of inner virtue, when we, of course, guard our heart with all vigilance, for from it springs life. To discuss these individually and to draw everything to spiritual understanding would be too lengthy.

[Nehemiah 3:26] -- The Nathinnei, however, dwelt in Ophel, etc. The Nathinnei are considered to be the Gibeonites, who served the house of the Lord with faithful devotion according to the arrangement of Joshua the son of Nun. Ophel, however, was a tower, not far from the temple, of enormous height. Hence, Ophel, that is, of darkness, or named after a cloud, because its head rose up to the clouds. Finally, where it is written in Micah: And the tower of the flock, the cloud of the daughter of Zion (Micah IV); in Hebrew, for the cloudy tower, it is written ”the tower Ophel. This tower is mentioned, and its part within the city is indicated in the book of Chronicles, referring to King Manasseh, which we also previously noted, that he built a wall outside the city of David to the west of Gihon in the valley, from the entrance of the fish gate around up to Ophel (II Chron. XXXIII). Therefore, according to the location, it was fitting that the temple servants lived in the nearby temple tower. However, according to the mystical sense as well, Nathinnei dwell in Ophel, that is, in the cloudy tower, when

those dedicated to God in the profession of a more perfect life, always live in the fortress and height of virtues and actions and thoughts. Saying with the Apostle, For our conversation is in heaven (Phil. III). Of whom the multitude of the people also testifies with admiration, saying: Who are these who fly like clouds? (Isa. LX).

Similarly, Nathinnei dwell in Ophel, when those distinguished in the garb of religion have learned to penetrate the hidden things of Scripture, about which it is said, Dark water in the clouds of the sky; that is, the mystical knowledge in the prophets with an illuminated heart, and to meditate on these readings day and night. Regarding their habitation, it is aptly added: Up to the water gate towards the east and the tower that projected. For the gate of waters is the Lord, who daily waters us with the grace of his mercy lest we fail in the troubles of the present life. The Psalmist desired to enter this gate, when he said: As the deer pants for the fountains of water, so my soul desires you, God (Psalm XLI). This gate is fittingly mentioned as positioned towards the east; because indeed the same Lord, who, by the torrent of his pleasure, drenches us lest we thirst, also illuminates us with the gift of his visitation, lest we dwell in the darkness of errors. Accordingly, Zechariah says: The dawn from on high has visited us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death (Luke I). He also defends us with the protection of his aid, lest we be touched by the enemy. Hence it aptly follows: And up to the tower that projected. Understanding this, the same Psalmist said: You led me, because you have been my hope, a tower of strength in the face of the enemy (Psalm LX).

Therefore, the Nathinnei dwell in Ophel, up to the water gate towards the east, and the tower that projected; when faithful persons dedicated to sacred readings rejoice in being drenched and illuminated by divine mercy and grace, and in always being protected from the enemy. And because after the present gifts of virtues one ascends to see the clarity of the dominical man, it is rightly added:

[Nehemiah 3:27] -- After them, the Tekoites repaired another section, etc. Indeed, the wall of the temple is the body of the Lord Savior, about which He Himself said to the Jews: ”Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2): which, of course, the temple of His body, His persecutors destroyed in death, but being raised up, and exalted to the heavens, His lovers saw in glory, and do not cease to see forever. Therefore, from the great and eminent tower, even to the wall of the temple, the structure of the holy city is reached, as every just person, from the height of contemplation, in which, with earthly temporals despised even in this life, they are elevated to aspire to celestial things, and in that life, with the brightness of the Lord’s incarnation revealed, they also ascend to the eternity of divine glory. And because Tekoa means trumpet or horn, the Tekoites are interpreted as trumpeters, it is aptly said that the Tekoites built these things; for it is the duty of teachers, whose sound has gone out to all the earth, to reveal either the present gifts of God, or the future in His city, that is, the people of the faithful.

[Nehemiah 3:28] -- Upwards to the Horse Gate they built, etc. Jeremiah mentions this gate and designates it to be on the eastern side of the city, writing typically about the holy

Church: And the city shall be built for the Lord from the tower of Hananeel (Jer. XXI). And a little later: Up to the brook Kidron, and unto the corner of the Horse Gate eastwards (Ibid.). Horses, when taken in a good sense, like donkeys, camels, and mules, sometimes signify the Gentile peoples converted to the Lord, and sometimes the cares of temporal matters rightly subjected to the Lord by the soul. The priests built the wall of God's city up to the Horse Gate, just as the holy teachers, after the calling of the Jewish people, continued spreading the word until they brought the Gentile peoples into the Holy Church. Equally, they build to the Horse Gate when they provide the example of a sufficient mode of living for those who enter the gates of the holy Church to restrain their carnal or mental desires; or certainly when they arrange their own thoughts, which they must have in dealing with their livelihood or habits, in such a way that they do not hinder the freedom of mind, with which they have always proposed to seek heavenly things. And it is aptly added about the laborers, "Everyone against his own house"; this phrase is often repeated in this construction of the holy city.

There is no need to labor in explaining how in the holy Church each one should build a wall of virtues against his own house and fortify his mind against the devil's snares; so that he who roams about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. V), cannot in any way break in, while each one fortifies his own body and mind with the strong faith in the Lord. But everyone also builds against his own house if he protects with diligent guard of regular discipline those who are committed to him, so that they cannot be deceived either by the incursion of vices or by heretical persuasion. It would take a long time to discuss in spiritual interpretation each of the buildings of the holy city or its builders; which, even without our speaking, the skilled reader can very easily recognize. This much, however, should be noted, that those who build the gates and towers, through which either citizens may enter or enemies be warded off, are the prophets, apostles, and evangelists; through whom the form and order of faith and right action have been provided to us, by which we ought to enter the unity of the holy Church; and by whose words we learn how to refute and repel the adversaries of truth. But those who build with other words are the pastors and teachers, whom the Apostle placed second, through whose diligence the Catholic faith, which was built by the great architects of the Church, is preserved throughout the world to this day.

And just as Nehemiah, enumerating the builders of the city in order, renders them perpetually memorable; so the Lord, the comforter of our poverty, inscribes the names in heaven of all who build up His Church among the elect. But let us consider the remaining matters as well.

Chapter 19

Sanballat and Tobiah mock the builders, but they are scorned; they wage wars, but they are repelled by prayers and arms. (Nehemiah IV.) [Nehemiah 4:1] -- Now it came to pass, when Sanballat heard, etc. Clearly, this is the anger of the heretics, these are their words, who vainly call themselves Samaritans, that is, guardians of God's law, when they are in fact greatly opposed to God and His laws, as they have long been separated from the house of David, that is, from the unity of Christ and the Church through heresies or schisms, or wicked deeds; who fear that their own impiety might be attacked and excluded, and therefore dread the building of the walls of faith. This is the derision of all who say they know God but deny Him by their deeds. For the Samaritans served the Lord in such a way that they did not renounce their ancient gods. Today, those who imitate them typologically are those who are Christians in such a way that they also consider their belly as their god, follow greed, which the Apostle clearly calls the service of idols; and being enslaved by the other allurements of the world, they serve the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. And therefore, such people, like the heretics, do not want the walls of the Church to be renewed, lest, as the state of piety grows, they are forced to abandon their impiety. Such people are accustomed to call the Jews weak, that is, confessors of the faith, and easily vanquished by the nations, while in the daily contest for souls they prefer to embrace vices rather than to obtain the palm of victory through virtue. And because there are some among the heretics who even deny forgiveness to those who repent after falling, it is rightly added in the person of these:

[Nehemiah 4:2] -- "Will the stones be rebuilt?" etc. For the stones were rebuilt, burnt from the heaps of dust, and were placed again in the work of the holy city, when those who had either denied the faith under the fire of persecutions or had lost the purity of conduct under the grips of vice, repented by the mercy of the Lord; so that they both recover the integrity of the catholic faith by steadfast profession, and obtain the ornaments of virtues by amended morals.

[Nehemiah 4:3] -- But also Tobias the Ammonite, his neighbor, said: Let them build, etc. And both the person and words of this Tobias agree with heretics. The person indeed, because his patriarch Ammon was conceived from incest and drunkenness, and at night and in a cave. All of which clearly can be easily applied to any heresiarch; whose entire origin is

from carnal pleasure and impurity, from the darkness of errors or crimes, from private gatherings, and not from the public symbol of the holy Church. Indeed, Tobias himself, meaning "good" of the Lord, said not by merit and truth, but by arrogance and pride, that the wall of the holy city could be leaped over by a fox; it is evident that heretics are called foxes. From which is that of the Song of Songs: Catch for us the little foxes that ruin the vineyards (Cant. II); which is to say quite clearly, Catch and bring to light the putrid and deceitful cunning of heretics, by which they strive to corrupt the fruitful minds of the faithful. Therefore, if, he says, a fox climbs up, it will leap over their stone wall. If against their faith's assertion any heretic arises, he immediately becomes proud and will subject all the confidence of their doctrine to his feet, which they boast is fortified like a stone and founded in Christ. But such blasphemers will come to what the sacred writer of this history, in imprecation, adds:

[Nehemiah 4:4] -- Hear, our God, for we have become an object of contempt, etc. Similar to that of the Psalmist about the enemies of the elect, speaking as if under the guise of one wicked person: His trouble will return on his own head, and his violence will descend on his own crown (Psalm VII). [Nehemiah 4:9] -- And we prayed to our God, etc. This is the only refuge against all the enemies of the Church, namely prayer to God, and the industry of teachers who meditating day and night on his law, fortify the hearts of the faithful against the snares of the devil and his soldiers by preaching, consoling, and exhorting them. [Nehemiah 4:10] -- But Judas said: The strength of the bearer is weakened, etc. Judas speaks of the tribe of Judah's sons. However, the question is about not being able to build the wall because an excessive amount of soil was piled up at the place of the wall, which first needed to be removed so that the foundations of the wall could be laid on solid ground. This relates to the parable of the evangelical house, whose builder dug deep; and with the accumulation of earth removed, he laid the foundation on rock that could not be toppled by any force of water or wind (Matthew VII; Luke VI). For first, the soil of earthly desires must be removed from our hearts, and then the firm and impregnable wall of good works must be built upon the foundation of faith; for whoever attempts to erect the edifice of holy action upon the soil and rubble of weak thoughts is deceived, and instead of a house or city, he will soon find, when the storm of temptation strikes, that he has built ruin.

[Nehemiah 4:11] -- And our enemies said: Let them not know and understand, etc. And this is always accustomed to be done in the spiritual building. For the tireless enemy remains with his satellites, namely unclean spirits and wicked men, who, caring less for the works of faith and virtues, strive to hinder and, as much as they can, always to attack, and they seek to kill the mind of the faithful with the sword of wicked suggestion. But we, according to the Apostle, must take up the armor of God against these, so that we may be able to resist on the evil day, and stand perfect in all things (Eph. VI). However, it is well said that he set up people with arms around the wall, so that the builders, surrounded by a line of armed men, might apply themselves to building the wall with a freer and more secure hand. For the degrees of the faithful are divided, and some adorn the Church with good works within; others, armed with the arms of sacred reading, watch over the Church against those heretics attacking it. These comfort their neighbors in the truth of the faith with devout religious

fervor, those exercise necessary combat against the darts of the devil or vices, by which they labor to attack the same faith, and repel the insidious wolves from the Lord's fold with pastoral care.

[Nehemiah 4:15] -- And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it had been made known to us, God had frustrated their plan, etc. And in the spiritual building, if we have always been clothed with apostolic arms, the plan of the devil and his angels, who desire to defeat us, will be frustrated.

Chapter 20

All the builders, armed and prepared for battle, were thus committed to the building of the walls.

[Nehemiah 4:18] -- And it happened from that day on, that half of the young men did the work, etc. It is to be noted that not only half of the young men did the work and the other half were prepared for war, but even those who did the work, the youths, were girded with swords. For so great is the cunning of the ancient enemy, so great is the fury of his militia fighting against the Church, that not only the preachers of truth, but also the people of God themselves must always be vigilant against his schemes and stand as if in battle array. Indeed, those who build gird their loins with swords when those who devote themselves to good works, who take care to arrange those entrusted to them in an orderly manner (that is, to place living stones in the building of the holy city fittingly), strive to restrain the flows of luxury in themselves by the keenness of the word of God. Nor should it be overlooked that when David or Solomon built that same city, nothing is reported about armed builders or adversaries attacking; but when the city was destroyed due to their sins, it was rebuilt with greater labor and industry, because such is the spiritual building that pertains to the salvation of souls, that in baptism, reborn through faith and the confession of the Holy Trinity, we become his city and house by the grace of God without any of our labor.

And if after the washing of the sacred font, we relapse into sins, seduced by the devil, and the enemy, victorious, destroys the walls of our virtues with the fire of vices, we must repair the buildings of good works we have lost with greater efforts of prayer, affliction, vigils, alms, and a stricter way of life. For it is more difficult for those who have experienced the allurements of vice to abstain from them than for those who are ignorant of them; and it is less laborious to beware of the unknown pleasure of the flesh than to reject the known one.

[Nehemiah 4:21] -- Let each one remain with his child, etc. Note how much effort they had in working, who also continued in labor at night. Thus the Apostle did, who worked night and day with his hands, so as not to burden any of the believers by seeking a livelihood (I Cor. IV). Unless perhaps they are to be believed to have succeeded each other in turns working, so that some worked by day on the wall, and others kept night watch against the attacks of enemies. For even the builders of our city do both at the same time. And those

same ones who build up the Church by instructing the faithful, also drive away unbelievers and contradictors by reproving them from injuring the Church.

Chapter 21

Upon the people being stirred into uproar due to hunger and scarcity, Nehemiah compels the nobles and magistrates not to demand interest from their brothers, but rather to provide money for them. (II. Esdras V.)

[Nehemiah 5:1] -- And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives, etc. Indeed, the people desired to build the city wall, but due to the great famine, they were hindered from the sacred work. This famine was caused not only by the shortage of crops but also by the greed of the rulers, who demanded greater tributes from the same people than they could pay, which we see happening in the same manner among us daily. For how many are there among the people of God who willingly desire to obey divine commands, but are prevented from fulfilling what they desire by the lack of temporal goods and poverty, and the examples of those who seem to be adorned with the appearance of religion, when they themselves, from those they appear to govern, demand an immense weight and tribute of secular goods, and contribute nothing to their eternal salvation, either by teaching, or providing examples of living, or by performing works of piety. And would that some Nehemiah in our days, that is, a comforter sent by the Lord, would restrain our errors, ignite our hearts towards divine love, turning our hands away from our own wills to build the city of Christ. But let us see according to the letter, for the outcry of the afflicted people was increased by a threefold distinction. Some, indeed, compelled by hunger, were arranging to sell their children for food to the wealthier; others, sparing their children, preferred to give their fields and homes for food; still others, preventing both the sale of their children and their fields, only persuaded this, that they should borrow money for the king's tribute, with their fields and vineyards given in pledge, until, with the return of abundance and crops, they could repay what they had borrowed to the moneylenders.

[Nehemiah 5:7] -- And he rebuked the nobles and magistrates, etc. As the best leader of the heavenly army, and a wise architect of the city of God, what he wanted the nobles and magistrates of the people to do, he first declared that he himself had done; namely, giving alms to the poor, and seeking nothing from them except the observance of the law of God and the edification of his city. In this reading, it is not appropriate for us to seek the sense through allegory, but rather to diligently observe the very text of the letter; that is to say, apart from the daily fruits of alms, we should be concerned, when a general time of famine

and poverty afflicts the people, to lend to the needy whatever we can, and also to remit the tributes which we used to demand from our subjects as if justly, to the extent that our Father may also forgive us our debts. A very terrible conclusion is imposed on this reading, when it is said:

[Nehemiah 5:13] -- Moreover, I shook out the fold of my garment, and said, etc. For whoever either refuses to give mercy to the poor, or does not blush to demand back what they do not have, as if justly, this person is shaken out of his house, namely, from the assembly of the holy Church, in which he believed he would remain forever, thrown out. He is also shaken out of his labors, that is, deprived of the fruit of the good works in which he thought he had laudably labored. For labors without pity cannot become fruitful before the Lord. How greatly this rebuke or imprecation of Nehemiah moved the hearts of all is clearly declared, when it is immediately added: [Nehemiah 5:13] -- And all the multitude said, Amen, etc. For when, having heard his testimony, all responded Amen, and praising God, they did what was commanded; it is evident, indeed, that they received his words not compelled by fear, but with the deep affection of their heart.

Chapter 22

Nehemiah explains how much piety he brought to the people by his own example. [Nehemiah 5:14] -- From the day on which he commanded me to be their leader, etc. Explaining this typologically, the Apostle says: “For the Lord has ordained that those who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel; but I have used none of these things” (I Cor. IX). Nehemiah, along with his brothers, lived in such a way for twelve years during his leadership that they did not consume the provisions owed to the leaders, thereby mystically indicating that it is an apostolic work when someone promoted to the governance of the people of God nobly exercises the work of leadership by building up the Church, but does not seek material gain from those he governs by preaching and living well.

Chapter 23

Sanaballat and his associates attempt to pull Nehemiah away from the building of the wall by hiring domestic intrigues against him; but, having discovered these, the wall of the city is completed to perfection. (Nehemiah VI.) [Nehemiah 6:1] -- Now it happened that when Sanaballat and Tobiah heard, etc. The enemies of the holy city urge Nehemiah to descend to the plains and enter into a covenant of peace with them, with calves slain together as a testimony of the contracted covenant. However, he, to avoid neglecting the religious work, perseveres in the mountains. Similarly, heretics and false Catholics seek to have the companionship of peace with true Catholics on the condition that the true Catholics do not consent to ascend to the stronghold of ecclesiastical faith or operation, but rather force those who dwell in the heights of virtues to descend from the depths of wicked works or doctrines. And it is well that they wish to make a pact with Nehemiah in one field; because undoubtedly they desire to release all those whom they can seduce into the same liberty of a more luxurious life, which they themselves follow. It is fitting that they wish to make the same pact with him with calves slain together because false brothers eagerly offer sacrifices of their prayer or action with true Catholics to God so that, being truly believed as faithful themselves, they can corrupt the same true Catholics through the proximity of communion. However, Nehemiah representing the role of faithful teachers, senses neither to descend to the profane nor to be tainted by their sacrifices, but devoutly persists in the conceived works of virtues; and the more ferociously the enemies tried to frighten him, the more he strives to become formidable to the same enemies by doing good works. Hence it is also said in the following.

[Nehemiah 6:9] -- But all these terrify us, etc. Therefore, in the spiritual structure, because the cunning enemy always tries to hinder our hands, let us always strive to strengthen them in good action with divine help. [Nehemiah 6:10] -- And I entered the house of Shemaiah, etc. Assaulted by the treacheries of enemies, Nehemiah entered the house of Shemaiah as though of a friend and brother; but he also found him to be a traitor and enemy, since he had been corrupted by the gifts and friendship of outsiders; for the chosen always have battles without, fears within; not only apostles, but also prophets, lived lives beset by dangers from their kind, dangers from their demands, dangers from false brothers.

[Nehemiah 6:15] -- Now the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, etc. The month Elul, according to the Hebrews, is the sixth month of the year, which the Romans call September. And rightly is the wall of the holy city completed in the sixth month of the year, so that the perfect action of the faithful, whether penitents or innocents, is also designated in this ultimate time. For the number six usually signifies the perfection of good works; either because the Lord completed the creation of the world on the sixth day, and on the seventh He rested; or because we are to labor in good works in the six ages of this present world, and to hope for the Sabbath of souls in the seventh age, which is in the life to come. Rightly is it completed on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, on account of the five senses of the body, by the ministry of which good works are to be performed externally. For as the simple number five usually signifies these senses, so when it is multiplied by itself and brought to twenty-five, it demonstrates these same senses with greater perfection. Thus we complete the wall of Jerusalem on the twenty-fifth day of the sixth month, when diligently consecrating all the senses of our body to divine services, we bring the endeavors of virtues begun to a firm end, and faithfully complete with the help of the Lord what we have begun to do for the strengthening of Catholic peace.

This wall is also rightly said to have been completed in fifty-two days; for the fiftieth psalm is the psalm of penitence and forgiveness, in which also the Prophet specifically prays about the building of this city, saying: ”Deal favorably, O Lord, in Thy good will with Zion, that the walls of Jerusalem may be built” (Psalm 51). On the fiftieth day of the Lord’s resurrection, the Holy Spirit came to the primitive Church, through whom the devotion of repentance is infused in us, and the gift of pardon is granted to penitents. Moreover, there are two precepts of charity, namely the love of God and the love of neighbor, through which, granted to us by the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins is given, and we are commanded to labor for the attainment of eternal life. Therefore, most fittingly, the citizens rebuilding the wall of the holy city, which had been destroyed by enemies, restore it in fifty-two days, because this indeed is the perfection of the just in this life, that through the grace of divine inspiration, they punish whatever they have sinned by repenting, and henceforth adorn themselves with good works in the love of God and neighbor.

Chapter 24

The gentiles are terrified by the deeds of the city of Jerusalem; and Nehemiah lists the singers and assigns guards to the gates. [Nehemiah 6:16] -- It happened... that all the nations feared, etc. Those who previously sought to terrify the builders of the holy city, to delay them from working, now fear themselves with the construction of the same city completed, and they are disheartened, recognizing that this building was begun and completed by the authoring of God. Thus also in the holy Church, when a firm structure of charity, continence, peace, and other virtues has risen, the unclean spirits fear, and the temptation of their strength is repelled by our forces, and rather promotes our victory. This can also be received concerning heretics as well as false Catholics; who, by the constant faith of the good working through love, either are corrected and amended, or being exposed are guarded against and expelled from the boundaries of the Church.

[Nehemiah 7:1] -- But after the wall was built, etc. And in a spiritual sense, wherever the wall of the Church may be built, gathering new peoples to the faith, or correcting those who have strayed, immediately the gates of regular discipline should be set up, so that the ancient enemy, who goes about like a roaring lion (I Peter V), may not anywhere break into the fold of the faithful. The gatekeepers, singers, and Levites must be reviewed, who guard the same gates; it is clear that the role of these pertains to all holy teachers. For gatekeepers are those who have received the keys of the kingdom of heaven, so that they may admit the worthy and humble, but keep out the proud and impure from entering the heavenly city, saying: 'You have no part or share in this matter; for your heart is not right before God' (Acts VIII). Singers are those who proclaim with a devout voice the sweetness of the same heavenly homeland to their listeners. Levites are those who always watch over the service of divine worship. Nehemiah commanded that the gates of Jerusalem not be opened until the heat of the sun, that is, throughout the entire night, so that neither the enemy covered by darkness might break in, nor any incautious citizen going out be captured and perish by the enemy.

Which also the guardians of souls ought to diligently do throughout the whole night of this age, lest, neglecting the observance of a pious conversation, the devil either enter to disturb the company of the faithful or seize and destroy any of their number among the faithful. However, when the Sun of righteousness appears and the light of future blessedness shines

forth, there will no longer be need for the cloisters of continence; for the adversaries will no longer be given the power to attack or tempt the faithful, since they and their prince will be condemned to eternal retribution. Wherefore John in his Apocalypse says of the future glory of the same holy city: 'And its gates will never be shut by day, for there will be no night there' (Rev. XXI)."

[Nehemiah 7:3] -- And I appointed watchmen from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, etc. The watchmen of souls are not from the neophytes, nor from the common crowd, but they are to be established from those who, having been liberated by the grace of God from the struggle with vices, have accustomed their minds to Jerusalem, that is, to the vision of tranquil peace, who can say with the Apostle: "But our conversation is in heaven" (Philippians 3). Of whom it is well said that He has appointed each in his own turn; so that, after completing their course, being withdrawn from this light, others immediately are preferred in their place for the governance of the faithful. Nor at any time are there lacking those who strive to keep vigil for the peace of the holy Church on account of night terrors, while the truth of the prophetic word always runs to the end of the age, in which it is said to the same Church: "Instead of your fathers, sons are born to you" (Psalm 45). It is also well added, "And each against his own house." For in this way the guardianship of the holy Church is rightly perfected, if each one carries the concern of all the faithful in such a way that he is especially placed over them, to whom, by the authority of God, he devotes more diligent care.

Chapter 25

Nehemiah, in order to find worthy inhabitants for the city, reviewed the book of the census of those who first ascended from Babylon to Judea. [Nehemiah 7:5] -- The city, however, was very wide and large, etc. These things suit that time typically. When the word of God, sown far and wide by the apostles, the whole world received the new seed of faith, and the Church buildings not yet constructed, but only by hearing and the sacraments of the word, the people were still being trained while still unpolished. [Nehemiah 7:5] -- Moreover, God put it into my heart, etc. Therefore, having convened not only the nobles and magistrates but also all the common people, he carefully took care to review their number so that he could discern the complete total of all, who should inhabit the city of Jerusalem itself, and who indeed should dwell in other cities.

Chapter 26

In the seventh month, the people are gathered in Jerusalem, and Ezra reading the law of Moses, they attentively listen. (Nehemiah VIII.)

[Nehemiah 8:2] -- And the seventh month came, etc. When Nehemiah sought to provide and arrange who should dwell in the city they had built, the seventh month arrived; for they were far away. For since the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the sixth month, no more than five days remained until the beginning of the seventh month. This seventh month, from its first day to the twenty-second, was entirely consecrated to legitimate ceremonies; and after these were duly celebrated, he returned with the leaders and the people to arrange the residents of the built city. Here, the devotion and concord of the people are to be noted, who, as if one man, that is, with one and the same faith and love, gathered at the temple of the Lord; and they asked their priest to bring the book and repeat the commands of the law they should follow, so that with the city built, the structure of work pleasing to God might also rise, lest, as before, due to the negligence of religion, the ruin of the city should follow. And it was well that in the sixth month the city was built, and in the seventh, the people were gathered into it to listen to the law; indeed, the sixth day is for working in the law, the seventh is for resting.

And this is our most beloved and acceptable rest to the Lord after our good work, that abstaining from servile work, that is, sin, we may more diligently give attention to hearing and fulfilling His commands. Hence, at the beginning of the same seventh month, the solemnity of the trumpets was appointed, by the sound of which the people, amidst prayers and sacrifices, might be more fervently awakened to the memory of the divine law. And now too, by spiritual understanding, after the holy city is built, the divine reading must follow, and the trumpets sound more frequently; for indeed, it is necessary that the people initiated in the heavenly sacraments, also from time to time, be more diligently instructed by sacred speeches on how they ought to live. But when it is said the people are gathered at the square before the Water Gate; I think the Water Gate refers to the court of the priests, by which the temple was surrounded on every side by a quadrangle, most especially on the eastern side of the temple, where the bronze sea was for washing the hands and feet of those entering the temple, and where the ten bronze lavers for washing sacrifices were; where also the altar of burnt offering was, between which and the temple Zacharias, the son of Barachias, was

stoned (Matthew XXIII). However, the people did not have the permission to enter within this gate of the court, but only the priests, the ministers of the Lord.

The people, however, stood outside this gate, and mostly in the square which was on its eastern side, to listen to the word or to pray. Therefore, the people were rightly gathered before the Water Gate, who by their priest were to be spiritually watered with the flowing Scriptures.

[Nehemiah 8:4] -- Ezra the scribe stood upon a wooden platform, etc. This place seems to be remembered in the Scripture of Chronicles, where it is said: Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord, facing the multitude of Israel, and stretched out his hands. For Solomon had made a bronze platform and had placed it in the middle of the basilica, measuring five cubits in length, five cubits in width, and three cubits in height, and he stood upon it (II Chronicles VI). Indeed, in the middle of the basilica, in the middle of the priests' courtyard, where the main basilica was surrounded on all sides by the outer courtyards of the temple. About these it is also written earlier in the same book: He also made the courtyard of the priests and a great basilica (II Chronicles IV). However, Solomon, as a king, made a bronze platform; while Ezra, as of lesser authority, set up a wooden platform to speak from, much like Solomon or Moses made a bronze altar for holocausts, for which the sons of the captivity replaced with stone. But it should not be thought that a wooden platform has a lesser degree of perfection than a bronze base. For it has often been said, as bronze endures through the passage of time or through the sweetness of sound, divine sacraments never fail through the passage of ages, and their sound goes out into all the earth;

thus also wood is very fittingly appropriate for them, especially on account of the trophy of the Lord's passion. Therefore, the high priest stands above the entire people when he who takes the position of a teacher, by the merit of a more perfect life, surpasses the actions of the crowd. He stands on a wooden platform made to speak from, when by the singular imitation of the Lord's passion, he makes himself loftier than the others. Hence, he worthily gained the confidence to freely preach the word of God. For he who scorns to imitate the Lord's passion according to his own measure has not yet ascended the wooden platform from which he can stand above the weak. Therefore, such a scribe must either tremble or blush to preach the commandments of God, fearing or being ashamed to propose for others to do what he himself has not done. Hence it aptly follows in the subsequent paragraphs:

[Nehemiah 8:5] -- The people stood in their place. For when leaders strive as much to excel their subjects in good works as they do in honor, then these same subjects, incited by their good examples, already follow the course of their own lives devotedly; admonished by their pious exhortations, they delight in frequently shedding tears for their admitted errors, or even for the desires of the heavenly homeland. Hence it is fittingly added here: [Nehemiah 8:9] -- "But all the people wept when they heard the words of the law." For the same holy teachers, who stir the minds of their hearers to tears with sacred readings and devout exhortations, also console those tears by promising them the eternal joys to come. Rightly it is added:

[Nehemiah 8:10] -- ”And he said to them: Go, eat rich foods, etc.” For the day of the Lord is holy to us when we strive to hear and fulfill his words. On which day, although suffering external tribulations, we ought to be rejoicing in hope, according to the Apostle’s saying: ”As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6). On this day we are also commanded to eat rich foods and drink sweet wine; that is, to rejoice in the abundance of good action divinely bestowed upon us and in the sweetness of hearing the word of God. For sweet wine is wine sweetened with honey, hence it is called Oinomeli in Greek. But we are also instructed to send portions to those who have not prepared themselves, from these same most wholesome mental feasts, so that we may also strengthen the consciences of our weaker neighbors either by the example of pious action or by the sweetness of devout exhortation, so that their souls, according to the Psalmist, may be filled as with marrow and fatness from the abundance of heavenly generosity, and with joyful lips may praise the name of the Lord (Psalm 62). We ought to imitate this literally as well; so that, on feast days, after prayer, readings, and the completion of the singing of psalms, when we plan to care for the refreshment of the flesh, we also remember to give a portion to the poor and to strangers.

Chapter 27

They celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, with Ezra reading the law of God to them every day.

[Nehemiah 8:14] -- And they found written in the law that the Lord commanded, etc. These things are more fully written in Leviticus, and that they were ordered to be remembered for that long journey during which the Lord, bringing His people out of Egypt, made them dwell in tabernacles in the desert for forty years, daily teaching them the precepts of His law through Moses (Leviticus 23). The erection of tabernacles was commanded, which in Greek is called Scenopegia, for seven days every year, that is, from the fifteenth day of the same seventh month to the twenty-second. The sacrament of this observance must be diligently examined by us with spiritual inquiry, especially since the Lord deigned to be present at this feast in the Gospel (John 7) and dedicated it with His sacrosanct words while addressing the gathered people. Therefore, our fathers were also freed from Egyptian servitude by the blood of the Lamb, and led through the desert for forty years to reach the promised land, just as through the Lord's passion, the world was freed from servitude to the devil, and the early Church was gathered by the apostles, which, as if led through a desert for forty years, was brought to the promised heavenly country. Imitating the forty-day fast, which Moses, Elijah, and the Lord Himself completed, it used to lead a life in great continence, always thirsting for the eternal homeland; and fully separated from all the allurements of this world, it conducted a nearly secluded life in daily meditation on the divine law.

For remembrance of this, at the same time, we must also dwell in tabernacles, leaving our dwellings, that is, abandoning secular delights, confessing that we are pilgrims in this life and that our homeland is in heaven; and to desire to reach it sooner. And this on the solemn day in the seventh month, that is, in the light of heavenly joy, when our heart is filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, which the prophet praised as sevenfold. In these tabernacles, indeed, we are commanded to stay for seven days; for throughout the duration of our lives, which revolves through so many days, we must keep in mind that we are sojourners with God on earth and strangers like all our fathers.

[Nehemiah 8:15] -- Go forth, he says, to the mountain, etc. And let us also go forth from a dwelling of general thoughts, to the height of the holy Scriptures to be frequently meditated upon; and let us bring from there, as if olive branches, the fruits of mercy, with which by

refreshing the poor, we may simultaneously shade ourselves from the heat of tempting vices; and branches of the most beautiful wood, which the Jews call cedar, indeed, the fruits of charity, which is amongst all virtues the most beautiful and illustrious, through which our Lord ascended the wood of the cross for our salvation. As we imitate His passion to the extent that it is possible, we are certainly protected by the branches of the most beautiful wood. Let us also bring branches of myrtle, in the mortification of desires and all vices. For even the magi, offering myrrh to the Lord, taught typologically that those who belong to Jesus Christ ought to crucify their flesh with its vices and lusts. Likewise, whoever can say: 'For we are the good fragrance of Christ to God, in every place' (II Cor. II), brings myrtle branches to make a shelter for themselves. Let us also bring palm branches, the ornament of the victorious hand, so that we may always carry a mind victorious over gluttony, wrath, greed, and other vices, and always strive to be stronger than all enemies; so that in the future we may be worthy to be consorts of those about whom John speaks in his Apocalypse: 'They stood before the throne in the presence of the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and with palms in their hands' (Rev. VII). Also, branches of woody trees, that is, the adornments of other virtues; with all these we make mystic tabernacles for ourselves, as by being delighted with good works, we draw our entire mind away from worldly enticements.

[Nehemiah 8:17] -- And the people went out, and brought back, etc. On the house-top, he says, on the roof of the houses. For in Palestine they do not have gabled roofs on the houses, but the tops of all the houses are flat, with beams and boards laid over them. Hence, in the law, it is commanded that when someone builds a new house, they shall make a parapet around the roof, so that no one may fall from it and incur the danger of death (Deut. XXII). In the same way, each of us goes out and makes tabernacles on the house-top, that is, on the roof of his house, when, transcending the dwelling of his flesh with his mind, he diligently tramples upon its harmful desires with meditations of heavenly light and freedom. This same thing we do in our courtyards when, with our mind burning towards heavenly things, we stand as if outside the world, whose dwelling we desire to leave behind more swiftly. We also do this in the courtyards of the house of God, when, even if it is not yet permitted to enter the hall of the heavenly dwelling, we place all the memory and residence of our thoughts in its vicinity. We also do this in the street of the water gate, when, with our heart expanded on the path of God's commandments, just as the servant desires at the fountains of water, so our soul desires the living God (Psalm XLI). We also do this in the street of the Ephraim gate, that is, of the fruitful or growing, when in the same ample freedom of heart we advance in such a way that the gate of righteousness is opened to us by the Lord, and we may always grow in Him for salvation, and may merit to abound in greater fruits of good action day by day.

[Nehemiah 8:18] -- He read from the book of the law of God, etc. As far as the meaning of the text goes, the Feast of Tabernacles was typically celebrated for seven days, that is, from the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the moon, up to the twenty-first. Then on the eighth day, that is, the twenty-second of the month, a gathering of the people took place once more, marked by a greater festivity. For it is written in Leviticus: On the fifteenth day

of the seventh month, when you have gathered all the fruits of your land, you shall celebrate the Lord's feast for seven days. The first day and the eighth day shall be a Sabbath, that is, a rest. And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, etc. (Leviticus 23). So Ezra read to the people in the book of the law of God during the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles; because this truly is our genuine solemnity of mind in this life, that through each day, that is, through all the good works by which we are enlightened by the Lord, we may devote our attentive hearts to reading, hearing, and doing His words. This solemnity begins on the fifteenth day of the month, when the moon is at its fullest at night, whereupon all the shadows of our mind are resolved by the most brilliant light of Christ. And it follows with the eighth day of the Sabbath, that is, of rest, obviously at the time of the resurrection in the future life; the joys of which we are uplifted by hope for now, and then we will fully enjoy in reality, when that most longed-for gathering—the entire assembly of saints, both angels and men—rejoices together in the presence of their Creator, never to be separated.

Chapter 28

After the completion of the Feast of Tabernacles, they convene again to confess, read, and pray to the Lord. (Nehemiah 9.) [Nehemiah 9:1] -- The children of Israel assembled in fasting and sackcloth, etc. The devotion of the people corrected after captivity is noteworthy, for once the solemnity mandated by the law of the Lord was duly completed, and after just one day of interval, they themselves willingly gathered in fasting and penance, diligently carrying out what they had heard during the days of holy readings and rejoicing, by separating themselves both in mind and body from the company of those who were proved to be estranged from the Lord and His worship, lest through the association and examples of the wicked they should again fall into the evils of captivity and distress; evils which they scarcely perceived themselves to have escaped even after long periods or centuries. And what might we mystically take from these things for ourselves, except that following such examples, whatever we have understood should be done in the public assembly or audience, we should again discuss mutually among ourselves, and diligently seek by thorough inquiry how we might be able to fulfill each of these with the correction of our hearts and bodies. The great diligence of their more correct life is evident as it is stated:

[Nehemiah 9:3] -- ”And they rose to stand, and read, etc.” For who would not marvel that the people had such an extraordinary care for piety, that four times a day, that is, at dawn, the third hour, the sixth, and the ninth, at times when they were to be dedicated to prayer or psalmody, they would commit themselves to hearing the divine law, so that with their minds renewed in God, they might return purer and more devout to implore His mercy; and also at night, four times, shaking off the lethargy of sleep, they would rise to confess their sins and seek forgiveness. I believe it is by this example that the custom has grown in the Church, that at every hour of the daytime psalmody a reading from either the Old or New Testament is said from memory before all the listeners; and thus strengthened by the apostolic or prophetic words, they bend their knees in prayer immediately. And also at night, when they cease from their labors, their ears are directed to the listening of divine readings.

Chapter 29

The prayer or confession of Ezra, in which he entreats the Lord to remember the covenant that He made with their fathers. [Nehemiah 9:6] -- And Ezra said: You alone, Lord, etc. What was previously stated, Because they confessed their sins and the sins of their fathers; is shown in more detail with Ezra beseeching how it was done. Moreover, in the conclusion he says, Therefore over all these, we ourselves make and write a covenant; and our princes, our Levites, and our priests sign; and so forth. It is more clearly shown how, with great grace of devotion, all their persons made a new assembly after the Feast of Booths, so that they might unite themselves with the divine covenant, having been thoroughly cleansed from the contamination of sins, and confirm the condition of the holy covenant both by word and by writing. As if separated from the company of the impious, they might more securely fulfill the work which they had long ago begun; that is, they would appoint suitable citizens of the reestablished city from the number of the pious.

Chapter 30

The leaders together with the people make a covenant, and write it to keep all the commandments of the Lord, and to aid the ceremonies of His house. (II Esdras X.) [Nehemiah 10:1] -- But the signatories were Nehemiah the Tirshatha, etc. Another translation has, Nehemiah, who is the Tirshatha; for Nehemiah had two names. Hence it is uniquely added, the son of Hacaliah; which is more clearly indicated above, where it is said: But Nehemiah said, he is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the scribe, and the Levites interpreting to all the people, This day is holy to the Lord our God (Neh. VIII). [Nehemiah 10:31] -- The peoples of the land, who bring goods for sale, etc. And for us, the Sabbath is always to be kept spiritually, always to abstain from servile work, that is, from sin, always to be free and to see that the Lord himself is God, so that after such a Sabbath, freed from the sins of conscience, we may reach the Sabbath of future glory in the heavens. But the peoples of the land seek to profane our Sabbath by bringing goods for sale to us on the sanctified day; because unclean spirits strive to defile the purity of our hearts, and by the price of our consent, to introduce the temptations of vices to us, so that they may pollute the day of the greatest sanctification; that is, to obscure the light of our pious thought or action with errors that are introduced. But we should avoid such a market, having enclosed ourselves within the walls of our city, which is the custody of a more perfect life.

[Nehemiah 10:32] -- And we shall set upon us the precepts, etc. All these things contained in this chapter pertain to the care of the house of the Lord and its ministers and ministries. And the best order of religious conversation, to be spiritually imitated now for us too, is that first the children of the transmigration chastise themselves from the defilements of the nations; then, by the observance of the Sabbath, which stood out among the foremost commandments of the law, they are sanctified; and thus henceforth they turn all care of acting to the service of divine worship. For first it is necessary for us to be cleansed from evils, and thus to be adorned with good acts. However, it is long enough to discuss each of these allegorically, in what order we should spiritually act towards the worship of the Lord, and this more so in the very volume of the law.

The leaders from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi live in Jerusalem, along with a tenth part of the remaining people.

[Nehemiah 11:1] -- Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem. etc. The arrangement that had been begun right after the rebuilding of the city is now complete; but up to this time, it could not be finished before the numbering of the people and the completion of the solemnities of the seventh month, so that it might be determined who should live in the holy city itself and who in the other towns. It is fitting regarding the figures of the sacraments that the leaders of the people are said to have lived in Jerusalem. For it is proper that the prelates of the holy Church should surpass the people as much in the merits of their life as they surpass them in the height of their power. Indeed, the other cities of Israel signify the devout conversation of God's people. But the habitation of the people of Jerusalem especially represents the deeds of those who, having overcome the struggle against vices, approach the vision of supreme peace with a free mind, according to that verse of the Psalmist: "The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob" (Psalm 87). Hence, subsequently, a tenth part of the people was chosen by lot to receive habitation in Jerusalem, while the other nine parts resided in their own towns;

because it is indeed the privilege of the perfect—those who fully keep the precepts of the Decalogue in the love of God and neighbor—to approach the heavenly secrets with their minds and to imitate, if I may say so, the peace of supreme blessedness amid the turmoil of a fleeting life. Although the gate to eternal life is open to those who keep God's general commandments, as the Lord declares to the rich man who questioned Him in the Gospel. Such people dwell, as it were, in the cities given to them by the Lord, because they vigilantly guard themselves against the snares of the ancient enemy by adhering to the divine law. But those who wish to be perfect, having sold all that they have and distributed it to the poor, and thus follow the Lord, these dwell, as it were, in the citadel of Jerusalem, close to the temple of God and the ark of the covenant, because they approach more intimately the grace of their Creator. It is well said that their habitation in the holy city was not due to human choice, but by the casting of lots, just as the possession of other cities was given by lot to the children of Israel in the time of Joshua; because indeed both small and great blessings are received not by the freedom or effort of one's own will but by the gift of the hidden Judge and Giver.

[Nehemiah 11:2] -- The people blessed all the men, etc. And we must make the exalted life of the elect, which we cannot follow by imitation, our own by rejoicing and venerating it. It should be noted, according to the faith of sacred History, that those who are said to have dwelled in Jerusalem were none other than from the tribe of Judah and Benjamin, and the Levites. For it clearly follows: [Nehemiah 11:3] -- Each one dwelt in his own possession, etc. By these words, it is plainly taught that all of Israel, that is, the ten tribes, lived in their cities, in which even the priests and Levites held their portion decreed by law. However, from the tribe of Judah and Benjamin, whoever was chosen by lot dwelled in Jerusalem; along with those from the priestly and Levitical tribes. For the tribe of Benjamin had been dwelling there from ancient times, as that city had fallen to them by lot. The tribe of Judah entered there in the times of David, when he made it the metropolis of the entire Israelite kingdom. The tribe of Levi was added when the ark of the covenant was brought there, and

the altar and temple of God were built. For, see the following passages of this book and you will find that inhabitants of Jerusalem are counted only from these three tribes, and their total is carefully tallied; once their catalog is completed, Scripture still goes on to add in which cities the rest of these tribes lived. For it follows:

[Nehemiah 11:25] -- Of the sons of Judah, they dwelled in Kiriath-arba, etc. For Beer-sheba was the boundary of Judah to the south, and the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom to the north next to Jerusalem to the east. Then the cities of the sons of Benjamin are recounted in a similar order. After listing these, it is added: [Nehemiah 11:36] -- And concerning the Levites, portions of Judah and Benjamin, it indicates that the Levites received their share in the possession of the children of Judah and Benjamin according to the decree of the law. Let these few words be said about the history. Concerning all these things, if we also wish to hear an allegorical sense that fits our actions, Judah is interpreted as confessing, Benjamin as the son of the right hand, Levi as taken up. Tribes of all these partly live in Jerusalem, and partly in subordinate cities given to them by God, because the gains of the faithful are many and diverse, for which there are also many mansions in the house of the Father in the heavens, as we taught above. Some are content to keep the general commandments of God: not to kill, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to bear false witness against their neighbor; to honor father and mother, and to love neighbors as themselves. Others try to take a stricter way of a perfect life, yet all praise and confess the grace of their Creator according to their calling and are children of the eternal kingdom, which is at His right hand; and they are taken up by Him into life, when the time of that judgment comes, in which two will be in the field, one will be taken, two women grinding at the mill, one will be taken, and one left (Matthew XXIV).

[Nehemiah 12:1] -- These are the priests and Levites, etc. Here the chief priests are described together with their brothers, that is the lesser priests, and the Levites, those who went up from the captivity of Babylon with Zerubbabel and Joshua the son of Jozadak. After explaining these, those who succeeded each other in the chief priesthood from that time up to the beginning of the kingdom of the Macedonians are also included. For it follows:

Chapter 32

The progeny of Joshua the high priest, and those who were leaders of the priests and Levites at that time, is expounded. [Nehemiah 12:10] -- Now Joshua begot Joakim, etc. Finally, Jeddua, who is placed last among these, Josephus writes (Antiquities II, 8) was the high priest in the times of Alexander the Great, and humbly and honorably received by him when he met him with his brothers. Indeed, he names him Jaddus, and says that he was the father of Onias the high priest, of whom it is written in the book of the Maccabees; not that Nehemiah, the author of this book, could have lived in the flesh until those times, but because he knew his infancy, who yet could have reached the grade of priesthood after a long time following his death. For at the end of this little book, there is also mention of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliasib, that one of them was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite, although the name of this son-in-law is indeed omitted. But because Joiada is the same grandfather of Jeddua, it is clear that the son-in-law spoken of is either the actual father of this Jeddua, or his uncle; therefore, he could have been born while Nehemiah was still alive.

[Nehemiah 12:12] -- In the days of Joachim there were priests, etc. However, after providing the succession of chief priests, a catalogue of the lesser priests and Levites who existed during their times is also added, so that we might know that, when the number of citizens in Jerusalem increased abundantly, the group of priests and Levites was also distinguished and noble, sufficient for the ministries of the temple and altar, for confessing and praising God, for the guardianship of the same temple and city, and for instructing the people. Nor was it done without the understanding of a holier mystery, that the rebuilt city of Jerusalem deserved such a great number of citizens in every rank and order, as it is never read to have lost so many even while the enemy was pressing and destroying. For just so, the holy Church often received greater increases from its losses, when many, frightened by the example of one who lapsed into sin through negligence, became more cautious about persevering in the chastity of faith. Often the very ones who sinned, after performing penance, began to bear greater fruits of good works than those they were accustomed to bear before the incursion of sin. Often the Church, devastated by heretics, after receiving the light of truth through the diligence of Catholic doctors, generated more children of the same truth, recovering many to know and defend reason.

For blessed Fathers Athanasius, Ambrose, Hilary, Augustine, and others like them would never have composed so many and such magnificent treatises on the holy Scripture if not for the multifarious errors of heretics against the correct faith. But while the heretics were trying to support their lies with testimonies of Scriptures, they were forced contrariwise to refute them with the authority of the same Scriptures and to explain how their statements should rightly be understood. Reading these writings today, we receive them as more vigilant guards at the gates and entrances of the holy city and temple, and as more copious ministers for the office of the altar and the sacrifices of the Lord; for through their words we are instructed to more intently serve under the divine gaze of majesty, in the custody of faith, and in good action. This can also mystically be understood of the persecution by the pagans, by which the holy Church was very frequently shaken; it seemed indeed to be completely destroyed on the occasion of the martyrs, but it was better constructed as they were crowned in secret. With their miracles shining forth after their deaths, a greater people flocked to the confession of faith, until the very pinnacle of worldly power consented to submit its neck to the sweetest yoke of Christ, so that the state of the holy city, which is the Church of Christ, long attacked by unbelieving kings, was again helped and propagated by the efforts of believing kings and princes of the age;

just as the city of Jerusalem was indeed overthrown by the kings of the Chaldeans, who are interpreted as fierce or like demons, but was restored and exalted with the due honor by the kings of the Persians, who are said to be interpreted as tempted, through friendly provision.

Chapter 33

The city of Jerusalem is dedicated with solemn joy, and guardians are appointed over the treasury houses for the offerings of the saints. [Nehemiah 12:27] -- At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, etc. The city had already been built for some time, but it was not fitting to dedicate it until inhabitants were gathered, appropriate ministers for the temple were assigned, and guards were appointed for the gates and vestibules. Once the holy city is established, it is dedicated when, at the end of the age, the number of the elect is completed and the Universal Church is brought into heaven to behold its Creator. Whenever we are uplifted in this life with the desires for that life, we rejoice as if at the dedication of our figurative city. Thus, this same dedication can be understood in two ways signification-wise: at one time, in the hope of those desiring and purifying the eyes of their heart, by which they may be able to see God; and then in the actual enjoyment of the divine vision by blessed people in spiritual bodies among the angelic host of spirits.

[Nehemiah 12:27] -- They sought out the Levites from all their dwellings, etc. Spiritual Levites, that is, those chosen for the lot of the kingdom, are also sought from all their places, when the Son of Man shall send His angels, and gather His elect from the four winds, from the highest part of the earth to the highest part of the heavens. And they make dedication with joy, song, thanksgiving; and with various musical instruments, for in the perception of eternal life they will rejoice together, giving thanks to Him by whose gift they have deserved to enter that city. Moreover, cymbals, psalteries, and lyres can be understood as the bodies of the saints, now immortal, rendering the sweetest sounds of their praise to the Lord. But in the present life, the Levites are gathered in Jerusalem when the faithful, inflamed by the memory of supernal peace, place their whole mind's delight in it, and of that eternal inheritance in the heavens which they hope to receive; and if they cannot yet see it, at least they rejoice in the hope, according to the words of the Psalmist: Rejoice, you just, in the Lord, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness (Ps. XCVI). For they make dedication in song and thanksgiving, receiving with a mind rejoicing in the Lord whatever occurs in the world, whether adversity or prosperity. They also make it in cymbals, psalteries, and lyres, when they cause the grateful sounds of good works to ascend to the ears of their Creator, and also kindle the hearts of their neighbors to the love of the same Creator and Savior.

[Nehemiah 12:28] -- So the sons of the singers gathered, etc. The sons of the singers are imitators of those who have striven to serve the Lord with a devout and cheerful mind, or even to sound forth His word by preaching to others; who build for themselves villages around Jerusalem, when they dwell in the vicinity of the heavenly homeland with a lofty heart, saying: "For our conversation is in heaven" (Philippians III). And they build these same villages in the plains around Jerusalem, when they humble themselves the more with a heart expanded in God, as much as they sweetly taste and touch the glory of His loftiness; who, indeed, all being gathered now and with the progress of good works, to the heavenly homeland of virtues, and in the very time of dedication - that is, of eternal reward - are found there together.

[Nehemiah 12:30] -- And the priests and Levites purified themselves, etc. It is a wholly just order that those teachers and prelates who wish to purify the people should first be purified themselves; first, they should chastise their own body and bring it into servitude, lest perhaps, while preaching to others, they themselves should be found reprobate (I Cor. IX). The priests and Levites were purified by prayers and by the offerings of sacrifices, and also by abstaining from wives, they purified the people by preaching the same continence. They also purified the gates and the wall with trumpets and the songs of psalms, with the people accompanying them by encircling. Together they purified with themselves the people, the gates, and the wall, offering great sacrifices after completing the circuit for the state of the citizens and the city. But also now, those who preside over the people with holy leadership, and have been taken by the Lord into spiritual ministry, carry with greater seriousness the memory of our dedication, which is in the future resurrection; thus, they strive the more earnestly to purify and sanctify both themselves and those entrusted to them; lest perhaps anyone, found in a defiled state of mind, be cast outside from the common joy of the holy solemnity and be bound hand and foot and cast into the outer darkness.

[Nehemiah 12:31] -- And I caused the leaders of Judah to ascend upon the wall, etc. The leaders of Judah, that is, of confession or praise, are indeed the more advanced teachers of the holy Church, who ascend upon the wall in the dedication of the city; because when the time of recompense shall appear, they will be shown to have transcended the general conduct of the holy Church by living more loftily. These are of whom the Lord promises to the same Church through the prophet, saying: "I have appointed watchmen upon your walls" (Isaiah XXVI). Hence it is just that those who are now elevated as the wall of the holy Church in the capacity of watchmen, should then also surpass the others in the glory of their reward. Where two large choirs of praisers are established, because from both peoples, namely, the Jews and the Gentiles, who praise God in the heavenly homeland, they come. What also anyone learned recognizes to happen daily in this life. These choirs indeed go to the right upon the wall, because the just, by living rightly, hasten to eternal life both now in the present, and will reach it in the future. They go to the gate of the dung heap, indeed in the present to purge the filth of sins from the Church by living rightly and correcting those who err. In the future, however, so that they may expel by judicial power from the city of the Lord, that is, from the entrance to the heavenly homeland, those who were unwilling to

be corrected. Or certainly, the choirs of praisers go to the right upon the wall to the gate of the dung heap, while they proclaim the worthy of praise, who took care to eliminate all uncleanness from the Church by preaching, reproving, excommunicating, anathematizing.

[Nehemiah 12:35] -- And of the sons of the priests with trumpets, Zechariah, etc. Indeed, in this life, the sons of the priests play the trumpets at the dedication of the city of God, because they inflame the hearts of the listeners with the memory of the heavenly homeland by preaching, and this is in the vessels of the song of David, the man of God, when, relying not on their own sense or desires, but following in all things the life of the fathers and prophets, they insist on doctrine, the word of preaching. Ezra, the scribe of the law of God, precedes them to the gate of the fountain, as in all that they do, they keep the words of the sacred Scripture before their eyes, by which they may be led to the entrance of eternal life. About this, the Psalmist says to the Lord: They will be filled from the abundance of your house, and you will give them drink from the torrent of your pleasure, for with you is the fountain of life (Psalm 36).

[Nehemiah 12:37] -- And they went up against them on the steps of the city of David, etc. Above, when the city was being built, it was said: Those who built the gate of the fountain continued their measure of work up to the steps descending from the city of David (Neh. III). There, therefore, is the descent of the steps during the building; here, however, during the dedication of the city, is the ascent mentioned; just as there labor and conflict with the enemy is conducted, here the joy of the enemy having been defeated is celebrated, because indeed all the saints, who now are humbled under the mighty hand of God, will be exalted by Him in the future. Those who now build the walls of the Church on earth from living stones, namely holy souls, in affliction and dangers, in many vigils, then with the completion of the same building, and when it has been raised in the kingdom of heaven, they, rejoicing, ascend to contemplate its glory. However, the house of David, that is, by the strong and desirable hand, are all the just, who by the grace of their Creator are filled and inhabited by Him. And the sons of priests ascend upon the house of David, when holy preachers, or martyrs, as they now pass through the general life of the just, either through the ministry of the word or the struggle of martyrdom; in this way, then, the general rewards of them precede the higher gifts of remuneration.

To whom the parable of the faithful servants aptly fits, of which one says, Lord, your mina has made ten minas; the same Lord says, Well done, good servant, because you have been faithful in a little, you will have authority over ten cities. To another saying the same, Lord, your mina has made five minas; and He says, You be over five cities (Luke XIX). For as many as one now instructs to life by his word or example, to such an extent he will then be honored, appearing more glorious in the perception of life. The priests also come to the water gate towards the east, when those who in this life, just as the deer longs for the fountains of water, so desired to appear before the face of God, they reach the affection of this desire, and merit to see the rise of the Sun of righteousness without setting. But it is said, And they went up against them; it does not signify the contrariety of distance, but the

encounter of harmony, by which the elect both in this life once kindle each other to the love of their Creator, and in the next life more perfectly rejoicing in each other's happiness, always without weariness they praise Him, in accordance with the example of the seraphim, who, as the prophet testifies, calling to one another, celebrate the holy Trinity with associated exultation (Isa. VI).

[Nehemiah 12:38] -- And a second chorus of those giving thanks went opposite, etc. It is long to discuss each gate or tower in particular; it suffices to say that those who completed the gates, towers, and wall of the city in great labor, hardship, hunger, cold, daily and nightly watchfulness, against an indefatigable and insidious enemy, then, with the enemy repelled and confounded, walking through the gates, towers, and buildings of the same city, rejoice together in songs and hymns, with psalteries, cymbals, lyres, trumpets, and thanksgiving, together with those who were the makers of the work and the teachers of God's law. It is doubtful to none that this also happens in the same manner in a spiritual edifice. When the time of ultimate retribution comes, as if by the long-desired dedication of the city of God, everlasting faith receives rewards for its works; when, like Nehemiah and Ezra, and the other priests and Levites, each presenting their laborers, all the teachers of the faithful people introduce those whom they have brought to the Lord to the walls of the heavenly homeland. Then, among other things, in the holy walls of the city, even upon the tower of the ovens, in whose structure they had labored before, Nehemiah advances with a chorus of praisers, while the teachers of truth rejoice in the sublime rewards of those they have taught. For if the breads of the ovens, which are baked in secret, signify the inner devotion of the faithful mind, confirmed by the fire of love;

whence such breads are commanded by law to be offered as a sacrifice to the Lord (Leviticus II), which are more aptly figured by the ovens in which those same breads are baked than by their own hearts, which are always to burn with the flame of intimate love, and tend to produce acts and words of virtues. About which the prophet beautifully says: "Your Lord is a fire in Zion, and a furnace in Jerusalem" (Isaiah XXXI). And Luke himself about himself: "Was not our heart burning within us, while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us? (Luke XXIV). And against, the hearts of the reprobate also burn, but with the fire of sins. Hence another prophet about them: "All of them are adulterers, like a heated oven" (Hosea VII). Therefore, the builders of the holy city build a tower of ovens among others, when the teachers establish the hearts of their hearers in faith and in the work of truth, so that they may be worthy to receive greater gifts of the Spirit, and daily new feasts of virtues to be brought forth in the joy of the people of God. Rejoicing, and singing praise to the Lord, they advance upon the tower of the ovens on the day of the dedication of Jerusalem, when in the time of future retribution, they rejoice in the eternal beatitude for the glory of those whom they have instructed with the teachings of life.

Therefore, the ovens are the hearts of the elect, in which love is poured out by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to them. And the tower of the ovens is the height and guard of good works; which same hearts, lest they may be harmed by evil spirits, lest the flame of

virtues be able to be inflated or disturbed by the wind of pride, always need to be fortified with careful and anxious vigilance.

[Nehemiah 12:40] -- And two choirs of those praising stood in the house of God, etc. Walking before the walls and gardens of the city, in a song of joy, and with musical instruments, they return to the temple of the Lord; so that there also standing, they may render praise to the Lord with sounding trumpets, and fulfill the vows of dedication with the offered sacrifices. But that same homeland of the future life mystically signifies the house of the Lord, which both the city of the Lord also indicates, just as the present Church is customarily called in the Scriptures both the house of Christ and the city. However, there is a distinction, as the buildings of the city sing the praises with songs of gratitude and instruments; but in the house of God standing, they are reported to have praised and sung clearly. For the chosen ascend the walls of the city, which they made with the joy of the heavenly country, which they themselves made with the diligence of good works, they enter. They perceive the diversity of the gates, and the height of the towers and buildings, when entering into the house of the Father, they contemplate the difference of many mansions there according to the diverse merits of men. But they stand in the house of God, and sing more clearly, when each received into their own mansions, they remain in stable habitation in the perpetual vision of their Creator, and celebrate His praises in the age of God with an undivided voice.

Where two choirs of those praising will be, either from both peoples, as we interpreted above, joined, and coupled into one modulation of divine praise; or made of angels and men, fulfilling the Lord's promise, where it is said, that men will be equal to the angels of God (Mark XII). But also in this life the just ascend into the city of the Lord with hymns of dedication, when longing with all their heart for the memory of future reward, they daily progress more and more in good works, according to that of the Psalmist: He has set ascensions in his heart in the valley of tears (Ps. LXXXIII). And again: Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord (Ps. CXVIII). For behold he also calls the undefiled those walking in the way in the law of the Lord, because they thus indeed hold the accepted innocence of heart and work, so that moreover they strive to grow in the merits of virtues to higher things. But they stand in the house of the Lord with praises, because in the very pursuit of good works they persevere indefatigably, according to that of blessed Elijah: The Lord lives, in whose sight I stand (III Kings XVII), that is, in whose will to be completed I remain with an indefatigable mind. But aptly it follows:

[Nehemiah 12:43] -- And they sacrificed great victims on that day, etc. On that day of perpetual light (about which Zachariah said: And there shall be one day which is known to the Lord, not day nor night: that is, removed from the experience of passing times) the chosen sacrifice great victims to the Lord, namely those which the Psalmist, tasting in the hope of future things, said: You have broken my bonds, I will offer to you the sacrifice of praise (Psalm 115). He also rightly shows where he hoped to sacrifice this victim, when he immediately adds: I will pay my vows to the Lord in the courts of the house of the Lord, in the presence of all his people, in the midst of you, Jerusalem. For in the midst of Jerusalem we

render our vows to God in the presence of all his people, when in the heavenly homeland with the entire assembly of saints gathered, we offer him those praises for which we now groan and which we daily long for with a desire for grace.

[Nehemiah 12:43] -- For God had made them rejoice with great joy, etc. These things truly pertain to the edification of that holy city which is in the future, in which God is the king who gladdens His citizens with His presence, indeed with great joy; hence, when the king was born in the flesh, the angel appearing to the shepherds said: Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which will be to all people (Luke 2). This is in clear distinction from human joy, which is both small and transient; and therefore, the wise should consider it of little value. However, in that joy which God grants to His city, it is well mentioned that the wives of the citizens, together with their children, also rejoiced; because at the time of the resurrection, not only those who had either preached the word or steadfastly endured in the works of faith will receive the great reward of their great labors, but also the weaker ones, those who shared the same faith, will rejoice together with them in the same reception of eternal life. For the Lord blessed all those who feared Him, the small together with the great (Psalm 115). This dedication can also be understood in this life metaphorically, in some chosen ones, who, having purified the eye of the heart, are worthy to contemplate part of the joys which the whole Church will fully receive in the future, like Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the other prophets; like the apostles (Matthew 17), who rejoiced to see the Lord glorified on the holy mountain; like Paul (2 Corinthians 12), who was worthy to be caught up into paradise and the third heaven; like John in the Apocalypse, who, the higher they ascended into the lofty heights of the heavenly city, the more clearly they took care to sing the praises of the Lord and always to offer Him the greatest sacrifices of good works.

[Nehemiah 12:44] -- They also appointed men over the storerooms of the treasury on that day, etc. While all rejoiced in the building and dedication of the city, every effort was made to ensure that the worship of religion, which was established through ceremonies, especially the teaching and duties of priests, Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, was maintained and grew. Therefore, diligent men were appointed to carefully gather and guard the money contributed by the people in the temple treasury, for the use of those same ministers of the temple and altar; to also carefully preserve the first fruits of the crops, tithes, wine, and libations brought to the temple; so that, with an abundance of things either to be offered to the Lord or from which the ministers of the Lord themselves could live, the multitude of those same ministers would more willingly agree to make their dwelling in Jerusalem, from whom the gathered crowd of people should be taught and at the same time sanctified.

[Nehemiah 12:44] -- Because Judah rejoiced in the priests and Levites who stood by, etc. This was the reason why the people chose to have the priests and Levites, and the other ministers of the saints to dwell in Jerusalem; because they rejoiced in their good works, through whose devoted diligence to God, the people themselves were corrected from their errors, and the city was constructed and dedicated with great praise and joy. We have an allegorical exposition of this chapter prepared for us; because the Lord decided that those

who proclaim the Gospel should live from the Gospel (1 Cor. 9). But woe to those priests and ministers of the saints, who indeed delight in joyfully receiving the rightful stipends from the people, but do not strive to labor for the salvation of the same people, neither to provide them with any guidance in holy living, nor to sing to them anything sweet about the sweetness of the heavenly kingdom, nor to open for them the gate of the heavenly city by having citizenship in heaven, but rather by acting perversely they are found to close it. In whose works the people cannot in any way trust, nor praise the Lord, but rather are much more compelled to be afflicted. Note well indeed that Judah, who previously spoke as one despairing in the construction of the city: "The strength of those bearing the burdens is weakened, and there is much dirt, and we are unable to build the wall" (Neh 4), and the rest of that place;

now had regained strength of mind and body to carry away the dirt which hindered the building of the wall that had fallen, to overcome the lurking enemies who were threatening. Therefore, with good reason, he rejoices in the priests and Levites, singers and gatekeepers, whose labor and exhortation enabled him to escape such a great danger of affliction, and found such great glory of regained prosperity. And you, therefore, if your heart is weighed down by the dirt of vices, so that you are unable to build in it a city worthy of divine habitation, if you see the evil enemy intending to draw you back from purging the rubble of vices, from building the walls of virtues, listen to the consolation and advice of the priests; be constant in listening to and keeping the divine readings; and thus you will stand, so that the habitation of your praetorium, with the snares of demons driven out, will have God as the victor enter, about to sanctify it as his city, and to make his dwelling with you.

[Nehemiah 12:47] -- And they sanctified the Levites, etc. The people sanctified the Levites by giving them tithes, as if to the holy ones of God; and the Levites themselves sanctified the priests by offering them a tenth part, as if giving from their own tithes to those higher than themselves.

[Nehemiah 13:1] -- On that day, it was read from the book of Moses, etc. It is evident that the Moabites and Ammonites, because they were born of incest, hold the figure of the heretics, whose founders, while they corrupt the doctrine of the fathers, from which they themselves were taught, by misunderstanding it, use it as if the daughters of Lot secretly and in the dark used their father's seed, and not lawfully: therefore the progeny of such, that is, the followers of heresies, can never have any part in the Church of the Lord. For whoever are corrected from this, will no longer be the offspring of the same origin. However, they met the children of Israel coming out of Egypt with bread and water, if they, living well, and dwelling in Catholic peace, would offer the solace of the word of God to those who have recently been rescued from the service of sins by the water of baptism and the waves of the sea, aspiring to the freedom of the heavenly homeland; just as Barzillai the Gileadite did (2 Samuel 19), who met David and his army fleeing from Absalom with provisions, so that by refreshing them, he rendered them stronger against the new tyranny of the king's son;

clearly signifying those who strengthen the church scattered by heretics with the help of the heavenly word, and take care to encourage them to conquer their madness.

But while these same heretics strive to destroy neophytes with their leaders and by the shown examples of others, or with malignant words, like a people born of incest attacking the exodus of Israel from Egypt with their arms, and Balaam the soothsayer, who is interpreted as the vanity of the cursed people, and with wicked plots. But God turned the curse of Balaam into a blessing for His people, and protected them from the arms of hostile nations; for all things work together for good to those who love God (Romans 8).

Chapter 34

All foreigners are separated from Israel, and the portions of the Levites and the firstfruits of the priests are placed in the treasury of the house of the Lord. [Nehemiah 13:3] -- Now it came to pass when they heard the law, etc. Hearing the law about the two enemy nations to be anathematized, the faithful people immediately separated all foreigners from themselves; because it is necessary for us to attend to the hearing of the truth in such a way that when we are prohibited by divine reading from any single vice, we immediately purge not only that particular vice concerning which the discourse may have occurred, but also everything whatsoever of vice we find soiling us, both from our actions and our conscience. [Nehemiah 13:5] -- He made for himself a large treasury, etc. This statement, where Nehemiah writes that he was not in Jerusalem, does not seem to pertain to the matters narrated above up to this point, but only to the present location; for the previous matters were seen to have been done or spoken at the time when the city was built and dedicated, when Nehemiah was still residing in Jerusalem; with those things diligently completed, he returned to the king, and while he was absent, Eliashib made a large treasury in which were stored those things necessary either for the ministry of the house of the Lord or for the use of the ministers. He was not afraid to place certain unlawful things in the treasury of the house of the Lord; because when Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, he immediately strove to disrupt those things. For it follows:

Chapter 35

Nehemiah, having returned from Babylon to Jerusalem, again cleanses the treasuries of the vessels of the Gentiles and places there those things appropriate for the house of the Lord. [Nehemiah 13:7] -- And I came to Jerusalem and understood the evil, etc. We read above that Tobiah was an Ammonite servant, an enemy of the people of God; therefore, Eliashib the priest acted very wrongfully; for he made a treasury in the vestibules of the house of God for this man, even though he was closely related to him by kinship, in which he placed his vessels, having ejected the vessels of the house of God, and the other things required for its ministry; for what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? What accord has Christ with Belial? What agreement does the temple of God have with idols? What communion have heretics and schismatics with the orthodox and peaceful children of God? (II Cor. VI)

[Nehemiah 13:8] -- And I cast out the vessels of the house of Tobiah outside, etc. And you, whatever of infidelity and impurity you find among the faithful, immediately cast it out, so that from the hearts of the believers, which are the treasuries of the Lord, when they have been filled with the riches of virtues, the vessels of the Lord may be brought in; that is, those very hearts which shortly before had been vessels of error through fault may again become vessels of the Lord through correction; and there the sacrifice of good works and the incense of pure prayer may be found, where formerly was the den of thieves. But those also who cast out the vessels of Tobiah the Ammonite from the treasury of the temple, and replace there the vessels of the house of God, and the sacrifice and incense, are those who, excommunicating or anathematizing heretics or false Catholics and expelling them from the Church, appoint in their place the servants of Christ who serve Him with faithful deeds and prayers. Certainly, this too should be compared to Nehemiah, with the zeal of the Lord the Savior, when finding those selling and buying in the temple, he made a whip of cords and drove them all out (Mark XII, Luke XIX); and Nehemiah, aptly as in his other acts, thus in this also carried the type of the true comforter and cleaner of God.

Chapter 36

Nehemiah diligently strives to prevent the Sabbath rest from being violated by the Gentiles' market.

[Nehemiah 13:15] -- In those days I saw in Judah men treading wine presses on the Sabbath, etc. By law, we are commanded to work for six days on necessary things, and on the seventh, we are to rest; the general mystery of this command is clear, that all the elect in this world, which is measured by six ages, ought to labor for eternal rest; but on the future day, as on the seventh day, they hope to receive perpetual rest from the Lord. And according to tropology, that is, the moral sense, the elect also in this life keep a Sabbath dedicated to the Lord, when they separate themselves temporarily from the cares of this world, devote themselves to prayer, and lift their purified minds to the contemplation of heavenly things. For when we carry out the demands of the flesh with a sincere heart, and not in desires contrary to the Apostle's command, we labor as if in six days on necessary things; since we are occupied with things needed for this world. Furthermore, the Sabbath of our prayers and devotion, in which we are freed from temporal activities, so that we may sweetly taste the joys of eternity, is rightly assigned to the seventh day; because it imitates the future rest of life and blessed praise; but the Gentiles seek to profane the Sabbath day when earthly thoughts inopportunely disturb us during our time of prayer and try to draw us away from deep love through memory or delight in temporal things.

They load wine, grapes, and figs onto donkeys, and all kinds of burdens, and bring them into Jerusalem, when they seek to burden the foolish movements of our spirit with carnal pleasures, attempting through these and similar temptations to violate the rest of our hearts devoted to God. But Nehemiah opposes these tumults of improper thoughts so that they do not disturb our Sabbath, when with strict diligence, aided by the Lord, we exclude useless and inept imaginations from our hearts during prayer. He exhorts them to sell such merchandise on the days when it is lawful to do so, when the devout heart imposes a boundary on its thoughts, so that during prayer, it abstains from the cares of passing things. Yet at other times, when opportunity dictates, let them not completely turn away from efforts concerning food and clothing; but let them dispense these with appropriate moderation when necessity demands.

[Nehemiah 13:16] -- And the Tyrians lived in it, bringing in fish, etc. Just as the good fish represents pious faith, which when one asks from the Lord, one does not receive the serpent of unbelief; similarly, the wicked fish represents base thoughts, which by their very nature tend to immerse themselves excessively in worldly cares; these the Tyrians, who are interpreted as the constrained, seek to sell to us on the Sabbath, when impure spirits improperly attempt to overwhelm the rest of our pious life with deep worldly concerns. However, for such commerce Nehemiah rebukes and chastises the leaders of Judah, when divine inspiration mercifully purges those who strive to serve the profession of piety from such thoughts. [Nehemiah 13:19] -- Therefore, it happened, when the gates of Jerusalem rested on the Sabbath day, etc. If our conscience, when purified from vices, rejoices in the indwelling of God, it can rightly be called Jerusalem. What are these gates of Jerusalem, but the senses of our body, namely, sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch? through which the things done outside reach the knowledge of our mind, as if entering through them; which we are commanded to close on the Sabbath day, so that when we seek to occupy ourselves with psalms or prayers to God, everything external is expelled from the mind, and we pray and praise only our judge in secret with a free mind. And because no one becomes supreme suddenly, but ought to reach this perfection and peace of mind, of which we speak, through long progress in holy living with the aid of Christ's grace, it is fittingly added and said of these things:

[Nehemiah 13:22] -- He also said to the Levites that they should be purified, etc. For it is necessary that they be purified from the daily exercise of good works, who desire to guard the gates of their senses from any incursion of turbulent thoughts. And whoever wishes to sanctify the Sabbath day, that is, to make useful to oneself the leisure of prayers, psalmody, holy reading, and tears, it is necessary to cleanse one's conscience with great diligence, so that one may be able to bring to completion the intent of good action well. This can also be rightly interpreted in an allegorical sense concerning the teachers of the faithful. For whoever desires to guard the gates of the holy Church, that is, the faith and works of their hearers, through which alone one enters the Church, from the contagion of heretics and vice knocking, ought first to purify their own heart and actions from every stain of errors.

Chapter 37

Nehemiah cleanses the Jews from foreign wives and establishes the orders of priests and Levites, each in his service; and finally recommends himself to the memory of God for good. [Nehemiah 13:30] -- But in those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, etc. And now in the holy Church they marry foreign wives, whoever tarnishes his conscience with the pleasures of crimes, which properly belong to the pagans. And the children born from these do not know how to speak Jewish, as the deeds which arose from a corrupted mind reveal nothing of pious profession; but rather sound like pagan folly than ecclesiastical chastity. For Ashdod, which is called Asdod in Hebrew, is interpreted as "word of fire." Therefore, according to the allegorical sense, the sons of foreign wives speak Ashdodite, when deeds begotten through wantonness expect the retribution of eternal combustion. Hence, rightfully, the parents of such are not only rebuked and cursed by Nehemiah, but some are also beaten; because it is necessary for the erring to be more severely restrained by teachers of the truth, so that they may learn to be happily transferred from the word of avenging fire to the word of divine praise. But also heretics, when they devote themselves more to the studies of gentile philosophy, dialectics, and rhetoric than to ecclesiastical simplicity, it is not surprising if their listeners speak according to the tongue of the people, and the people indeed speak, turning over the holy scriptures with their mouth, but interpreting these with erratic and pagan sense.

[Nehemiah 13:30] -- Therefore, I cleansed them from all foreigners, etc. An apt and fitting end in all respects for the edification of the holy city and the temple of the Lord, so that with the citizens cleansed of every stain of foreign and alien pollution from God, the orders of priests and Levites might rightly be preserved in their ministry; so that the institution of the master of the Church, royally established, may remain and grow in goodness, encouraging the people disciplined from all sin; for indeed this people, among other things, offers wood to the Lord to sustain the fire of the altar, as they perform works of virtues surely worthy of divine consecration. For if wood did not sometimes signify something good, the prophet would not say: "Then shall all the trees of the forest rejoice before the Lord" (Psalm 95). But wood burns and is consumed on the altar of holocausts, when works of justice in the hearts of teachers are perfected by the flame of charity. Rightly then does such a founder and dedicant of the city, after many labors of his devotion, commend himself to the memory of his Creator and the Giver of all good things. And You, supreme Father of lights, from

whom every good gift and every perfect gift descends; who have bestowed upon me, most humble of your servants, both the love and the help to consider the wonders of your law; who in the treasury of the prophetic volume has granted me the grace not only to embrace the old things, but also to find new gifts by the uplifting of the old, and to bring them forth for the use of my fellow servants, remember me, my God, for good (James 1).

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.