

SPIRITUAL HOMILIES

BY

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(Translated by H. C. GRAEF)

THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD AND THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT (HOM. 5)



HE prince of the world holds all men captive by earthly things, which he uses to agitate and frighten them. He causes them to stumble through vain thoughts, shameful desires and worldly ties, with which he ever allures and captivates all the sinful race of Adam. For the word that the Creator spoke to Cain: 'A fugitive and vagabond shalt thou be upon the earth', has become the type and image of all sinners. After the Fall, Adam's race bore this image within: they were perpetually agitated by imaginations, fears, and all sorts of perturbations, desires and lusts. For the prince of this world tosses about every soul that is not born of God. For as out of the one Adam the whole human race spread over the earth, so the one evil of the passions has submerged this whole sinful race, so that the prince of evil can easily sift every one of them through their material, vain and exciting imaginations.

Now true Christians differ from all other men in this, that their mind is always occupied with heavenly thoughts, and that they contemplate the good things that are eternal, because they are partakers of the Holy Ghost. For they are born of God from above, and truly accounted worthy to be God's children. Therefore they reach a stable state of tranquillity and peace—not, it is true, without long struggle and much labour—until they are no longer sifted and tossed about in the fluctuations of their vain imaginings. In this respect they are greater and better than the world, that their minds and thoughts are established in the peace of Christ and the charity of the Holy Ghost. For the Christians differ from other men not so much by external forms, but in their spiritual renewal and peace of soul, in the charity of the Lord and heavenly love—in these does the new creature of the Christian differ from all other men in the world. For their joy, their beauty and their heavenly riches are ineffable; and though these have to be won with pain and sweat, in temptation and struggle, they are wholly given by the grace of God.

ON DETACHMENT (HOM. 5)

Those who long for the love of the heavenly King, and in their desire have only him before their eyes, will with his assistance

become detached from all love of the world; they will forsake all earthly ties, so that their heart may desire him alone and nothing else besides him.

Now there are but few who, after a good beginning, attain to a good end, and persevere without falling back in their unique love for God alone, being detached from all things. For many are stirred up at first and given a share in heavenly grace, being wounded by celestial love. But because of the intervening struggles, sufferings and temptations of the evil one they do not persevere. They are agitated by all sorts of worldly desires, because every one wants to love something of this world. Thus, because they are not perfectly detached from its love, they remain submerged in its depth through the cowardly weakness of their will in the face of this earthly attachment. For whether the tie that holds a man to the world be small or great, it does hold him down and will not allow him to rise. For it is clear that a man loves the passion against which he will not fight sincerely, and that it dominates him and weighs him down. It becomes a snare and a fetter to him, so that his mind does not tend towards God nor seeks to please and serve him alone, to win the kingdom of eternal life.

For the soul whose desire is truly the Lord turns her love wholly to him and thus obtains the help of his grace. She denies herself and does not follow her own desires, but detaches herself as far as possible from every visible tie, gives herself wholly to the Lord, and so passes happily through struggles, pains and afflictions. For where one's love is, from there one receives help and the weight of attraction. If a man loves something of the world, that thing will become a burden to him, pull him down and prevent him from raising himself to God. But if one loves God and his commandments, one will receive help and relief from him, and all his precepts will become easy.

ON HOW TO PRAY (HOM. 33)

We ought not to require a particular posture for prayer, nor clamour, or silence, or bent knees, but should simply direct our mind to await the Lord, so that when he comes he may enter into the soul through all her gates and paths and the organs of sense. Therefore one should sometimes be silent and at other times pray with crying, only the mind should always be firmly fixed in God. For just as the body, when it does some work, is wholly occupied with it and helped by all its members, so also must the soul be concentrated on prayer and the love of the Lord; she must not be distracted and let her thoughts go astray, but should fix her attention on Christ alone.

Take a merchant for an example. He does not think only of one

way of making money, but is anxious to increase his fortune by every possible means, trying now one idea, now another, changing from what brings no profit to a more lucrative article. So also should we skilfully prepare our souls by various methods, that we may obtain the greatest gain, God himself, who will teach us to pray in truth. Then will the Lord rest in the soul that is of good will, and make her the throne of his glory where he reposes. And as the house, when the master is there, is richly and beautifully adorned, so also is the soul in whom the Master abides full of beauty and dignity, for the Lord is dwelling in her with all his spiritual treasures.

THE BRIDE SOUL. (HOM. 49)

Oh ineffable mercy of God, who gives himself to those who believe! For soon he will be their inheritance, and will dwell in a man's body as in a beautiful house. For as he has created heaven and earth as a dwelling place for man, so also did he create the human body and soul as a habitation for himself. He reposes in the body as in his own house, and has the loving soul, made in his image, for his beautiful bride. Neither the wise by their wisdom nor the prudent by their prudence can comprehend the delicate essence of the soul, nor say what she is, unless the Holy Ghost reveal it.

Now therefore contemplate, distinguish and grasp this matter. He is God, she is not God; he is the Lord, she is a servant; he is the Creator, she the creature; he the Maker, she what is made. There is nothing in common between his nature and hers. But because of his infinite, ineffable and incomprehensible love and mercy, it has pleased him to dwell in this rational creature, this precious and chosen one, as the Scripture says: 'that we might be some beginning of his creature', that is to say that we should have communion with his wisdom, being his habitation and his own pure bride.

With such good things, such promises, such divine loving-kindness before our eyes, let us then not hesitate, my children, to press on towards eternal life, and to devote ourselves entirely to what is pleasing to God. Therefore let us beseech him by the power of his divinity to free us from the dark prison of vile passions, and to cause his own image to shine forth in us, restoring the soul to wholeness and purity. Thus may we be accounted worthy of the communion of the Spirit, glorifying the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, for ever and ever. Amen.