

Exposition on Psalm 86

by St. Augustine

God hears the prayers of the humble and those who recognize their dependence on Him, and He promises to fix their prayer in His ears.

Topics: "Christology", "Prayer Life"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the significance of being united with Christ, emphasizing the inseparable connection between believers and Jesus as the Son of God and the Son of man. He highlights the importance of prayer, acknowledging Jesus as the one who prays for us, in us, and with us. St. Augustine urges believers to recognize the presence of Christ in their words and to fully surrender to Him. He discusses the humility of Christ in joining Himself to humanity and the need for believers to ask for God's mercy and guidance.

Transcript

1. No greater gift could God have given to men than in making His Word, by which He created all things, their Head, and joining them to Him as His members: that the Son of God might become also the Son of man, one God with the Father, one Man with men; so that when we speak to God in prayer for mercy, we do not separate the Son from Him; and when the Body of the Son prays, it separates not its Head from itself: and it is one Saviour of His Body, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who both prays for us, and prays in us, and is prayed to by us. He prays for us, as our Priest; He prays in us, as our Head; He is prayed to by us, as our God. Let us therefore recognise in Him our words, and His words in us. Nor when anything is said of our Lord Jesus Christ, especially in prophecy, implying a degree of humility below the dignity of God, let us hesitate to ascribe it to Him who did not hesitate to join Himself unto us....He is prayed to in the form of God, in the form of a servant He prays; there the Creator, here created; assuming unchanged the creature, that it might be changed, and making us with Himself one Man, Head and Body. Therefore we pray to Him, through Him, in Him; and we speak with Him, and He speaks with us; we speak in Him, He speaks in us the prayer of this Psalm, which is entitled, A Prayer of David. For our Lord was, according to the flesh, the son of David; but according to His divine nature, the Lord of David, and his Maker....Let no one then, when he hears these words, say, Christ speaks not; nor again say, I speak not; nay rather, if he own himself to be in the Body of Christ, let him say both, Christ speaks, and I speak. Be thou unwilling to say anything without Him, and He says nothing without you....

2. Bow down Your ear, O Lord, and hear me Psalm 85:1. He speaks in the form of a servant: speak thou, O servant, in the form of your Lord: Bow down Your ear, O Lord. He bows down His ear, if you dost not lift up your neck: for unto the humble He draws near: from him that is exalted He removes afar off, except whom He Himself has exalted from being humble. God then bows down His ear unto us. For He is above, we below: He in a high place, we in a lowly one, yet not deserted. For while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. For scarcely for a just man will one die: yet for a good man perhaps one would even dare to die: Romans 5:8, 7 but our Lord died for the wicked. For no merits of ours had gone before, for which the Son of God should die: but the more, because there were no merits, was His mercy great. How sure then, how firm is the promise, by which for the righteous He keeps His life, who for the wicked gave His own death! For I am poor and in misery. To the rich then He bows not down His ear: unto the poor and him that is in misery He bows down His ear, that is, unto the humble, and him that confesses, unto him that is in need of mercy: not unto him that is full, who lifts up himself and boasts, as if he wanted nothing, and says, I thank You that I am not as this Publican. For the rich Pharisee boasted of his merits: the poor Publican confessed his sins. Luke 18:11-13

3. Yet do not take what I have said, my brethren, in such a way, as if God does not hear those who have gold and silver, and a household, and farms, if they happen to be born to this estate, or hold such a rank in the world: only let them remember the Apostle's words: Charge those who are rich in this world, that they be not highminded. 1 Timothy 6:17 For those that are not highminded are poor in God, and to the poor and needy and those in want He inclines His ear. For they know that their hope is not in gold and silver, nor in those things in which for a time they seem to abound. It is enough that riches ruin them not; it is enough that they do them no harm: for good they can do them none. What certainly profits is a work of mercy, done by a rich or by a poor man: by a rich man, with will and deed; by a poor man, with will alone. When therefore he is such an one as despises in himself everything which is wont to swell men with pride, he is one of God's poor: He inclines unto him His ear, for He knows that his heart is contrite....Was it really for the merit of his poverty that the poor man was carried away by Angels, Luke 16:19-24 or was it for the sin of his riches that the rich man was sent away to be tormented? In that poor man is signified the honour which is paid to humility, in that rich man the condemnation which awaits pride. I will prove shortly that it was not riches but pride which was tormented in that rich man. It is certain that the poor man was carried into the bosom of Abraham: of Abraham himself Scripture says that he had here very much gold and silver, and was rich on the earth. Genesis 13:2 If every one that is rich is hurried away to be tormented, how could Abraham have gone before that poor man, so as to be ready to receive him when carried to his bosom? But Abraham in his riches was poor, humble, reverencing all commands, and obeying them. So true was it that he counted all those riches for nothing, that on God's command he was ready to sacrifice his son, Genesis 22:10 for whom he was keeping his riches. Learn therefore ye to be poor and needy, whether you have anything in this world, or whether you have not....

4. Preserve My Soul, for I am holy Psalm 85:2. I know not whether any one could say this, I am holy, but He who was in the world without sin: He by whom all sins were not committed but remitted. We own it to be His voice saying, Preserve My Soul, for I am holy; of course in that form of a servant which He had assumed. For in that was flesh, in that, was also a Soul. For He was not, as some have said, only Flesh and the Word: but Flesh and Soul also, and the Word, and all this, One Son of God, One Christ, One Saviour; in the form of God equal to the Father, in the form of a servant the Head of the Church. When therefore I hear, for I am holy, I recognise His voice: yet do I exclude my own? Surely He speaks inseparably from His body when He speaks thus. Shall I then dare to say, For I am holy? If holy as making holy, and as needing none to sanctify, I should be proud and false: but if holy as made holy, as it is written,

Be holy, for I am holy, Leviticus 19:2 then the body of Christ may venture, and that one Man crying from the end of the earth, may venture with his Head, and under his Head, to say, For I am holy. For he has received the grace of holiness, the grace of Baptism, and of remission of sins. 1 Corinthians 6:11 ...Say unto your God, I am holy, for You have sanctified me: because I received, not because I had: because You gave, not because I deserved. For on another side you are beginning to do an injury to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. For if all Christians who are faithful and have been baptized in Him have put Him on, as the Apostle says, As many as are baptized in Christ have put on Christ: Galatians 3:27 if they have been made members of His body, and say that they are not holy, they do injury to their Head, of whom they are members, and yet not holy. Look thou where you are and from your Head assume dignity. For thou were in darkness, but now light in the Lord. Ephesians 5:8 You were sometime darkness, he says: but did ye remain darkness? Was it for this the Enlightener came, that you might still remain darkness, or that in Him ye might become light? Therefore, every Christian by himself, therefore also the whole body of Christ, may say, it may cry everywhere, while it suffers tribulations, various temptations and offenses, it may say, Preserve my soul, for I am holy: my God, save Your servant, that puts his trust in You. See thou, that holy man is not proud, since he puts his trust in God.

5. Be merciful unto me, O Lord, for I have cried unto You all day Psalm 85:3. Not one day: understand all day to mean continually: from the time that the body of Christ groans being in afflictions, until the end of the world, when afflictions pass away, that man groans and calls upon God: and each one of us after his measure has his part in that cry in the whole body. You have cried in your days, and your days have passed away: another has come after you, and cried in his days: and thou here, he there, another elsewhere: the body of Christ cries all the day, its members departing and succeeding one another. One Man it is that reaches to the end of the world: the same members of Christ cry, and some members already rest in Him, some still cry, some when we shall be at rest will cry, and after them others will cry. It is the whole body of Christ whose voice He hears, saying, Unto You have I cried all the day. Our Head on the right hand of the Father intercedes for us: some members He recovers, others He scourges, others He cleanses, others He comforts, others He is creating, others calling, others recalling, others correcting, others restoring.

6. Make glad the soul of Your servant: for unto You, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul Psalm 85:4. Make it glad, for unto You have I lifted it up. For it was on earth, and from the earth it felt bitterness: lest it should wither away in bitterness, lest it should lose all the sweetness of Your grace, I lifted it up unto You: make it glad with Yourself. For You alone are gladness: the whole world is full of bitterness. Surely with reason He admonishes His members to lift up their hearts. May they hear and do it: may they lift up unto Him what on earth is ill. There the heart decays not, if it be lifted up to God. If you had grain in your rooms below, you would take it up higher, lest it should grow rotten. Would you remove your grain, and do you suffer your heart to rot on the earth? You would take your grain up higher: lift up your heart to heaven. And how can I, do you say? What ropes are needed? What machines? What ladders? Your affections are the steps: your will the way. By loving you mount, by neglect you descend. Standing on the earth you are in heaven, if you love God. For the heart is not so raised as the body is raised: the body to be lifted up changes its place: the heart to be lifted up changes its will.

7. For You, Lord, art good and gracious Psalm 85:5...Even prayers are often hindered by vain thoughts, so that the heart scarcely remains fixed on God: and it would hold itself so as to be fixed, and somehow flees from itself, and finds no frames in which it can enclose itself, no bars by which it may keep in its flights and wandering movements, and stand still to be made glad by its God. Scarcely does one such

prayer occur among many. Each one might say that this happened to him, but that it happened not to others, if we did not find in the holy Scripture David praying in a certain place, and saying, Since I have found my heart, O Lord, so that I might pray unto You. 2 Samuel 7:27 He said that he had found his heart, as if it were wont to flee from him, and he to follow it like a fugitive, and not be able to catch it, and to cry to God, For my heart has deserted me.

Therefore, my brethren, thinking over what he says here, I think I see what he means by gracious. I seem to feel that for this reason he calls God gracious, because He bears with those failings of ours, and yet expects prayer from us, in order to make us perfect: and when we have given it to Him, He receives it gratefully, and listens to it, and remembers not those many prayers which we pour out unthinkingly, and accepts the one which we can scarcely find. For what man is there, my brethren, who, on being addressed by his friend, when he wishes to answer his address, sees his friend turn away from him and speak to another, who is there who would bear this?

Or if you appeal to a judge, and set him up to hear you, and all at once, while you are speaking to him, pass from him, and begin to converse with your friend, who would endure this? Yet God endures the hearts of so many persons who pray and think of different things....What then? Must we despair of mankind, and say that every man is already condemned into whose prayers any wandering thoughts have crept and interrupted them? If we say this, my brethren, I know not what hope remains.

Therefore because there is some hope before God, because His mercy is great, let us say unto Him, For unto You, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul. And how have I lifted it up? As I could, as You gave me strength, as I could catch it when it fled away....From infirmity I sink: heal me, and I shall stand: strengthen me, and I shall be strong. But until You do this, You bear with me: For You, Lord, are good and gracious, and of great mercy. That is, not only of mercy, but of great mercy: for as our iniquity abounds, so also abounds Your mercy.

Unto all that call upon You. What is it then which Scripture says in many places: They shall call, and I will not hear them? Proverbs 1:28 Yet surely You are merciful to all that call upon You; but that some call, yet call not upon Him, of whom it is said, They have not called upon God. They call, but not on God. You call upon whatever you love: you call upon whatever you call unto yourself, whatever you wish to come unto you. Therefore if you call upon God for this reason, in order that money may come unto you, that an inheritance may come unto you, that worldly rank may come unto you, you call upon those things which you desire may come unto you: but you make God the helper of your desires, not the listener to your needs.

God is good, if He gives what you wish? What if you wish ill, will He not then be more merciful by not giving? Then, if He gives not, then is God nothing to you; and you say, How much I have prayed, how often I have prayed, and have not been heard! Why, what did you ask? Perhaps that your enemy might die. What if he at the same time were praying for your death? He who created you, created him also: you are a man, he too is a man; but God is the Judge: He hears both, and He grants their prayer to neither.

You are sad, because you were not heard when praying against him; be glad, because his prayer was not heard against you. But you say, I did not ask for this; I asked not for the death of my enemy, but for the life of my child; what ill did I ask? You asked no ill, as you thought. What if he was taken away, lest wickedness should alter his understanding. Wisdom 4:11 But he was a sinner, you say, and therefore I wished him to live, that he might be corrected. You wished him to live, that he might become better; what if

God knew, that if he lived he would become worse?...If, therefore, you call on God as God, be confident you shall be heard: you have part in that verse: And of great mercy unto all that call upon You....

8. Think, brethren, and reflect what good things God gives unto sinners: and learn hence what He keeps for His own servants. To sinners who blaspheme Him every day He gives the sky and the earth, He gives springs, fruits, health, children, wealth, abundance: all these good things none gives but God. He who gives such things to sinners, what do you think He keeps for His faithful ones? Is this to be believed of Him, that He who gives such things to the bad, keeps nothing for the good? Nay verily He does keep, not earth, but heaven for them. Too common a thing perhaps I say when I say heaven; Himself rather, who made the heaven. Fair is heaven, but fairer is the Maker of heaven. But I see the heavens, Him I see not. Because you have eyes to see the heavens: a heart you have not yet to see the Maker of heaven: therefore came He from heaven to earth, to cleanse the heart, that He may be seen who made heaven and earth. But wait thou with full patience for salvation. By what treatment to cure you, He knows: by what cutting, what burning, He knows. You have brought sickness on yourself by sinning: He comes not only to nurse, but also to cut and to burn. Seest thou not how much men suffer under the hands of physicians, when a man promises them an uncertain hope? You will be cured, says the physician: you will be cured, if I cut. It is a man who speaks, and to a man that he speaks: neither is he sure who speaks, nor he who hears, for he who is speaking to the man has not made man, and knows not perfectly what is passing in man: yet at the words of a man who knows not what is passing in man, man sooner believes, submits his limbs, suffers himself to be bound, often without being bound is cut or burned; and receives perhaps health for a few days, even when just healed not knowing when he may die: perhaps, while being healed, dies; perhaps cannot be healed. But to whom has God promised anything, and deceived him?

9. Fix my prayer in Your ears, O Lord Psalm 85:6. Great earnestness of him who prays! That is, let not my prayer go out of Your ears, fix it then in Your ears. How did he travail that he might fix his prayer in the ears of God? Let God answer and say to us; Would you that I fix your prayer in My ears? Fix My law in your heart; and attend to the voice of my prayer.

10. In the day of my trouble I have cried unto You, for You have heard me Psalm 85:7. A little before he had said, All the day have I cried, all the day have I been troubled. Let no Christian then say that there is any day in which he is not troubled. By all the day we have understood the whole of time. What then, is there trouble even when it is well with us? Even so, trouble. How is there trouble? Because as long as we are in the body we are absent from the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:6 Let what will abound here, we are not yet in that country whither we are hastening to return. He to whom foreign travel is sweet, loves not his country: if his country is sweet, travel is bitter; if travel is bitter, all the day there is trouble. When is there not trouble? When there is joy in one's country. At Your right hand are delights for evermore. You shall fill me with joy, he says, with Your countenance: that I may see the delight of the Lord. There toil and groaning shall pass away: there shall be not prayer but praise; there Alleluia, there Amen, the voice in concord with Angels; there vision without failing and love without weariness. So long therefore as we are not there, you see that we are not in that which is good. But do all things abound? If all things abound, see if you are assured that all things perish not. But I have what I had not: more money has come to me which I had not before. Perhaps more fear too has come, which you had not before: perhaps you were so much the more secure as you were the poorer. In fine, be it that you have wealth, that you have redundancy of this world's affluence, that you have assurance given you that all this shall not perish; besides this, that God say unto you, You shall remain for ever in these things, they shall be for ever with you, but My face you shall not see. Let none ask counsel of the flesh: ask ye counsel of the Spirit: let your heart answer you; let hope,

faith, charity, which has begun to be in you, answer. If then we were to receive assurance that we should always be in affluence of worldly goods, and if God were to say to us, My face you shall not see, would ye rejoice in these goods? Some one might perhaps choose to rejoice, and say, These things abound unto me, it is well with me, I ask no more. He has not yet begun to be a lover of God: he has not yet begun to sigh like one far from home. Far be it, far be it from us: let them retire, all those seductions: let them retire, those false blandishments: let them be gone, those words which they say daily unto us, Where is your God? Let us pour out our soul over us, let us confess in tears, let us groan in confession, let us sigh in misery. Whatever is present with us besides our God, is not sweet: we would not have all things that He has given, if He gives not Himself who gave all things.

11. Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord Psalm 85:8. What did he say? Among the gods, etc. Let the Pagans make for themselves what gods they will; let them bring workmen in silver and in gold, furbishers, sculptors; let them make gods. What kind of gods? Having eyes, and seeing not; and the other things which the Psalm mentions in what follows. But we do not worship these, he says; we do not worship them, these are symbols. What then do ye worship? Something else that is worse: for the gods of the gentiles are devils. What then? Neither, say they, do we worship devils. You have certainly nothing else in your temples, nothing else inspires your prophets than a devil. But what do ye say? We worship Angels, we have Angels as gods. You know not altogether what Angels are. Angels worship the one God, and favour not men who wish to worship Angels and not God. For we find Angels of high rank forbidding men to adore them, and commanding them to adore the true God. Revelation 19:10 But when they say Angels, suppose they mean men, since it is said, I have said, You are Gods, and all the children of the Most Highest. Whatever man thinks to the contrary, that which was made is not like Him who made it. Except God, whatever else there is in the universe was made by God. What a difference there is between Him who made, and that which was made, who can worthily imagine? Therefore this man said, there is none like You, O Lord: there is not one that can do as you do. But how much God is unlike them he said not, because it cannot be said. Let your Charity attend: God is ineffable: we more easily say what He is not than what He is. You think of the earth; this is not God: you think of the sea; this is not God: of all things which are in the earth, men and animals; this is not God: of all things which are in the sea, which fly through the air; this is not God: whatever shines in the sky, the stars, sun and moon; this is not God: the heaven itself; this is not God: think of the Angels, Virtues, Powers, Archangels, Thrones, Seats, Principalities; this is not God. What is He then? I could only tell you, what He is not. Askest thou what He is? What the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, nor has risen up into the heart of man. 1 Corinthians 2:9 ...

12. All nations that You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord Psalm 85:9. He has announced the Church: All nations. If there is any nation which God has not made, it will not worship Him: but there is no nation which God has not made; because God made Adam and Eve, the source of all nations, thence all nations sprang. All nations therefore has God made. When was this said? When before Him there worshipped none but a few holy men in one people of the Hebrews, then this was said: and see now what it is which was said: All nations that You have made, etc. When these things were spoken, they were not seen, and they were believed: now that they are seen, why are they denied? All nations that You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your Name.

13. For You are great, and doing wondrous things: You alone are the great God Psalm 85:10. Let no man call himself great. Some were to be who would call themselves great: against these it is said, You alone are the great God. For what great thing is ascribed to God, when it is said that He alone is the great God?

Who knows not that He is the great God? But because there were to be some who would call themselves great and make God little, against these it is said, You alone are the great God.

For what You say is fulfilled, not what those say who call themselves great. What has God said by His Spirit? All nations. What says he, whoever he is, who calls himself great? Far from it: God is not worshipped in all nations: all nations have perished, Africa alone remains. This you say, who callest yourself great: another thing He says who alone is the great God. What says He, who alone is the great God? All nations. I see what the only great God has said: let man be silent, who is falsely great; great only in appearance, because he disdains to be small.

Who disdains to be small? He who says this. Whoever will be great among you, said the Lord, shall be your servant. Matthew 20:26 If that man had wished to be the servant of his brethren, he would not have separated them from their mother: but when he wishes to be great, and wishes not to be small, as would be for his welfare, God, who resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble, James 4:6 because He alone is great, fulfills all things which He predicted, and contradicts those who blaspheme.

For such persons blaspheme against Christ, who say that the Church has perished from the whole world, and is left only in Africa. If you were to say to him, You will lose your villa, he would perhaps scarcely keep from laying his hand upon you: and yet he says, that Christ has lost His inheritance, redeemed by His own Blood! See now what a wrong he does, my brethren. The Scripture says, In a wide nation is the king's honour; but in the domination of the people is the affliction of a prince.

Proverbs 14:28 This wrong then thou dost unto Christ, to say that His people is diminished to that small number. Was it for this you were born, for this you call yourself a Christian, that you may grudge Christ His glory, whose sign you say that you bear on your forehead, and hast lost out of your heart? In a wide nation is the king's honour: acknowledge your King: give Him glory, give Him a wide nation. What wide nation shall I give Him, do you say? Choose not to give Him from your own heart, and you will give aright.

Whence am I to give? You will say. Lo, give from hence: All nations that You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord. Say this, confess this, and you have given a wide nation: for all nations in One are one: this is very oneness. For as there is a Church and Churches, and those are Churches which also are a Church, so that is a nation which was nations: formerly nations, many nations, now one nation. Why one nation? Because one faith, one hope, one charity, one expectation.

Lastly, why not one nation, if one country? Our country is heavenly, our country is Jerusalem: whoever is not a citizen of it, belongs not to that nation: but whoever is a citizen of it is in that one nation of God. And this nation, from the east to the west, from the north and the sea, is extended through the four quarters of the whole world. This God says: From the east and west, from the north and the sea, give glory to God. This He foretold, this He fulfilled, who alone is great.

Let him therefore who would not be little cease from saying this against Him who alone is great: for there cannot be two great, God and Donatus. 14. Lead me, O Lord, in Your way, and I will walk in Your truth Psalm 85:11. Your way, Your truth, Your life, is Christ. Therefore belongs the Body to Him, and the Body is of Him. I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. John 14:6 Lead me, O Lord, in Your way. In what way? And I will walk in Your truth. It is one thing to lead to the way, another to guide in the way.

Behold man everywhere poor, everywhere in need of help. Those who are beside the way are not Christians, or not yet Catholics: let them be guided to the way: but when they have been brought to the

way and made Catholics in Christ, they must be guided by Him in the way itself, lest they fall. Now assuredly they walk in the way. Lead me, O Lord, in Your way: surely I am now in Your way, lead me there. And I will walk in Your truth: while You lead I shall not err: if Thou let me go, I shall err.

Pray then that He let you not go, but lead you even to the end. How does He lead you? By always admonishing, always giving you His hand. And the arm of the Lord, to whom is it revealed? Isaiah 53:1 For in giving His Christ He gives His hand: in giving His hand, He gives His Christ. He leads to the way, in leading to His Christ: He leads in the way, by leading in His Christ, and Christ is truth. Lead me, therefore, O Lord, in Your way, and I will walk in Your truth: in Him verily who said, I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. John 14:6 For Thou who leadest in the way and the truth, whither leadest Thou, but unto life? In Him then, unto Him You lead.

15. Let my heart be made glad, so that it may fear Your name. There is then fear in gladness. How can there be gladness, if fear? Is not fear wont to be painful? There will hereafter be gladness without fear, now gladness with fear; for not yet is there perfect security, nor perfect gladness. If there is no gladness, we faint: if full security, we rejoice wrongly. Therefore may He both sprinkle on us gladness, and strike fear into us, that by the sweetness of gladness He may lead us to the abode of security; by giving us fear, may cause us not to rejoice wrongly, and to withdraw from the way. Therefore says the Psalm: Serve the Lord in fear, and rejoice unto Him with trembling: so also says the Apostle Paul; Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that works in you. Philippians 2:12-13 Whatever prosperity comes then, my brethren, is rather to be feared: those things which you think to be prosperous, are rather temptations. An inheritance comes, there comes wealth, there is an abundant overflow of some happiness: these are temptations: take care that they corrupt you not. Whatever prosperity also there is according to Christ, and the true love of Christ: if perhaps you have gained your wife, who was of the party of Donatus: if your sons have been made believers who were Pagans: if perhaps you have gained your friend who wished to draw you away to the theatres, and you have drawn him to the church: if some hostile opponent of yours who was furiously mad against you, laying aside his fury, has become gentle, and owned God, and now barks at you no more, but cries with you against wickedness: these things are pleasant. For what do we rejoice for, if we do not rejoice for these things? Or what other are our joys, but these? But because tribulations also abound, and temptations, and dissensions, and schisms, and other evils, without which this world cannot be, until iniquity pass away: let not that rejoicing make us secure, but let our heart be so made glad, as to fear the name of the Lord, lest it be made glad on one side, be stricken on another. Expect not security in journeying: if ever we wish for it here, it will be the birdlime of the body, not the safety of the man. Let my heart be made glad, so that it may fear Your name.

16. I will confess unto You, O Lord my God, in my whole heart, and I will glorify Your name for ever Psalm 85:12: for great is Your mercy toward me, and You have delivered my soul from the nethermost hell Psalm 85:13. Do not be angry, brethren, if I do not explain what I have said as though I were certain. For I am a man, and as much as is granted to me concerning the sacred Scriptures, so much I venture to speak: nothing of myself. Hades I have not yet seen, nor have you: and there will be perhaps another way for us, and not through Hades. These things are uncertain. But because Scripture, which cannot be gainsaid, says, You have delivered my soul from the nether-most hell, we understand that there are as it were two hells, an upper one and a lower one: for how can there be a lower hell, unless because there is also an upper? The one would not be called lower, except by comparison with that upper part. It appears then, my brethren, that there is some heavenly abode of Angels: there is there a life of ineffable joys, there immortality and incorruption, there all things abiding according to the gift and grace of God. That part of

the creation is above. If then that is above, but this earthly part, where is flesh and blood, where is corruptibleness, where is nativity and mortality, departure and succession, changeableness and inconstancy, where are fears, desires, horrors, uncertain joys, frail hope, perishable existence; I suppose that all this part cannot be compared with that heaven of which I was just now speaking; if then this part cannot be compared with that, the one is above, the other below. And whither do we go after death, unless there is a depth deeper than this depth in which we are in the flesh and in this mortal state? For the body is dead, says the Apostle, because of sin. Romans 8:10 Therefore even here are the dead; that you may not wonder because it is called infernum, if it abounds with the dead. For he says not, the body is about to die: but, the body is dead. Even now surely our body has life: and yet compared with that body which is to be like the bodies of Angels, the body of man is found to be dead, although still having life. But again, from this infernum, that is from this part of Hades, there is another lower, whither the dead go: from whence God would rescue our souls, even sending there His own Son. For it was on account of these two hells, my brethren, that the Son of God was sent, on all sides setting free. To this hell he was sent by being born, to that by dying. Therefore it is His voice in that Psalm, not according to any man's conjecture, but an Apostle explaining, when he says, For You will not leave my soul in hell. Therefore it is here also either His voice, You have delivered my soul from the nethermost hell: or our voice by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself: for on this account He came even unto hell, that we might not remain in hell.

17. I will mention another opinion also. For perhaps even in hell itself there is some lower part where are thrust the ungodly who have sinned most. For whether in hell there were not some places where Abraham was, we cannot define sufficiently. For not yet had the Lord come to hell that He might rescue from thence the souls of all the saints who had gone before, and yet Abraham was there in repose. Luke 16:22 And a certain rich man when he was in torments in hell, when he saw Abraham, lifted up his eyes.

He could not have seen him by lifting up his eyes, unless the one was above, the other below. And what did Abraham answer unto him, when he said, send Lazarus. My son, he said, remember that thou in your lifetime received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is at rest, but you are tormented. And besides this, he said, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that neither can we go to you, nor can any one come from thence to us. Luke 16:24-26 Therefore between these two hells, perhaps, in one of which the souls of the just have gotten rest, in the other the souls of the ungodly are tormented, one waiting and praying here, placed here in the body of Christ, and praying in the voice of Christ, said that God had delivered his soul from the nethermost hell, because He delivered him from such sins as might have been the means of drawing him down to the torments of the nethermost hell....Some one having a troublesome cause was to be sent to prison: another comes and defends him; what does he say when he thanks him?

You have delivered my soul out of prison. A debtor was to be hanged up: his debt is paid; he is said to be delivered from being hanged up. They were not in all these evils: but because they were in such due course towards them, that unless aid had been brought, they would have been in them, they rightly say that they are delivered from thence, whither they were not suffered by their deliverers to be taken. Therefore, brethren, whether it be this or that, consider me to be herein an inquirer into the word of God, not a rash assertor. 18.

O God, the transgressors of the law have arisen up against me Psalm 85:14. Whom calls he transgressors of the law? Not the Pagans, who have not received the law: for no one transgresses that which he has not received; the Apostle says clearly, For where there is no law, there is no prevarication. Romans 4:15 Transgressors of the law he calls prevaricators. Whom then do we understand, brethren? If we take this

word from our Lord Himself, the transgressors of the law were the Jews....They did not keep the law, and accused Christ as if He transgressed the law.

And we know what the Lord suffered. Do you think His Body suffers no such thing now? How can this be? If they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more those of his household? The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. The body also suffers transgressors of the law, and they rise up against the Body of Christ. Who are the transgressors of the law? Do the Jews perchance dare to rise up against Christ? No: for it is not they that cause us much trouble.

For they have not yet believed: they have not yet owned their salvation. Against the Body of Christ bad Christians rise up, from whom the Body of Christ daily suffers trouble. All schisms, all heresies, all within who live wickedly and engraft their own character on those who live well, and draw them over to their own side, and with evil communications corrupt good manners; these persons transgressing the law rose up against Me. 1 Corinthians 15:33 Let every pious soul speak, let every Christian soul speak.

That one which suffers not this, let it not speak. But if it is a Christian soul, it knows that it suffers evils: if it owns in itself its own sufferings, let it own herein its own voice; but if it is without suffering, let it also be without the voice; but that it may not be without suffering, let it walk along the narrow way, Matthew 7:14 and begin to live godly in Christ: it must of necessity suffer this persecution. For all, says the Apostle, who will live godly in Christ, suffer persecution. 2 Timothy 3:12

And the synagogue of the powerful have sought after My soul. The synagogue of the powerful is the congregation of the proud. The synagogue of the powerful rose up against the Head, that is, our Lord Jesus Christ, crying and saying with one mouth, Crucify Him, crucify Him: John 19:6 of whom it is said, The sons of men, their teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. They did not strike, but cried: by crying they struck, by crying they crucified Him. The will of those who cried was fulfilled, when the Lord was crucified: And they did not place You before their eyes. How did they not place Him before them? They did not know Him God. They should have spared him as Man: what they saw, according to this they should have walked. Suppose that He was not God, He was man: was He therefore to be slain? Spare Him a man, and own Him God.

19. And You, Lord God, art One who hast compassion and merciful, longsuffering, and very pitiful, and true Psalm 85:15. Wherefore longsuffering and very pitiful, and One who hast compassion? Because hanging on the Cross He said: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Luke 23:34 Whom prays He to? For whom does He pray? Who prays? Where prays He? The Son prays to the Father, crucified for the ungodly, in the midst of very insults, not of words but of death inflicted, hanging on the Cross; as if for this He had His hands stretched out, that thus He might pray for them, that His prayer might be directed like incense in the sight of the Father, and the lifting up of His hands like an evening sacrifice.

20. If therefore You are true, Look upon me, and have mercy upon me: give power unto Your servant. Because You are true, give power unto Your servant Psalm 85:16. Let the time of patience pass away, the time of judgment come. How, give power? The Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son. John 5:22 He rising again will come even to earth Himself to judge: He will appear terrible who appeared despicable. He will show His power, who showed His patience; on the Cross was patience; in the judgment will be power. For He will appear as Man judging, but in glory: because as you saw Him go, said the Angels, so He will come. Acts 1:11 His very form shall come to judgment; therefore the

ungodly also shall see Him: for they shall not see the form of God. For blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Matthew 5:8 ...In the vision of the Father there is also the vision of the Son: and in the vision of the Son there is also the vision of the Father. Therefore He adds a consequence, and says: Do you not know that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? John 14:10 that is, both in Me seen the Father is seen, and in the Father seen the Son too is seen. The vision of the Father and the Son cannot be separated: where nature and substance is not separated, there vision cannot be separated. For that you may know that the heart ought to be made ready for that place, to see the Divinity of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, in which though not seen we believe, and by believing cleanse the heart that there may be able to be sight: the Lord Himself says in another place, He that has My commands and keeps them, he it is that loves Me: and he that loves Me shall be loved by My Father: and I will love him, and will manifest Myself unto him. John 14:21 Did they not see Him, with whom He was talking? They both saw Him, and did not see Him? They saw something, they believed something: they saw Man, they believed in God. But in the Judgment they shall see the same Lord Jesus Christ as Man, together with the wicked: after the Judgment, they shall see God, apart from the wicked.

21. And save the Son of Your handmaid. The Lord is the Son of the handmaid. Of what handmaid? Her who when He was announced as about to be born of her, answered and said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it unto me according to Your word. Luke 1:38 He saved the Son of His handmaid, and His own Son: His own Son, in the Form of God; Philippians 1:6 the Son of His handmaid in the form of a servant. Of the handmaid of God, therefore, the Lord was born in the form of a servant; and He said, Save the Son of Your handmaid. And He was saved from death, as you know, His flesh, which was dead, being raised again....And each several Christian placed in the Body of Christ may say, Save the Son of Your handmaid. Perhaps he cannot say, Give power unto Your servant: because it was He, the Son, who received power. Yet wherefore says He not this also? Was it not said to servants, You shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel? Matthew 19:28 and the servants say, Do you not know that we shall judge Angels? 1 Corinthians 6:3 Each one therefore of the saints receives also power, and each several saint is the son of His handmaid. What if he is born of a pagan mother, and has become a Christian? How can the son of a pagan be the son of His handmaid: He is indeed the son of a pagan mother after the flesh, but the son of the Church after the Spirit.

22. Show me a sign for good Psalm 85:17. What sign, but that of the Resurrection? The Lord says: This wicked and provoking generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of the Prophet Jonah. Matthew 12:39 Therefore in our Head a sign has been shown already for good; each one of us also may say, Show me a sign for good: because at the last trumpet, at the coming of the Lord, both the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 1 Corinthians 15:52 This will be a sign for good. That they who hate me may see it, and be ashamed. In the judgment they shall be ashamed unto their destruction, who will not now be ashamed unto their healing. Now therefore let them be ashamed: let them accuse their own ways, let them keep the good way: because none of us lives without being ashamed, unless he first be ashamed and live anew. Now God grants them the approach of a healthy shame, if they despise not the medicine of confession: but if they will not now be ashamed, then they shall be ashamed, when their iniquities shall convince them to their face. How shall they be ashamed? When they shall say, These are they whom we had sometimes in derision, and a parable of reproach. We fools counted their life madness: how are they numbered among the children of God! What has pride profited us? Then shall they say this: let them say it now, and they say it to their health. For let each one turn humbly to God, and now say, What has my pride profited me? And hear from the Apostle, For what glory had ye in those things of which you are now ashamed? Romans 6:21 You see that there is even now a

wholesome shame while there is a place of penitence: but then one which will be late, useless, fruitless....

23. For You, Lord, have helped me, and comforted me. Have helped me, in struggle; and comforted me, in sorrow. For no one seeks comfort, but he who is in misery. Would ye not be consoled? Say that you are happy, and you hear, My people (now ye answer, and I hear a murmur, as of persons who remember the Scriptures. May God, who has written this in your hearts, confirm it in your deeds. You see, brethren, that those who say unto you, You are happy, seduce you), O My people, they that call you happy cause you to err, and disturb the way of your feet.

So also from the Epistle of the Apostle James: Be afflicted, and mourn: let your laughter be turned to mourning. James 4:9 You see what you have heard read: when would such things be said unto us in the land of security? This surely is the land of offenses, and temptations, and of all evils, that we may groan here, and deserve to rejoice there; here to be troubled, and there to be comforted, and to say, For You have delivered my eyes from tears, my feet from falling: I will please the Lord in the land of the living.

This is the land of the dead. The land of the dead passes, the land of the living comes. In the land of the dead is labour, grief, fear, tribulation, temptation, groaning, sighing: here are false happy ones, true unhappy, because happiness is false, misery is true. But he that owns himself to be in true misery, will also be in true happiness: and yet now because you are miserable, hear the Lord saying, Blessed are they that mourn. Matthew 5:4 O blessed they that mourn! Nothing is so akin to misery as mourning: nothing so remote and contrary to misery as blessedness: You speak of those who mourn, and You call them blessed!

Understand, He says, what I say: I call those who mourn blessed. Wherefore blessed? In hope. Wherefore mourning? In act. For they mourn in this death, in these tribulations, in their wandering: and because they own themselves to be in this misery, and mourn, they are blessed. Wherefore do they mourn? The blessed Cyprian was put to sorrow in his passion: now he is comforted with his crown; now though comforted, he was sad. For our Lord Jesus Christ still intercedes for us: all the Martyrs who are with Him intercede for us.

Their intercessions pass not away, except when our mourning is passed away: but when our mourning shall have passed away, we all with one voice, in one people, in one country, shall receive comfort, thousands of thousands joined with Angels playing upon harps, with choirs of heavenly powers living in one city. Who mourns there? Who there sighs? Who there toils? Who there needs? Who dies there? Who there shows mercy? Who breaks bread to the hungry there, where all are satisfied with the bread of righteousness?

No one says unto you, Receive a stranger; there no one will be a stranger to you: all live in their own country. No one says unto you, Set at one your friends disputing; in everlasting peace they enjoy the Face of God. No one says unto you, Visit the sick; health and immortality abide for ever. No one says unto you, Bury the dead; all shall be in everlasting life. Works of mercy stop, because misery is found not. And what shall we do there? Shall we perhaps sleep? If now we fight against ourselves, although we carry about a house of sleep, this flesh of ours, and keep watch with these lights, and this solemn feast gives us a mind to watch; what wakefulness shall that day give unto us!

Therefore we shall be awake, we shall not sleep. What shall we do? There will be no works of mercy, because there will be no misery. Perhaps there will be these necessary works which there are here now, of sowing, ploughing, cooking, grinding, weaving? None of these, for there will be no want. Thus there will

be no works of mercy, because misery is past away: where there is no want nor misery, there will be neither works of necessity nor of mercy. What will be there? What business shall we have?

What action? Will there be no action, because there is rest? Shall we sit there, and be torpid, and do nothing? If our love grow cold, our action will grow cold. How then will that love resting in the face of God, for whom we now long, for whom we sigh, how will it inflame us, when we shall have come to Him? He for whom while as yet we see Him not, we so sigh, how will He enlighten us, when we shall have come to Him? How will He change us? What will He make of us? What then shall we do, brethren?

Let the Psalm tell us: Blessed are they who dwell in Your house. Why? They shall praise You for ever and ever. This will be our employment, praise of God. You love and praisest. You will cease to praise, if you cease to love. But you will not cease to love, because He whom you see is such an One as offends you not by any weariness: He both satisfies you, and satisfies you not. What I say is wonderful. If I say that He satisfies you, I am afraid lest as though satisfied you should wish to depart, as from a dinner or from a supper.

What then do I say? Does He not satisfy you? I am afraid again, that if I say, He does not satisfy you, you should seem to be in want: and should be as it were empty, and there should be in you some void which ought to be filled. What then shall I say, except what can be said, but can hardly be thought? He both satisfies you, and satisfies you not: for I find both in Scripture. For while He said, Blessed are the hungry, for they shall be filled; Matthew 5:6 it is again said of Wisdom, Those who eat You shall hunger again, and those who drink shall thirst again.

Sirach 24:21 Nay, but He did not say again, but he said, still: for shall thirst again is as if once having been filled he departed and digested, and returned to drink. So it is, Those who eat You shall still hunger: thus when they eat they hunger: and those who drink You, even thus when drinking, thirst. What is it, to thirst in drinking? Never to grow weary. If then there shall be that ineffable and eternal sweetness, what does He now seek of us, brethren, but faith unfeigned, firm hope, pure charity? And man may walk in the way which the Lord has given, may bear troubles, and receive consolations.

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