

Exposition on Psalm 147

by St. Augustine

We should praise God through good works and moderation in all things, and our lives should praise Him, not just our voices.

Topics: "Worship And Praise", "Gods Love"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the importance of praising the Lord, highlighting the goodness of praising God and the need for our lives to be a continuous praise to Him. He emphasizes the significance of singing Psalms not just with our voices but with our actions, aligning our works with our worship. St. Augustine delves into the concept of praising God through good lives, explaining that true praise is pleasant to God when it comes from a sincere and righteous heart. He reflects on God's love and mercy, showcasing how God gathers His people, heals the brokenhearted, and commends His love to sinners through Christ's sacrifice.

Transcript

1. It is said to us, Praise the Lord Psalm 146:1. This is said to all nations, not to us alone. And these words, sounded forth through separate places by the Readers, each Church hears separately; but the one same Voice of God proclaims unto all, that we praise Him. And as though we asked wherefore we ought to praise the Lord, behold what reason he has brought forward: Praise the Lord, he says, for a Psalm is good. Is this all the reward of them that praise?...The Psalm is praise of God. This then he says, Praise the Lord, for it is good to praise the Lord. Let us not thus pass over the praise of the Lord. It is spoken, and has passed: it is done, and we are silent: we have praised, and then rested; we have sung, and then rested. We go forth to some business which awaits us, and when other employments have found us, shall the praise of God cease in us? Not so: your tongue praises but for a while, let your life ever praise. Thus then a Psalm is good.

2. For a Psalm is a song, not any kind of song, but a song to a psaltery. A psaltery is a kind of instrument of music, like the lyre and the harp, and such kinds of instruments, which were invented for music. He therefore who sings Psalms, not only sings with his voice, but with a certain instrument besides, which is called a psaltery, he accompanies his voice with his hands. Will you then sing a Psalm? Let not your voice alone sound the praises of God; but let your works also be in harmony with your voice....To please then the ear, sing with your voice; but with your heart be not silent, with your life be not still. Thou devisest no fraud in your heart: you sing a Psalm to God. When you eat and drinkest, sing a Psalm: not by

intermingling sweet sounds suited to the ear, but by eating and drinking moderately, frugally, temperately: for thus says the Apostle, whether you eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31 ...If by immoderate voracity you exceed the due bounds of nature, and gluttest yourself in excess of wine, however great praises of God your tongue sound, yet your life blasphemes Him. After food and drink you lie down to sleep: in your bed neither commit any pollution, nor go beyond the license given by the law of God: let your marriage bed be kept chaste with your wife: and if you desire to beget children, yet let there not be unbridled sensuality of lust: in your bed give honour to your wife, 1 Peter 3:7 for you are both members of Christ, both made by Him, both renewed by His Blood: so doing you praise God, nor will your praise be altogether silent. What, when sleep has come over you? Let not an evil conscience rouse you from rest: so does the innocence of your sleep praise God....

3. Let praises be pleasant to our God. How? If He be praised by our good lives. Hear that then praise will be pleasant to Him. In another place it is said, Praise is not seemly in the mouth of a sinner. Sirach 15:9 If then in the mouth of a sinner praise is not seemly, neither is it pleasant, for that only is pleasant which is seemly....For praise may be pleasant to a man, when he hears one praising with neat and clever sentiments, and with a sweet voice; but let praise be pleasant to our God, whose ears are open not to the mouth, but to the heart; not to the tongue, but to the life of him that praises.

4. Who is our God, that praise should be pleasant to Him? He makes Himself sweet to us, He commends Himself to us; thanks to His condescension....But God commends His love to us...in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8 ...Let us see whether it be the commendation which the Apostle speaks of, that Christ died for the sinners and ungodly: the Lord who builds up Jerusalem, and gathers the dispersions of Israel Psalm 146:2. For the people of Jerusalem are the people of Israel. It is Jerusalem eternal in the heavens, whereof the Angels are citizens also....All the citizens then of that city, through seeing God, rejoice in that great and wide and heavenly city; they gaze upon God Himself. But we are wanderers from that city, driven out by sin, that we should not remain there; weighed down by mortality, that we should not return there. God looked back on our wandering, and He who builds up Jerusalem, restored the part that had fallen. How restored He the part that had fallen?...He sent then to our captive estate His Son as a Redeemer. Take with You, said He, a bag, bear therein the price of the captives. For He put on Him our mortal flesh, and therein was the Blood, by the shedding of which we were to be redeemed. With that Blood He gathered the dispersions of Israel. And if He gathered them that before were dispersed, how must we strive that they be gathered who now are dispersed? If the dispersed have been gathered, that in the Hand of the Builder they might be fashioned into the building, how should they be gathered who through disquiet have fallen from the Hand of the Builder? Behold whom we praise; behold to whom we owe praise all our life long.

5. How does He gather? What does He in order to gather? Who heals the bruised in heart Psalm 146:3. Behold the way in which the dispersions of Israel are gathered, by the healing of the bruised in heart. They who are not of a bruised heart, are not healed. What is to bruise the heart? Let it be known, brethren, let it be done, that you may be able to be healed. For it is told in many other places of Scripture;...the sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit, a bruised and contrite heart God will not despise. He heals then the bruised in heart, for He draws near unto them to heal them; as is said in another place, the Lord is near unto them who have bruised their heart. Who are they that have bruised their heart? The humble. Who are they that have not bruised their heart? The proud. The bruised heart shall be healed, the puffed up heart shall be dashed down. For for this purpose perhaps is it dashed down, that being bruised it may be healed. Let not our heart then, brethren, desire to be set upright, before it be upright. It is ill for that to be uplifted which is

not first corrected....

6. What are the means whereby He binds up their bruises? Just as physicians bind up fractures. For sometimes (observe this, beloved; it is well known to those who have observed it, or have heard it from physicians), sometimes when limbs are sound, but are crooked and distorted, physicians break them in order to set them straight, and make a new wound, because the soundness which was distorted was amiss....

7. What are these means whereby He binds? The sacraments of this present life, whereby in the mean time we obtain our comfort: and all the words we speak to you, words which sound and pass away, all that is done in the Church in this present time, are the means whereby He binds up our bruises. For just as, when the limb has become perfectly sound, the physician takes off the bandage; so in our own city Jerusalem, when we shall have been made equal to the Angels, think ye that we shall receive there, what we have received here? Will it be needful then that the Gospel be read to us, that our faith may abide? Or that hands be laid upon us by any Bishop? All these are means of binding up fractures; when we have attained perfect soundness, they will be taken off; but we should never attain it, if they were not bound up.

8. Who tells the number of the stars, and calls them all by their names Psalm 146:4. What great matter is it for God to tell the number of the stars! Men even have endeavoured to do this; whether they have been able to achieve it, is their concern; they would not however attempt it, did they not think that they should achieve it. Let us leave alone what they can do, and how far they have attained; for God I think it no great matter to count all the stars. Or does He perhaps go over the number, lest He should forget it? Is it any great thing for God to number the stars, by whom the very hairs of your head are numbered? Matthew 10:30 The stars are certain lights in the Church comforting our night; all of whom the Apostle says, In the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding the Word of life. Philippians 2:15 These stars God counts; all who shall reign with Him, all who are to be gathered into the Body of His only-begotten Son, He has counted, and still counts them. Whoso is unworthy, is not even counted. Many too have believed, or rather may, with a kind of shadowy appearance of faith, have attached themselves to His people: yet He knows what He counts, what He winnowes away. For so great is the height of the Gospel, that it has come to pass as was said, I have declared, and have spoken: they are multiplied above number: there are then among the people certain supernumeraries, so to speak. What do I mean by supernumeraries? More than will be there. Within these walls are more than will be in the kingdom of God, in the heavenly Jerusalem; these are above the number. Let each one of you consider whether he shines in darkness, whether he refuses to be led astray by the dark iniquity of the world; if he be not led astray, nor conquered, he will be, as it were, a star, which God already numbers. And calling them all by their names, he says. Herein is our whole reward. We may have certain names with God, that God may know our names, this we ought to wish, for this to act, for this to busy ourselves, as far as we are able; not to rejoice in other things, not even in certain spiritual gifts....When the disciples returned from their mission exulting, and saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us in Your Name Luke 10:17 -- then He (knowing that many would say, have we not in Your Name cast out devils? to whom He should say, I know you not) said, In this rejoice not, that the devils are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven. Luke 10:20

9. Great is our Lord Psalm 146:5. The Psalmist is filled with joy, he has poured out his words wonderfully: yet somewhat he was unable to speak, and how availed he to think on it? And great is His power, and of His understanding is no numbering. He who numbers the stars, Himself cannot be numbered. Who can expound this? Who can worthily even imagine what is meant by, and of His understanding is no

number?...Whatsoever then that is infinite this world contains, though it be infinite to man, yet is not to God: too little is it to say, to God: even by the angels it is numbered. His understanding surpasses all calculators; it cannot be counted by us. Numbers themselves who numbers? What than is there with God? Wherewith made He all things, and where made He all things, to whom it is said, You have arrayed all things in measure, number, and weight? Wisdom 11:20 Or who can number, or measure, or weigh, measure and number and weight themselves, wherein God has ordered all things? Therefore, of His understanding is no number. Let human voices be hushed, human thoughts still: let them not stretch themselves out to incomprehensible things, as though they could comprehend them, but as though they were to partake of them, for partakers we shall be....Partakers then we shall be: let none doubt it: Scripture says it. And of what shall we be partakers, as though these were parts in God, as though God were divided into parts? Who then can explain how many become partakers of one single substance? Require not then that which I think ye see cannot fitly be said: but return to the healing of the Saviour, bruise your heart. He will guide it, He will bind it up where it is broken, He will make it perfectly sound; and then those things will not be impossible with us, which now are impossible. For it is good that he confess weakness, who desires to attain to the divine nature.

10. The Lord takes up the gentle Psalm 146:6. For example; you understand not, you fail to understand, canst not attain: honour God's Scripture, honour God's Word, though it be not plain: in reverence wait for understanding. Be not wanton to accuse either the obscurity or seeming contradiction of Scripture. There is nothing in it contradictory: somewhat there is which is obscure, not in order that it may be denied you, but that it may exercise him that shall afterward receive it. When then it is obscure, that is the Physician's doing, that you may knock. He willed that you should be exercised in knocking; He willed it, that He might open to you when you knock. By knocking you shall be exercised; exercised, you shall be enlarged; enlarged, you shall contain what is given. Be not then indignant for that it is shut; be mild, be gentle. Kick not against what is dark, nor say, It were better said, if it were said thus. For how can you thus say, or judge how it is expedient it be said? It is said as it is expedient it be said. Let not the sick man seek to amend his remedies: the Physician knows how to temper them: believe Him who cares for you. Therefore what comes next?...The Lord takes up the gentle, but humbles the sinners even to the ground, he intended a certain sort of sinners to be understood, from the gentleness mentioned first. By sinners then in this place, we understand the fierce, and those who are not gentle. Wherefore does He humble them even to the earth? They carp at objects of understanding, they shall perceive only things earthly.

11. Begin to the Lord in confession Psalm 146:7. Begin with this, if you would arrive at a clear understanding of the truth. If you will be brought from the road of faith to the profession of the reality, begin in confession. First accuse yourself: accuse yourself, praise God. What after confession? Let good works follow. Sing unto our God upon the harp. What is, Upon the harp? As I have already explained, just like the Psalm upon the psaltery, so also is the harp: not with voice only, but with works.

12. ...Who covers the heaven with clouds, who prepares rain for the earth Psalm 146:8. Now you are alarmed, because you can not see the heaven: when it has rained you shall gather fruit, and shall see clear sky. Perhaps our God has done this. For had we not the obscurity of Scripture as an occasion, we should not say to you those things wherein ye rejoice. This then perhaps is the rain whereat ye rejoice. It would not be possible for it to be expressed to you by our tongue, were it not that God covers with clouds of figures the heaven of the Scriptures. For this purpose willed He that the words of the Prophets should be obscure, that the servants of God might afterwards have that by interpreting which they might flow over the ears and hearts of men, that they might receive from the clouds of God the fatness of spiritual joy. Who

makes grass to grow upon the mountains, and herb for the service of men. Behold the fruit of the rain. Who makes, says he, grass to grow upon the mountains. Does it not also grow upon the low ground? Yes, but it is a great thing that it grows on the mountains....For nothing could be more barren than the hard mountains. And herb for the service of men. What service? Listen to Paul himself. And ourselves, says he, your servants for Jesus Christ's sake. 2 Corinthians 4:5 He who said, If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we reap your carnal things? yet said, that he was a servant. For we are your servants, brethren. Let none of us speak of himself, as though he were greater than you. We shall be greater if we are more humble. But whosoever will be great among you (it is the Lord's saying), shall be your servant. Matthew 20:26 Paul the Apostle, indeed, living by his own labour, refused even to receive the grass of the mountains; he chose to want; nevertheless, the mountains gave grass. Because he chose not to receive, ought the mountains therefore not to give, and so to remain barren? Fruit is due to the rain, food is due to the servant, as the Lord says, Eat such things as they give you: and that they should not think that they gave anything of their own, He added, for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Luke 10:7-8

13. ...Just now has been read, Give to every one that asks of you; Luke 6:30 and in another place Scripture says, Let alms sweat in your hand, till you find a righteous man to whom to give it. One there is who seeks you, another you ought to seek. Leave not indeed him who seeks you empty, for, give to every one that asks of you; yet still there is another whom you ought to seek; find a righteous man to whom to give it. You will never do this, unless you have somewhat set aside from your substance, each what pleases him according to the needs of his family, as a sort of debt to be paid to the treasury. If Christ have not a state of His own, neither has He a treasury... ..Cut off then and prune off some fixed sum either from your yearly profits or your daily gains, else you seem as it were to give of your capital, and your hand must needs hesitate, when you put it forth to that which you have not vowed. Cut off some part of your income; a tenth if you choose, though that is but little. For it is said that the Pharisees gave a tenth; I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. Luke 18:12 And what says the Lord? Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:20 He whose righteousness you ought to exceed, gives a tenth: you give not even a thousandth. How will you surpass him whom you match not? Who prepares rain for the earth.

14. And gives unto the cattle their food Psalm 146:9. These are the cattle he means, even God's flocks. God defrauds not His flock of their food through men, for whose service He makes the grass to grow. And to the young of the ravens that call upon Him. Shall we perchance think this, that the ravens call upon God to give them their food? Think not that the unreasoning creature calls upon God: no creature knows how to call upon God, save the reasonable alone. Consider it as spoken in a figure, lest you think, as some evil men say, that the souls of men migrate into cattle, dogs, swine, ravens. Give this no place in your hearts or in your faith. The soul of man is made after the image of God: He will not give His image to dog or swine. Who are the young of the ravens? The Israelites used to say that they alone were righteous, because to them the Law had been given: all other men of every nation they used to call sinners. And in truth all nations were given up to sin, to idolatry, to the worship of stones and stocks: but did they continue so? Although the ravens themselves, our fathers, did not, yet we, the young of the ravens, do call upon God. 1 Peter 1:18 ...For the young of the ravens, who seemed to worship the images of their forefathers, have advanced, and turned to God. And now you hear the young of the ravens calling upon the one God. What then? Do you say to the young of the ravens, have you left your father? Plainly I have, says he; for he is a raven who calls not upon God. I, the young of the raven, do call upon God.

15. In the power of an horse He will not take pleasure Psalm 146:10. The power of an horse is pride. For the horse seems adapted as it were to bear a man aloft, that he may be more uplifted as he goes. And in truth he has a neck which typifies a sort of pride. Let not men exalt themselves upon their worth, let them not think themselves uplifted by their distinctions; let them beware lest they be thrown by an untamed horse.. ..Nor in the tabernacle of a man will He delight. For the tabernacle of the Lord is the Holy Church spread throughout the whole world. Heretics, separating themselves from the Church's tabernacles, have set up tabernacles for themselves. For if perchance it be the lot of any, who is good and pious, who confesses his own weakness, who is the young of a raven that calls on God, not to enjoy worldly distinction, he goes not out of the Church, he sets not up for himself a tent outside the Church, wherein God will not delight. But what says he? I have chosen to be cast away in the house of God, rather than to dwell in the tents of sinners.

16. But what adds he? The Lord will delight in them that fear Him, and in them that hope in His mercy Psalm 146:11. A robber is feared, and a wild beast is feared, and an unjust and powerful man is much feared. The Lord will delight in them that hope in His mercy. Behold, Judas, who betrayed our Lord, feared, but he did not hope in His mercy....It is well indeed that you have feared, but only if you trusted in His mercy, whom you have feared. He in despair went and hanged himself. In such wise then fear the Lord, that you trust in His mercy....

17. Praise in unison, O Jerusalem, your God Psalm 147:12. Abiding yet in captivity, they behold those flocks, or rather, the one flock of all its citizens, gathered from all sides into that city; they see the joy of the mass, now after threshings and winnowings placed in the garner, fearing nothing, suffering no toil nor trouble; and, as yet abiding here, in the midst of the threshing they send forward their joy of hope, and pant for it, joining as it were their hearts to the Angels of God, and to that people which shall abide with them in joy for ever.

For what will you then do, O Jerusalem? Surely toil and groaning will pass away. What will you do? Will you plough, or sow, or plant vines, or make voyages, or trade? What will you do? Will it still be your duty to be engaged in the works thou now doest, good though they are, and spring from mercy? Consider your numbers, consider on all sides your company: see whether any hungers, for you to give bread to; see whether any thirsts, for you to give a cup of cold water to; see whether any is a stranger, for you to take in; see whether any is sick, for you to visit; see whether any is at strife, for you to reconcile him; see whether any is dying, for you to bury him.

What then will you do? Praise in unison, O Jerusalem, your God. Behold, this is your business. As is wont to be said in inscriptions, Use it and be happy. 18. Be Jerusalem; remember of whom it is said, Lord, in Your city their image You shall bring to nought. These are they who now rejoice in such pomps; among them are they who have not come hither today because there is a show. To whom is it a gift? to whom is it a loss? Or why is it a gift? Why is it a loss? For not they only who exhibit such shows are smitten with loss, but with much greater loss are they smitten who delight in gazing on them.

The former have their chest drained of its gold, the latter have their breast robbed of the riches of righteousness. Most of the exhibitors of shows have to mourn for selling their estates; how ought the sinners to mourn, for losing their souls: Was it then for this that the Lord cried out on the Lord's Day, Watch ye, that today men should watch in this way. I beseech you, you citizens of Jerusalem, I beseech you by the peace of Jerusalem, by the Redeemer, the Builder, the Ruler of Jerusalem, that you address your prayers to God for them.

May they see, may they feel, that they are trifling; and, intent as they are on the sights which please them, may at length look on themselves, and be displeased. For in many we rejoice that this has already been done: and once we too sat there and were mad: and how many think we now sit there, who shall yet be, not only Christians, but also Bishops! From what is past, we conjecture what is to be: from what has already been done, we announce beforehand what God will do. Let your prayers be wakeful, you groan not for nothing.

Certainly they who have already escaped, praying for those who are still in danger, because they too having been among those in danger, are heard; and God shall drag His people out of the captivity of Babylon; by all means He shall redeem and deliver them, and the number of the saints who bear the image of God shall be perfected....Praise in unison, because you consist of many: praise, because you have been made one. We being many, says the Apostle, are one in Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:17 As then we are many, we praise in unison; as we are one, we praise.

The same are many and one, because He in whom they are one is ever One. 19. Wherefore, says this Jerusalem, do I praise in unison the Lord, and, as Sion, praise my God? Jerusalem is the same as Sion. For different reasons has it the two names. Jerusalem means visions of peace; Sion means watching. See whether these words do not sound like sights; that the Gentiles may not think that they have sights and we have none. Sometimes after the theatre or amphitheatre breaks up, when the crowd of lost ones begins to be vomited forth from that den, sometimes, retaining in their minds images of their vain amusements, and feeding their memory with things not only useless but even hurtful, rejoicing in them as if they were sweet, while they are really deadly; they see often, it may be, the servants of God pass by, they recognise them by their garb or headdress, or they know them by sight, and they say to one another, or inwardly, Wretched people, how much they lose!

Brethren, let us return their good will (for they do mean it well) with prayers to the Lord. They wish us well; but he that loves iniquity, hates his own soul. If he hates his own soul, how shall he love my soul? Yet with a perverse, and empty, and vain good will, if indeed it may be called good will, they grieve that we lose what they love: let us pray that they lose not what we love. Behold of what character that Jerusalem is to be which he exhorts to praise, or rather foresees will praise.

For the praises of that city, when we shall see and love and praise, will not need to be urged on and stirred up by the voice of prophecy; but the Prophets now say this, to drink in as far as while they remain in this flesh they can, the future joys of the blessed, and then giving them forth into our ears, to arouse in us love of that city. Let us burn with longing, let us not be slothful in spirit. Praise your God, O Sion.

20. He says, He has made strong the bars of your gates Psalm 147:13. The making bars strong is not for open gates, but shut ones, wherefore most manuscripts read, He has made strong the bolts of your gates. Observe, beloved. He bids Jerusalem when closed in to praise the Lord. We praise in unison now, we praise now; but it is amid offenses. Many where we wish not, enter in: many though we wish it not, go out: therefore offenses are frequent. And because iniquity has abounded, says the Truth, the love of many waxes cold: Matthew 24:12 because men come in whom we cannot discern, because men go out whom we cannot retain. Wherefore is this? Because not yet is there perfection, not yet is there the bliss that shall be. Wherefore is this? Because as yet it is the threshing-floor, not yet the garner. What therefore will be then, save no fear that anything of this kind will happen? He said not only, He has set, but, He has made strong the bars of your gates. Let none go out, let none come in. Let none go out, we rejoice: let none come in, we fear. Nay, fear not this: when you have entered it will be said: only be thou in the number of

virgins, who carried their oil with them....

21. He has blessed your children within you. Who? He who has set peace as your borders. How ye all exult! Love peace, my brethren. Greatly are we delighted, when the love of peace cries from your hearts. How greatly does it delight you! I had said nothing: I had explained nothing: I but read the verse, and you shouted. What was it that shouted in you? The love of peace....children of the kingdom, O citizens of Jerusalem, in Jerusalem is the vision of peace: and all who love peace are blest in her, and they enter in, when the doors are being shut, and the bars made strong. This, which when but named ye so love and esteem, this follow after, this long for: this love in your home, in your business, in your wives, in your sons, in your slaves, in your friends, in your enemies....

22. What ye cried out a while ago at the very mention of peace, you cried from longing: your cry was from thirst, not from fullness; for there will be perfect righteousness where will be perfect peace. Now we hunger and thirst after righteousness. They shall be filled. Matthew 5:6 How shall they be filled? When we have arrived at peace. Therefore when he had said, Who has set peace for your borders, because there is fullness and no want, he added at once, and fills you with the fat of wheat Psalm 147:14....

23. Who sends forth His Word to the earth Psalm 147:15. Behold, on earth we toil, weary, fainting, sluggish, cold: when should we be raised up to the fat of wheat that satisfies, did not He send His Word to the earth, whereby we were weighed down, to the earth, whereby we were hindered from returning? He sent His Word, He deserted us not even in the wilderness, He rained manna from heaven. Who sends forth His Word to the earth; and to earth His Word came. How? Or what is His Word? Even unto swiftness His Word runs. He said not, His Word is swift, but, His Word runs even unto swiftness. Let us understand, my brethren: He could not have chosen a better word. He who is hot grows hot by heat, he who is cold grows cold by cold, he who is swift becomes swift by swiftness....To what degree then does it run? Even to swiftness. Increase as much as you will the swiftness of the Word, and say, It is as swift as this or that, as birds, as the winds, as the Angels; is any of these as great as swiftness itself, even unto swiftness? What is swiftness itself, brethren? It is everywhere; it is not in part. This belongs to the Word of God, not to be in part, to be everywhere by Himself the Word, whereby He is the Power of God and the Wisdom of God, 1 Corinthians 1:24 before He had taken flesh upon Him. If we think of God in the Form of God, the Word equal to the Father, this is the Wisdom of God, of which is said, It reaches from one end to the other mightily. Wisdom 8:1 What mighty speed! It reaches from one end to the other mightily....

24. We then are burdened by the sluggishness of this cold body, and the bonds of this earthly and corruptible life; have we no hope of receiving the Word, which runs even unto swiftness? Or has abandoned us, though by the body we are depressed to the lowest depths? Did not He predestinate us, before we were born in this mortal and sluggish body? He then, who predestinated us, gave snow to the earth, even ourselves. For now let us come to those somewhat obscure verses of the Psalm, let those entanglements begin to be unrolled. Behold, we are sluggish on this earth, and are as it were frozen here. And just as happens to the flakes of snow, for they freeze above, then fall down; so as love grows cold, human nature falls down to this earth, and involved in a sluggish body becomes like snow. But in that snow are predestined sons of God. For, He gives snow like wool Psalm 147:16. What is like wool? It means, of the snow which He has given, of these, who are as yet slow in spirit and cold, whom He has predestinated, He is about to make somewhat. For wool is the material of a garment: when we see wool, we look on it as a sort of preparation for a garment. Therefore since He has predestinated these, who at present are cold and creep on earth, and as yet glow not with the spirit of love (for as yet He speaks of predestination), God has given these as a sort of wool: He is about to make of them a garment. Rightly did

the raiment of Christ shine on the mountain, like snow. Matthew 17:2 The raiment of Christ did shine like snow, as though of that snow a garment had already been made: of which wool, that is, of the snow which He gave like wool, they being as yet predestined, were sluggish: but wait, see what follows. Since He gave them as wool, a garment is made of them. For as the Church is called the Body of Christ, so is the Church also called the garment of Christ: hence comes that which is said by the Apostle, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle. Ephesians 5:27 Let Him then present unto Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle; let Him make Himself a garment of that wool, which He had predestinated in the snow. While men are yet unbelieving, and cold, and sluggish, let Him make a garment of this wool. That it may be washed from spots, let it be cleansed by faith: that it may have no wrinkle, let it be stretched out upon the cross....

25. He scatters mist like ashes. He scatters, says the Psalmist, mist like ashes. Who? He who gives snow like wool. For whom He predestined, He calls to repentance; for whom He predestined, them He also called. But ashes are connected with repentance. Hear Him calling to repentance, when He upbraided certain cities, saying, Woe unto you, Chorazin! Woe unto you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they had long ago repented in dust and ashes. Matthew 11:21 Therefore, He scatters mist like ashes. What is, He scatters mist like ashes? When a man is called to learn about God, and it is said to him, Receive the truth; he begins to wish to receive the Truth, but is not able; he sees that He is under a sort of darkness, which before he saw not....Wander not in the mist, follow in faith. But forasmuch as you endeavour to see and art not able, repent of your sins, for mist is scattered like ashes. Repent you now of having been obstinate against God, repent of having followed your own evil ways. You have come into this state where it is difficult for you to see the vision of bliss, and the mist will be healthful to you, which God scatters like ashes. Thou yourself art as yet a mist, but like ashes. For they that are penitent, as yet roll themselves in ashes, my brethren, testifying, as it were, that they are like it, saying unto God, I am ashes. For a certain Scripture says, I have despised myself, and wasted away, I have reckoned myself earth and ashes. This is the humility of the penitent. When Abraham speaks to his God, and wishes the burning of Sodom to be disclosed to him, he says, I am but earth and ashes. Genesis 18:27 How has this humility ever been found in great and holy men!

26. Who sends His crystal like morsels of bread Psalm 147:17. We need not spend our toil again in saying what crystal is. We have already said it, and I do not think that you, beloved, have forgotten it. What is then, He sends His crystal like morsels of bread? What is crystal? It is very hard, it is very tightly congealed; it can not, like snow, be easily melted. Snow, hardened by many years' duration, and by the succession of ages, is called crystal, and this He sends like morsels of bread. What means this? They were too hard, no longer fit to be compared to snow, but to crystal; but they too are predestinated and called, and some of them even so as to feed others, to be useful to others also. And what need is there to enumerate many, whom we happen to know, this one and that one? Every one when he thinks can recall to mind how hardened and obstinate some of those whom he knows have been, how they have struggled against the truth; yet now they preach the truth, they have been made morsels of bread. Who is that one Bread? We being many, says the Apostle, are one Body in Christ; Romans 12:5 he says also, we being many are one Bread and one Body. 1 Corinthians 10:17 If then the whole Body of Christ is one Bread, the members of Christ are morsels of Bread. Of some that are hard He makes members of Himself, and useful for feeding others....Behold, the Apostle Paul was a crystal, hard, resisting the truth, crying out against the Gospel, hardening himself, as it were, against the sun....Since then he was crystal, he appeared clear and white, but he was hard and very cold. How was he bright and white? An Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee. Behold the brightness of crystal. Now hear the hardness of

crystal. As touching zeal, persecuting the Church Philippians 3:5-6 of Christ. Among the stoners of the holy martyr Stephen, was he, hard, perhaps harder than all. For he kept the raiment of all who were stoning, Acts 22:20 so that he stoned by the hands of all.

27. Thus then we see the snow, the mist, the crystal: it is good that He blow and thaw them. For if He blow not, if He Himself thaw not the hardness of this ice, in the face of His cold who shall stand? He abandons a sinner, behold, He calls him not; behold, He opens not his perception; behold, He pours not in grace; let the man thaw himself, if he can, from the ice of folly. He cannot. Wherefore can he not? In the face of His cold who shall stand? Behold him then growing harder, and saying, O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Behold, I am growing cold, behold, I am growing hard, what heat shall thaw me that I may run? Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?....In the face of His cold who shall stand? And who shall free himself, if God abandon him? Who is it that frees? The grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 7:24-25 Are we then to despair? God forbid. For it goes on, He shall send out His Word, and melt them Psalm 147:18. Let not then the snow despair, nor the mist, nor the crystal. For of the snow, as of wool, a garment is being made. That mist finds safety in repentance: for, whom He predestinated, them He also called. But even though they be the very hardest among the predestinated, though they have been for a long time hardening, and have become crystal, they will not be hard to the mercy of God. He shall send out His Word, and melt them. What is melt? Understand not melt in an ill sense: it means, He shall liquefy, He shall thaw them. For they are hard through pride. Rightly is pride called also dulness: for whatever is dull, is also cold....Despair not even of the crystal. Hear a saying of the crystal. Who before was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious. 1 Timothy 1:13 But wherefore does God melt the crystal? That the snow despair not of itself. For he says, For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them that hereafter should believe in Him unto eternal life. 1 Timothy 1:16 God then calls unto the Gentiles, Be melted, O crystal; come, you snows. His Spirit shall blow, and the waters shall flow. Lo, the crystal and the snows are melted, they turn into water, let them that thirst, come and drink. John 7:37 Saul, hard as crystal, persecuted Stephen unto death; Paul, now in the living water, John 4:14 calls the Gentiles to the Fount....

28. Announcing His Word unto Jacob, His Righteousnesses and Judgments unto Israel Psalm 147:19. What Righteousnesses, what Judgments? Because whatever mankind had suffered here before, when it was snow and mist and crystal, it suffered for the deserts of its pride and uplifting against God. Let us go back to the origin of our fall, and see that most truly is it sung in the Psalm, Before I was troubled I went wrong. But he who says, Before I was troubled I went wrong, says also, It is good for me that You have humbled me, that I may learn Your Righteousnesses. These righteousnesses Jacob learned from God, who made him to wrestle with an Angel; under the guise of which Angel, God Himself wrestled with him. He held Him, he exerted violence to hold Him, he prevailed to hold Him: He caused Himself to be held, in mercy, not in weakness. Jacob therefore wrestled, and prevailed: he held Him and when he seemed to have conquered Him asked to be blessed of Him. How did he understand with Whom he had wrestled, Whom he had held? Wherefore did he wrestle violently, and hold Him? Because the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. Matthew 11:12 Wherefore then did he wrestle? Because it is with toil. Wherefore do we with difficulty hold, what we so easily lose? Lest, easily getting back what we have lost, we learn to lose that which we hold. Let man have toil to hold: he will hold firmly, what he has only held after toil. These His judgments therefore God manifested to Jacob and Israel....

29. He has not done so to the whole race Psalm 147:20. Let none deceive you: it is not announced to any nation, this judgment of God; namely, how the righteous and the unrighteous suffer, how all suffer for their deserts, how the righteous themselves are freed by the grace of God, not in their own merits. This is not announced to the whole race, but only to Jacob, only to Israel. What then do we, if He has not announced it to the whole race, but only to Jacob, only to Israel? Where will we be? In Jacob. He has not manifested His judgments to them. To whom? To all nations. How then are the snows called, when the crystal is melted? How are the nations called, now Paul is justified? How, save to be in Jacob? The wild olive is cut off from its stock, to be grafted into the olive: now they belong to the olive, no longer ought they to be called nations, but one nation in Christ, the nation of Jacob, the nation of Israel...What is Israel? Seeing God. Where shall he see God? In peace. What peace? The peace of Jerusalem; for, says he, He has set peace for your borders. There shall we praise: there shall we all be one, in One, unto One: for then, though many, we shall not be scattered.

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