

A HOMILY OF SAINT  
GREGORY *the* GREAT *on*  
*the* PASTORAL OFFICE

TRANSLATED BY REV. PATRICK BOYLE, C.M.

“Read, venerable Brethren, that admirable homily of the holy Pontiff, and make your clergy read and ponder it, especially at the time of their annual retreat” (Pius X. Ency. *Jucunda sane*,  
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## PREFACE

ON the occasion of the thirteenth centenary of St. Gregory the Great, our Holy Father, Pius X., published an Encyclical letter,\* in which he dwelt on the lessons to be learned from the life and writings of that great Pope. He directed, in a special manner, the attention of the clergy to the *Regula Pastoralis* of St. Gregory and to his *Seventeenth Homily on the Gospels*. Of the latter Pius X. speaks in the following terms:—

“We still seem to have before our eyes the image of Gregory, in the Pontifical Council of Lateran, surrounded by bishops from all quarters and by the entire clergy of Rome. How fruitful is the exhortation which falls from his lips on the subject of the duties of the clergy! What burning zeal! Like a thunderbolt his sermon smites the guilty. His words are so many scourges to rouse the slothful. They are, so to say, flames of divine love, which sweetly influence even the most fervent.

“Read, venerable brethren, that admirable homily of the holy Pontiff, and make your clergy read and ponder it, especially at the time of their annual retreat.”

These words of Pius X. will be a sufficient

\* Encyc., *Jucunda sane*, 12 March, 1904.

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apology for the attempt made here to render this admirable homily of St. Gregory more accessible to English-speaking ecclesiastics. The translator has followed the Latin text as given in Migne's edition.\*

PATRICK BOYLE, C.M.

*Irish College,*

*Paris, 2 Feb., 1907.*

\* See Migne, P. L., vol. LXXVI, col. 1138-1149.

## St. Gregory the Great\*

ST. GREGORY, surnamed the Great, was born in Rome of a wealthy patrician family about A.D. 540. In his youth he embraced a political career, and was appointed by the Emperor Justin II., in 571, to the influential office of Prætor of Rome. But disenchanted with the attractions of worldly honours, Gregory resigned his functions, and sold his paternal estates. With the proceeds he founded six monasteries in Sicily. His own house on Mount Scaurus, now the Cœlian Hill, he converted into a monastery, where he took the religious habit, and observed the Benedictine rule in all its austerity. Knowing the virtues and capacity of Gregory, Pope Benedict I. withdrew him from his monastery, and made him one of the Regionaries or Cardinal Deacons of the city. In 578 Pelagius II. conferred on him a further mark of confidence by sending him as apocrisiarius, or nuncio, to the Court of the Emperor Tiberius at Constantinople. Here Gregory spent six years.

About 585 he returned to Rome, and was elected Abbot of his monastery. Not long after, as he passed through the forum, some Anglo-Saxon boys exposed for sale in the slave-market attracted his attention, and a conversation with them awakened in his heart a desire to go to evangelize the country from which they came. With the

\* See Bardenhewer, *Les Pères de l'Église, leurs vies et leurs œuvres*. Second French edition, vol. III, p. 210.

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permission of the Pope he set out for England. But the news of his departure excited a tumult amongst the people by whom he was beloved, and the Pope was obliged to dispatch a messenger with an order commanding Gregory to return to Rome. In February, 590, Pelagius II. died, and Gregory was chosen by the unanimous vote of the clergy, the Senate and people to succeed him on the pontifical throne. According to the usage of the period the Emperor confirmed the election, and on 3 September, 590, Gregory received episcopal consecration in St. Peter's.

From that date until his death, in March, 604, in spite of continual infirmity, Gregory laboured with indefatigable energy for the welfare of the Church. In Italy he was a father to the people, then suffering from famine and pestilence and from the invasion of the Lombards. While subscribing himself *Servus Servorum Dei*, he steadfastly maintained the dignity of the Holy See, and resisted the ambitious pretensions of the patriarch of Constantinople, John the Faster, styled by his flatterers the Œcumenical Patriarch. Nor did he forget his former project of labouring for the conversion of England. By his orders Augustine and forty monks proceeded to that country, founded the See of Canterbury, and organized the Church throughout the island.

Gregory watched with zealous care over the decorum of public worship and the administration of the Sacraments; and a tradition, which modern criticism has not succeeded in demolishing, ascribes to him the regulation of ecclesiastical chant, and the correction of the ancient Sacramentary of the Roman Church.

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But the labours and cares of administration did not hinder Gregory from devoting much attention to literary work. From the first years of his pontificate dates a work which ranks as a classic on the duties of the pastoral office—viz., the *Regula Pastoralis*. In the preface to that work, addressed to John, Archbishop of Ravenna, Gregory defends his conduct in seeking to escape the supreme dignity of the pontificate. The work itself is divided into four books. The first treats of the qualities necessary for the pastoral office; the second deals with the life a pastor ought to lead; the third lays down the rules to be observed in the instruction and spiritual direction of various classes of men; the fourth book, consisting of a single chapter, admonishes the pastor to reflect, and examine whether he has been faithful to the obligations of his state and office. The *Regula Pastoralis* was published in 591. It was followed in 593 by a second work, entitled *Dialogues*,\* in four books. The work takes the form of a dialogue between the saint and his intimate friend, the deacon Peter. The three first books treat of the holy men who flourished in Italy, the whole of the second book being devoted to the life and miracles of St. Benedict. The fourth book narrates visions of holy persons, and has for object to show the continuance of life after death.

The next great work of St. Gregory was his *Morals on the Book of Job* (*Expositio in librum Job, seu Moralium libri XXXV.*). In that work, the composition of which was commenced at

\* *De vita et miraculis patrum Italicorum et de æternitate animarum.*

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Constantinople but completed after his elevation to the Papacy, the author proposes to himself to give a threefold interpretation of the text—viz., literal, mystical and moral. He is meagre, however, in the literal interpretation, and dwells by preference on the allegorical meaning, and the moral lessons which that meaning suggests. The moral lessons contained in St. Gregory's great work on the book of Job are so full and practical that it has served as a source from which theologians and spiritual writers since his time have largely drawn.

Though physical infirmity rendered preaching difficult to Gregory, he was not unmindful of that great duty of the pastoral office. Amongst his works are two valuable collections of homilies—viz., his homilies on Ezekiel, and forty homilies on the Gospels. The homilies on the Gospels were delivered probably in the years 590, 591. The first twenty were dictated by the saint, and read in his presence in the church by his secretary. The remaining twenty were delivered by himself, and taken down by stenographers as he spoke.

The style of St. Gregory's homilies is simple, paternal and earnest. Though he loves to dwell on the allegorical sense of the Gospel text, the lessons he inculcates are practical for all time.



# A Homily of St. Gregory the Great

*Addressed to the Bishops and Clergy, assembled  
in Council at the Lateran Basilica, about  
A.D. 591.*

“And after these things the Lord appointed also other seventy-two; and He sent them two and two before His face into every city, whither He Himself was to come. And He said to them: ‘The harvest indeed is great, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He send labourers into His harvest. Go: behold, I send you as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes, and salute no man by the way. Into whatsoever house you enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they have. For the labourer is worthy of his hire. Remove not from house to house. And into what city soever you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you, and heal the sick that are therein, and say to them, The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you” (St. Luke x, 1-9).

**D**EARLY beloved Brethren, our Lord and Saviour instructs us at one time by His words, and at another by His works. For His works are lessons, because from His acts, though performed in silence, our duty becomes manifest. For instance, He sends His disciples two and two to preach, because there are two precepts of charity—the love, that is, of God and of our

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neighbour, and between less than two there cannot be charity. For no one is said to have charity for himself ; but love, to deserve the name of charity, must have for object another. Our Lord sent His disciples two and two to preach, to give us to understand that the man who has not charity for his neighbour ought on no account to undertake the office of preaching.

2. And with good reason it is said that He sent them two and two before His face into every city whither He Himself was to come. The Lord follows His preachers ; for preaching comes first, and when the words of exhortation have preceded, and the intellect has been enlightened by truth, our Lord comes to take up His abode in our minds. For this reason Isaiah says to preachers : “ Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight His paths ” (Isa. xl. 3). Hence the Psalmist also says, “ Make a way for Him who ascendeth upon the west ” (Ps. lxxvii. 5). For our Lord ascends upon the west, inasmuch as from the place where He set in His Passion He displayed in His resurrection His greater glory. He ascends in sooth upon the west, because by His resurrection He triumphed over death, to which He had submitted. For Him, therefore, who ascends upon the west we make a way, when we preach His glory to your minds, that He Himself, coming after, may enlighten them by the presence of His love.

3. Let us give ear, then, to what He says when

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sending His preachers: "The harvest indeed is great, but the labourers are few. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that He send labourers into His harvest."

It is with profound sorrow we have to admit that though the harvest is great, the labourers are few, because, though the people are ready to hear the Word of God, there are few to preach it. Lo, the world is full of priests, yet in the harvest of the Lord a labourer is very rare, for we undertake, it is true, the office of the priesthood, but its duties we do not fulfil. Yet weigh well, dearly beloved, weigh well the words of the text: "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that He send labourers into His harvest." Pray then for us that we may have strength to labour for you as we ought, that our tongue may not be slack to exhort, and that, having undertaken the office of preaching, our silence may not prove our condemnation at the tribunal of the just Judge.

For oftentimes by reason of their own sins the tongue of preachers is tied, oftentimes on the other hand it is because of the sins of their people that the gift of eloquence is withheld from pastors. By reason of their own sins the tongue of preachers is tied, according to the words of the Psalmist, "But to the sinner God hath said, Why dost thou declare My justices?" (Ps. xlix. 16.) And again, the voice of preachers is hindered because of the sins of the people, according to the words of the

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Lord to Ezechiel: "I will make thy tongue stick fast to the roof of thy mouth, and thou shalt be dumb, and not as a man that reproveth, because they are a provoking house" (Ezec. iii. 26).

As though He said expressly: The gift of eloquence is withdrawn from thee, because while the people offend Me by their sins they are not worthy to have the truth preached to them. Through whose fault it is that speech is withdrawn from the preacher is no easy matter to decide. But that the silence of the pastor is hurtful to himself sometimes, and to his flock at all times, is beyond all doubt.

4. But if we cannot preach as efficiently as we ought, would that by innocence of life we held the rank that befits our office. For the Gospel adds, "Behold I send you as lambs among wolves." Now there are many who, when placed in authority, show themselves eager to rend their subjects; they use their power to terrify, and they injure those to whom it was their duty to do good. And not possessing the bowels of charity they seek to appear as masters, and forget that they are fathers; and, instead of governing in the spirit of humility, they domineer in the spirit of pride; and if at times their outward acts are gentle, their hearts within are full of passion. Of them Truth says in another place, "They come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matth. vii. 15). We, on the contrary, should

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bear in mind that we are sent as lambs among wolves, and should therefore observe innocence of conduct, and abstain from manifestations of malice. For one who undertakes the office of preaching ought not to do but rather to suffer wrong, and so by his meekness calm the anger of his persecutors, and heal the wounds of sinners, though weighed down himself by affliction. And if zeal for virtue sometimes requires him to treat his subjects with rigour, his severity itself should spring from love, and not from passion, so as to maintain outwardly the rights of discipline, and inwardly cherish with a father's love those whom he publicly corrects with severity. And the pastor succeeds in acting thus who is free from self love, who covets not the things of the world, who in no wise submits his neck to the burden of earthly desires.

5. For this reason the text also adds, "Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes, and salute no man by the way." For a preacher should be so filled with confidence in God as to be firmly convinced that temporal sustenance will never be wanting to him, though he takes no thought of it, lest concern for temporal things should divert his mind from attending to the eternal interests of others. And the Gospel also permits him to salute no man by the way, to give him to understand with what speed he should proceed to preach.

And if we take the words of the text in an allegorical sense, as money is put in a purse, so

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money in a purse is a figure of wisdom which is hidden. He then who possesses the word of wisdom, but neglects to distribute it to his neighbour, so to speak, keeps his money in a purse. "For wisdom that is hid, and a treasure that is not seen, what profit is there in them both?" (Ecclus xli. 17).

What is meant by *scrip* but the cares of the world, and what by *shoes* but the example of the works of the dead. He, therefore, who undertakes the office of preaching ought not to carry the burden of secular business, lest, by submitting his neck to its yoke, he be unable to raise himself up to preach heavenly things. Nor ought he to take for his guidance the example of the conduct of the unwise, lest he be led to suppose that his own conduct is defended, so to say, by dead skins. For there are many who defend their own misdeeds by instancing the misdeeds of others. From the fact that others have so acted, they imagine that they may lawfully do likewise. Now, what is this but an effort to cover their feet with the skins of dead animals?

Again, every man who salutes by the way salutes as an incident in his journey and not from concern for the health of the person saluted. In like manner the man who preaches the Gospel not for love of heaven, but for sake of a recompense, salutes so to speak by the way, because he desires the salvation of his hearers incidentally, and not of set purpose.

6. The Gospel goes on to say: "Into what-

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soever house you enter first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon him, but if not it shall return to you." Now the peace offered by the preacher either rests upon the house, if a son of peace reside therein, or it returns to the preacher. For if there be there anyone predestined unto life, he will hearken to the heavenly doctrine; or if no one gives ear to it, the preacher himself shall not go unrewarded, because his peace returns to him inasmuch as the Lord will recompense him in proportion to his labour.

7. But observe that he who forbids preachers to carry scrip, or purse, permits them to accept their support in return for their labour. For the text adds: "In the same house remain eating and drinking such things as they have. For the labourer is worthy of his hire." If our peace is received, it is but just that we remain in the same house eating and drinking such things as they have, and so obtain a stipend on earth from those to whom we offer the rewards of heaven. Hence St. Paul, esteeming those earthly rewards of little account, says, "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we reap your carnal things?" (1 Cor. ix. 11). And the words which follow deserve attention: "The labourer is worthy of his hire." For sustenance is already a portion of the hire, inasmuch as the hire of the preacher's labour commences in this life, and is completed

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in the next, in the vision of truth. And here observe that to our labour there is due a double reward, one in this life and the other in the next ; the former to be our sustenance in our toil, and the latter to be our recompense in the resurrection. The hire, therefore, which we receive in this life should serve to make us more earnest in labouring for the recompense to come.

The true preacher, therefore, ought not to preach in order to receive his hire in this life, but he should accept the hire that he may be able to continue to preach. For the man who preaches to receive, as a recompense, either praise or gifts in this life, beyond doubt deprives himself of the recompense which is eternal. But if he desires that his discourses please men, that by means of them God, and not the preacher, may be loved ; or, if he accepts an earthly stipend for his labour that he may not be compelled by indigence to desist from preaching, the fact that he has accepted his sustenance in this life is no obstacle to his receiving his recompense in the next.

8. But, O pastors, what, I ask with sorrow, what are we doing ? for we receive the hire, and we are far from being labourers. In our daily stipend we accept the fruits of holy Church, yet we do not labour in preaching for the everlasting Church. Let us weigh well what a subject of condemnation it is to receive without labour the hire of labour.



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Behold, we live by the offerings of the faithful, but what labour do we perform for the souls of the faithful? We receive as our stipend the offerings which the people make for their sins; yet, by diligence in prayer and in preaching, we do not labour as we ought for their correction. We hardly venture to reprove anyone publicly as his sins deserve. And what is worse still, if the sinner is powerful in this world, perhaps we praise him for his faults, lest he should be provoked by correction, and in his indignation withhold the offerings he was wont to make.

Now we should ever keep in mind that it is written of priests, "They shall eat the sins of My people" (Osee iv. 8). Why is it said that they eat the sins of the people, but because they foster the sins of the people in order not to lose their contributions? And if we ourselves who live by the offerings of the people for their sins, eat and are silent, without doubt we eat the sins of the people. Let us therefore lay to heart what a crime it is in the eyes of God to eat the price of sins, and yet to do nothing by preaching to oppose sin. Let us hearken to the words of holy Job: "If my land cry against me, and with it the furrows thereof mourn. If I have eaten the fruits thereof without money" (Job xxxi. 38-39).

For the land cries against its owner, when the Church has reason to murmur against its pastor. And the furrows thereof mourn, if the faithful

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whose hearts have been ploughed by the preaching and corrections of former pastors see anything to lament in the conduct of their present ruler.

And the worthy possessor does not eat the fruit of the land without money; for the wise pastor first lays out the talent of the Word of God, in order not to receive to his condemnation his maintenance from the Church. For we eat the fruits of our land with money if we labour in preaching while we receive the revenues of the Church. We are the heralds of the Judge who is to come. And who will announce His coming if the herald is silent?

9. Hence each of us, to the best of his ability, and according to the needs of his flock, ought to strive to make them understand the terrors of the Last Judgment, and the joys of the Kingdom to come. And if the pastor cannot reach all by a discourse addressed to all in common, he ought as far as in him lies to instruct them individually, to edify them by private discourses, and by familiar exhortation strive to produce fruit in the hearts of his people.

And we ought unceasingly to bear in mind the words addressed to the holy Apostles, and through them to us: "You are the salt of the earth." \* If, therefore, we are the salt of the earth, it behoves us to season the hearts of the faithful. As you are pastors, then, bear in mind that you feed the animals of God. For of them the Psalmist

\* Matt. v. 13.

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saith to God, "In it shall Thy animals dwell" (Ps. lxxvii. 11). Now we often see that a block of salt is set before cattle that they may be improved by licking it. As is the block of salt amid the cattle, such should the priest be in the midst of his people. For the priest must needs take thought of what to say to each, how to admonish individuals, that all who approach him may, as it were, by the touch of salt, be seasoned with the savour of eternal life. For we do not deserve to be called the salt of the earth, unless we season the hearts of the people. And he truly imparts that seasoning to his flock, who does not withhold from them the word of exhortation.

10. But to preach virtue as we ought our life should be an example of our preaching; and as we cannot pass through life without sin, we ought with tears springing from divine love to wash away the stains of our daily faults. And to have genuine compunction we should carefully consider the life of the pastors who went before us, that the glory of their example may make our own life appear to us despicable. To be truly contrite we must carefully examine the commandments of the Lord, and strive to make progress in them, like those whom we venerate, and who sanctified themselves by their observance. Hence it is written of Moses: "And he set up for Aaron and his sons to wash in, when they entered into the Holy of Holies, a laver of brass, which he made of the

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mirrors of the women that watched at the door of the tabernacle" (Exod. xxxviii. 8). Now Moses set up a laver of brass for the ablutions of the priests before they entered into the Holy of Holies, for the law of God commands us first to purify ourselves by compunction, that our uncleanness may not render us unworthy to penetrate the purity of the secrets of God. And it is stated that the laver was made of the mirrors of the women who kept watch, without ceasing, at the door of the tabernacle. Now the mirrors of the women are typical of the divine precepts, in which holy souls are wont to examine themselves to discover if there be in them any stain of uncleanness. And they correct their faults of thought, and, so to say, beautify their countenances according to the image they see reflected, for by careful consideration of the divine precepts they perceive what there is in them to please or displease their heavenly Spouse.

Yet while they remain in this life they cannot enter into the eternal tabernacles. But as the women kept watch at the door of the tabernacle, so holy souls, though weighed down by the infirmity of the flesh, ever keep watch by their constant love at the entrance of the eternal sanctuary.

As Moses, therefore, made the laver of brass from the mirrors of the women, so the law of God supplies us with a laver of compunction to wash away the stains of sin, by setting before us the heavenly precepts by the observance of which

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holy souls please their celestial Spouse. For if we diligently reflect on them we perceive the stains upon our inward countenance. The sight of those stains moves us to penance and compunction, and by our sorrow we are cleansed as it were in the laver made from the mirrors of the women.

11. But while filled with sorrow for our own faults, it is very necessary for us to have zeal for the progress of the people committed to our charge. Let us therefore be filled with compunction, but let not its bitterness turn us away from solicitude for the people. For what will it avail us to have love for ourselves if we abandon the care of our neighbour? or, again, what will it profit us to have love and zeal for our neighbour if we neglect ourselves? For in the decoration of the tabernacle it was commanded to offer scarlet twice dyed; so in the eyes of God our charity should be dyed with the love of God and of our neighbour. Now he truly loves himself who sincerely loves his Creator. The scarlet is therefore twice dyed when through love of truth the soul is inflamed with love of ourselves and of our neighbour.

12. But we should bear in mind, withal, that we must practise zeal for virtue by correcting our neighbours' faults, in such a way as, in the heat of correction, never to forget the virtue of meekness. For the anger of a priest ought not to be impetuous and violent, but should be controlled by deliberation and gravity. Our duty is to bear with those whom

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we correct, and to correct those whom we bear with, lest, if we fail either in severity or in meekness, our conduct be not such as becomes a priest.

Hence, in the service of the Temple, there were engraven on the bases of the Temple lions and oxen and cherubim. Now the cherubim signify the fullness of wisdom. And what is the reason that on the bases there were neither lions alone, nor oxen alone? What else do the bases typify but priests in the Church. For, bearing as they do the burden of government, like the bases they carry the weight laid upon them. As, then, there were cherubim engraven on the bases, so it is meet that the hearts of priests should be stored with the fullness of knowledge. Again, the lions are typical of terror and severity, and the oxen of patience and meekness. Hence, as on the bases the lions were not engraven without the oxen, nor the oxen without the lions, so at all times in the heart of a priest meekness should be blended with severity, and while meekness tempers anger, zeal and severity should hinder meekness from becoming lax.

13. But to what purpose is it to speak of these things, while we yet see many guilty of more grievous faults? For I am grieved to say to you, Prelates, that I have learned that some among you confer orders for money, sell the grace of the Holy Ghost, and at the cost of incurring the guilt of sin, lay up temporal lucre by favouring the iniquities of others.

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Why then do you not recall to mind the words of our Lord laying down the precept, "Freely you have received, freely give"? (Matth. x. 8). Why do you not picture to yourselves how our Redeemer entered into the Temple, and overthrew the chairs of them that sold doves, and poured out the money of the changers? Who are those who nowadays sell doves in the Temple of God but the ministers of the Church who take money for the imposition of hands? By that imposition of hands the Holy Spirit from on high is imparted. Therefore the dove is sold, because the imposition of hands by which the Holy Spirit is received is conferred for a price.

Now our Lord overthrew the chairs of them that sold doves by taking away the priesthood of those dealers. Hence the holy canons condemn the heresy of simony, and command that those who seek gain by conferring orders shall be deprived of the priesthood. The chair, therefore, of them that sell doves is overthrown, when they who sell the grace of the Spirit are deprived of the priesthood before men or before God.

And, in truth, there are many other sins of pastors which are now hidden from the eyes of men. For oftentimes pastors act before the eyes of men as though they were holy, and in secret they are not ashamed to appear unclean before the eyes of Him who sees their hearts. Beyond doubt the day shall come, it shall come, and it is

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not far distant, when the Pastor of pastors shall appear and make public the deeds of every man, and He who at present corrects the faults of the people by means of their pastors will then in person condemn severely the sins of the pastors themselves. Hence it was that entering the Temple He made, as it were, a scourge of cords, and drove out the wicked dealers from the house of God, and overthrew the chairs of them that sold doves; for He corrects the sins of the people by means of their pastors, but the sins of pastors He chastises in person. What is done in secret may now be denied before men. But the Judge shall surely come from whom no man can conceal his faults by silence, and whom none by denial can deceive.

14. There is another feature, dearly beloved brethren, in the life of pastors which causes me deep affliction; and lest perchance my words may seem to reflect on anyone, I accuse myself also though I am so circumstanced, much against my will, and through the necessities of the present troubled times. For we have descended to secular business, and having received the dignity of one office we busy ourselves with the duties of another. We abandon the duty of preaching, and to our disgrace, as I perceive, we are bishops in name, and have the title but not the virtue that befits that dignity. For the people committed to our care abandon God, and we are silent. They live in sin, and we do not stretch out a hand to correct



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them. Every day they are being lost on account of the multitude of their sins ; while they go down to hell we look on with negligence.

But how can we reform the life of others while we neglect our own ? For through attention to secular affairs the more we are occupied with external things, the more insensible we become to what is internal. And by application to worldly cares our mind becomes callous to heavenly desires, and hardened by the business of the world it cannot be softened to take an interest in what relates to the love of God.

Hence holy Church, with reason, says of her weak members : “ They have made me a keeper in the vineyards, my vineyard I have not kept ” (Cant. i. 5). Now our vineyards are our actions, which we cultivate by the practices of our daily life. But though we are made keepers in the vineyards, our own vineyard we do not keep, because being involved in external business we neglect the duties of our own ministry.

Dearly beloved brethren, from none, in my opinion, does God receive such prejudice as from priests, when they who are set up for the reformation of others set an example of wickedness, and when we ourselves, who should correct the faults of others, are guilty of sin. And what is still worse, oftentimes priests, who ought to give what is their own in alms, take what belongs to others. Oftentimes they deride such as live in humility and

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continence. Consider, then, what is the fate of the flock when the pastors become wolves. For there are men who undertake the care of souls, and yet they are not afraid to lay snares for the flock of the Lord, which needs to be protected against them. We seek not the good of souls, we are intent on our own interests; we covet earthly things, we strive to obtain the praise of men. And since our rank above others gives us greater liberty to act as we please, we make the ministry of blessing a means to further our ambition.

We abandon the interests of God, and give ourselves up to worldly business; we occupy a position which is holy, and we entangle ourselves in the affairs of the world. Truly the words of Scripture are fulfilled in us, "There shall be like people, like priest" (Osee iv. 9). For the priest does not differ from the people when he does not surpass the people by the merits of his life.

15. Let us then make our own the lamentation of Jeremias; let us consider our state and say: "How is the gold become dim, the finest colour changed; the stones of the sanctuary are scattered in the top of every street?" (Lamen. iv. 1). The gold is become dim, because the life of priests which formerly shone with the splendour of virtue has now become vile through the baseness of their actions. The finest colour is changed because the habit of sanctity, through the abject occupations of the world, is degraded and despised. The stones

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of the sanctuary were carefully guarded, and were worn by the High Priest only when he went into the Holy of Holies to appear before God in secret. We, dearly beloved brethren, are the stones of the sanctuary, and we should always remain in God's sanctuary, and not be seen abroad, that is occupied with what does not concern our vocation. But the stones of the sanctuary are scattered at the top of every street, when those, who by their action and their prayer should ever abide within, live abroad by their vicious conduct.

For behold, at the present time there is hardly any kind of secular business in which priests do not take a part. Hence, as in spite of the sanctity of their state they are engaged in exterior things, it comes to pass that the stones of the sanctuary are scattered.

And as in Greek, the word, *street*, *plateia*, is derived from breadth; the stones of the sanctuary are in the streets when religious persons walk in the broad paths of the world. And they are scattered not merely in the streets, but at the top of the streets, because through covetousness they do the works of the world, and yet by their religious profession they seek to occupy the place of honour. They are scattered at the top of the streets, because while their occupations degrade them, they desire to be honoured for the sanctity of their profession.

16. You yourselves are witnesses of the wars

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which afflict the world, and the scourges by which the people perish every day. To what is this to be ascribed but to our sins? Lo! cities are devastated, fortresses are overthrown, churches and monasteries are destroyed, the fields are laid desolate. And we who ought to lead the people to life are the cause of their destruction. For through our fault many of the people have perished, because through our negligence we did not instruct them unto life.

What appellation should we give to the souls of men but the food of God, for they were created to be incorporated in His body?—that is, to increase the Church which is eternal. Now we ought to be the seasoning of that food. For as I have already said, when He sent His preachers, He said to them, “You are the salt of the earth.” If, then, the people are God’s food, priests should be its seasoning. But as we have abandoned prayer and sacred learning, the salt has lost its savour, and cannot season God’s food, and therefore God does not partake of it; because, as we have lost our savour, it is not seasoned.

Let us ask ourselves, therefore, who has been converted by our preaching, who moved by our rebukes has done penance for his sins, who has been taught to abandon lust, who has turned away from avarice and pride?

Let us ask ourselves what profit we have earned for God, who gave us a talent and sent us to trade

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with it. For He has said, "Trade until I come" (Luke xix. 13). Behold He comes and demands the profit we have made. What gain of souls shall we be able to show as the fruit of our trade? What sheaves, so to say, of souls shall we present to Him from the harvest of our preaching?

17. Let us call to mind that dreadful day when the Judge shall come, and shall call to account His servants, to whom He gave talents. He shall appear in awful majesty, amid choirs of angels and archangels. At that great Judgment the multitude of the elect and the reprobate shall be brought to trial, and the deeds of each shall be made manifest. There Peter shall appear bringing with him his converts of Judea. There Paul shall appear, bringing with him, so to speak, the whole world which he converted. There Andrew shall present to his King his converts of Achaia; John, those of Asia; and Thomas, those of India. There all the rams of the flock of God, who by their holy preaching brought their people to God, shall appear with the profit they have earned in souls. When so many pastors shall present themselves with their flocks to the eternal Pastor of souls, what shall we poor wretches say, who return empty-handed from our toil; who have the name of pastors, but have no sheep fed by us to present? We have the name of pastors here, but there we have no sheep to bring.

18. But if we neglect God's flock, will the

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Almighty abandon it? Assuredly not. For as He promised by the prophet (Ezec. xxxiv.), He feeds it in person, and whom He has fore-ordained unto life He instructs by the smart of scourges, and by the spirit of compunction. By our ministry, it is true, the faithful are brought to holy baptism, by our prayers they are blessed, by the imposition of our hands they receive from God the Holy Spirit, they obtain the kingdom of heaven; and lo, we, through our negligence, go down to hell. Purified by the hands of priests the elect enter their heavenly country, while priests themselves, by their sinful life, hasten to eternal torments.

To what then shall I compare bad priests, but to baptismal water, which washes away the sins of the baptized and sends them on to heaven, while it flows itself down into the sewers?

Brethren, let us stand in dread of such a fate. Let our ministry and our life be in harmony. Let us every day take thought about the forgiveness of our sins, nor let us, by whom Almighty God sets others free, spend our days in the bondage of sin. Let us unceasingly keep in mind what we are, and weigh well our office and the burden we have undertaken. Let us daily examine how stand our accounts with our Judge.

And while we make provision for ourselves we must not neglect our neighbour, that so every man who approaches us may be seasoned with the salt of our exhortation.

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When we see an unmarried person leading an unchaste life, we should admonish him to bridle his passion by entering the married state, and to learn by what is lawful to overcome what is unlawful.

If we have to deal with a married person, we should admonish him to attend to the cares of the world in such a way as not to forget the love of God, and strive so to please his wife as not to displease his Creator.

When we have to treat with a cleric, we should warn him to live so as to be an example to seculars, lest if his conduct be reprehensible the honour of religion suffer through his fault.

When we deal with a monk we should admonish him to pay attention in his acts, in his words and in his thoughts, to the respect due to his habit, to abandon perfectly the things of the world, and to strive to be such in conduct before the eyes of God as he appears in habit before the eyes of men.

Let us exhort the holy to advance in holiness, and the wicked to correct his vices, so that every man who comes in contact with the priest may go away seasoned with the salt of his discourse.

Brethren, lay these things seriously to heart, speak of these things to your people, prepare to offer to Almighty God the fruit of the charge you have undertaken.

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But all this, of which we have been speaking, we shall induce you to perform rather by prayer than by exhortation.

Let us pray.

O God, who hast been pleased to call us to be pastors of Thy people, grant, we beseech Thee, that what we are called by men, such we may have strength to be in Thy sight. Through our Lord, &c.