



LENTI
with
St. Bernard



Mowbrays
Fleur de Lys Series

LENT WITH SAINT BERNARD

A Translation by
A RELIGIOUS OF CSMV

‘Eight hundred years ago Saint Bernard died. *Lent with Saint Bernard* contains the gist of a Lent course he gave at Clairvaux. It is a devotional commentary on Psalm 91, the psalm especially associated with our Lord’s temptations. Saint Bernard does not give milk for babes. His addresses are strong meat. They are typical of the best in the patristic tradition. Written for Religious, they make, in this admirable translation, a very satisfying study for priest and people. Here is a Lenten discipline which will enrich the mind and gladden the heart. If the language is at first unfamiliar, the context is in the authentic tradition of Christian piety. Incidentally, the book provides a first-rate introduction to the Christian Church’s use of the Psalter and to the Scriptural evidences of the mind of Christ.’

Church Times

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LENT WITH SAINT BERNARD

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F L E U R D E L Y S S E R I E S

Lent with Saint Bernard

*A Devotional Commentary
on Psalm Ninety-One*

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
A RELIGIOUS OF CSMV
[i.e., Ruth Penelope Lawson]

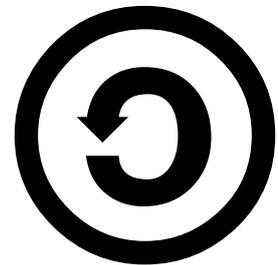
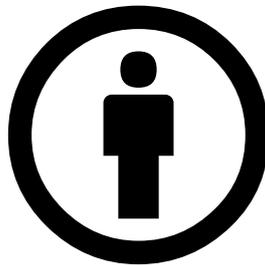
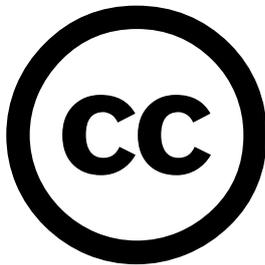
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FOREWORD

THE Psalm 'Whoso dwelleth' is the ninety-first in the Hebrew Bible and in our English versions; but in the Greek and Latin, which count Psalms 9 and 10 as one, it is the ninetieth. It is especially the Compline Psalm, being recited at that Office daily throughout the year, except from Maundy Thursday until Easter Friday. It is also specially the Psalm of Lent, because those Forty Days commemorate our Lord's Temptation in the wilderness, and the devil used this Psalm in the Temptation of the Pinnacle. It was for this reason that Saint Bernard chose it as the subject of his Lenten course to the brethren at Clairvaux somewhere between 1138 and his death in 1153. It is the best and most translatable material from those seventeen Sermons that is here offered for English readers in 1953, the year of Saint Bernard's octocentenary. The Prayer Book [i.e., the Book of Common Prayer] version of the Psalm is given verse by verse with each discourse, in [endnotes], to compare with the Psalm as Saint Bernard read it.

Easter 1952

Wantage, Oxon

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LENT WITH SAINT BERNARD

THE PSALM AS SAINT BERNARD READ IT

1. *Whoso dwelleth in the help of the Most High : shall abide in the protection of the God of Heaven.*
2. *He will say unto the Lord, Thou art my guardian and my refuge; my God, I will hope in Him.*
3. *For He hath delivered me from the snare of the hunter : and from a hopeless word.*
4. *With His shoulders shall He overshadow thee : and under His wings shalt thou trust.*
5. *His truth shall compass thee as with a shield : thou shalt not be afraid of the Terror by night;*
6. *Nor of the Arrow that flies by day : nor of the Thing that walks in darkness : nor of the Noonday Demon.**
7. *A thousand shall fall beside thee, and ten thousand at thy right hand : but it shall not come nigh thee.*
8. *Yea, with thine eyes shalt thou behold : and see the reward of sinners.*
9. *For Thou, Lord, art my hope : Thou hast set Thy place of refuge very high.*
10. *There shall no evil happen unto thee : neither shall the scourge come nigh thy tabernacle.*
11. *For He hath given His angels charge concerning thee : to keep thee in all thy ways.*
12. *They shall bear thee in their hands : that thou dash not thy foot against a stone.*

13. *Thou shalt go upon the adder and the basilisk : the lion and the dragon shalt thou tread underfoot.*

14. *Because he hath hoped in Me, I will deliver him : I will protect him, for he hath known My Name.*

15. *He hath called on Me, and I will hear him : I am with him in tribulation, I will rescue him, and I will glorify him.*

16. *With length of days will I fill him : and I will show him My salvation.*

* The Latin is: *ab incursu et daemonio meridiano*. But Saint Bernard confines his comments to the Noonday Demon.

THE COMMENTARY

PREFACE

THE sight of your labours, brethren, moves me to compassion. What comfort can I give you? Not physical alleviation, for that, so far from helping you at all, would only hinder; by sowing less you would reap less, and if a cruel pity restricts your practice of penitence now, you will later lose some jewels from your crown. What then shall we do? Where is the handful of meal that the prophet cast into the pot?¹ For there *is* death in the pot; you are killed all the day long by many fasts, by labours oft, by vigils above measure, besides those things that are within, sorrow for sin and multifold temptation. You are being killed; but it is for the sake of Him Who died for you. If you abound in tribulation for Him, you will abound in consolation through Him; the soul that refuses itself other forms of comfort will find delight in Him. For with Him you will find that great tribulation itself becomes a certain consolation. Are you not bearing a load above man's strength, beyond our nature, and contrary to that to which you are accustomed? Well, then, Another bears it; even He Who bears all things by the Word of His power, as the Apostle says. Is not the Enemy, moreover, already being slain with his own sword when this occurs?² Does not the greatness of the tribulation with which he is wont to tempt us itself overcome the temptations, and so give us a certain proof that God is with us? What then have we to fear, if He Who bears everything is there? 'The Lord is the Protector of my life: of whom then shall I be afraid?' 'Yea, though I walk through the

midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.'

Your comfort, then, is in the Word of the Lord; and in these days when, as is altogether fitting, your labour is somewhat greater than at other times, it is so more especially. I trust therefore that I may not unprofitably treat with you of something from the Holy Scriptures, as indeed some among you have requested me to do. And I have chosen for my subject the Psalm on which the Enemy based his temptation of the Lord;³ so that the weapons of the Evil One may be broken by the very means that he presumed to wrest to his own use.

CHAPTER 1

*'Whoso dwelleth in the help of the Most High : shall abide in the protection of the God of Heaven.'**

YOU will better understand who dwelleth in God's help if you consider who does not do so. There are three kinds of people, you will find, who dwell not in God's help: first, those who do not hope; then, those who have lost hope; and lastly those who hope in vain.

The man who takes not God for his Helper but trusts in his own strength and in the multitude of his riches certainly does not dwell in the help of God; for, ignoring the prophet's injunction, 'Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near,' and seeking only temporal things, he vies with evil-doers, seeing the peace of sinners, and is far removed from the help of the Most High, of which indeed he thinks he has no need. But who are we to judge the folk outside? I am afraid, brethren, that there may be someone even among ourselves who dwells not in the help of the Most High, but trusts in his own strength and in the multitude of things that he possesses! Someone full of zeal, maybe, mighty in watching and fasting and labour and so forth, who has—as he thinks—laid up great store of merit over a long time. Putting his trust in all this, he is slacker in the fear of God; with a baleful sense of security he turns aside to idle and trifling matters; he grumbles, he criticizes, he disparages. This man, if he were dwelling in the help of God, would give heed to himself and fear to offend Him of Whom he knew himself to stand in such great need. Knowing himself to have received such gifts from God, he ought to cultivate the fear of

Him the more; for we cannot retain the gifts of God apart from God. Yet now, I grieve to say and see, there are some who were sober and careful enough at the outset of their conversion; but now that they have made a little progress, instead of going further in accordance with the words, 'He that eateth me shall hunger still,'⁴ are beginning to behave and speak as I have just described. 'Why should we serve Him further,' they say in effect, 'when we already possess that which He has to give us?' O if you knew how little you had got, and how quickly you lose it if He Who gave it does not keep it safe! Only the knowledge of these two things can make us really submissive and God-fearing, and so keep us from being of those who dwell not in the help of the Most High, because they think they have no need of it. And those are they who do not hope in God.

There are also people who have ceased to hope; who in view of their own weakness have thrown in their hand and fallen victims to faintheartedness. Such persons dwell in their own flesh, and are so absorbed in its infirmity that they are ready to reel off a list of all their sufferings on the spot; for where you are really interested, you are vigorous enough! But these folk are not dwelling in the help of God, neither do they know it; for they cannot pluck up courage even to meditate on it sometimes. And there are other people who do hope in the Lord, but hope in vain; for they so flatter themselves in regard to His mercy towards them, that they do not amend their faults. That kind of hope is wholly vain; and the confused thinking which produces it is due to lack of love. The man, who in his easygoing pride drives grace away and empties his hope completely of its content, most certainly hopes in vain.

None of these three types dwells in the help of the Most High; for the first dwells in his own merits, the second in his

sufferings, and the third in his sins. The abode of the last is foul, that of the second is wretched, and that of the first is dangerous and silly. What could be sillier than to live in a house that has scarcely been begun? Do you imagine you can finish it? But 'when a man hath done, then he begins.'⁵ And this house is all tumbling down, and stands in need of props and buttresses, not of inhabitants! Is not this present life brittle and uncertain? Must not anything that is founded on it be the same? And who imagines he can build a lasting structure on a weak foundation? Dangerous indeed is the dwelling of those who hope in their own merits, dangerous because it is a tumbling ruin. But the dwelling of those who are thrown into despair by the thought of their own weakness is wretched, and they live in torments, as we said. For as long as they both endure the actual pains that bruise them day and night, and also suffer anguish even greater on account of those which they have not felt yet and maybe never will, what suffering could be worse? What hell could you imagine more unbearable, especially as, burdened and toiling as these people are, they yet are not supported by the heavenly bread?

These hopeless people dwell not in the help of the Most High. The others did not seek it; these lack it because they seek it in a way by which they cannot get it. They alone dwell in the help of the Most High who desire to obtain and fear to lose that help *and nothing else*, and devote themselves to their quest with careful and anxious thought; which dutiful service is in very truth the worship that we owe to God. Blessèd indeed is he who dwells thus in the help of the Most High, for he will abide in the protection of the God of Heaven. What is there under heaven that can hurt a person whom the God of Heaven wills to protect and keep? And all the things that do harm are under heaven; the powers of the air are

under heaven, this present evil world is under heaven, so also is the flesh that lusts against the spirit.

It is well said, therefore, that he shall abide in the protection of the God of Heaven; so that he who is found worthy of God's help may fear nothing that is under heaven at all. And whether you take the phrase with that which follows, 'He will say unto the Lord, "Thou art my Guardian,"' or regard it as the explanation of the foregoing 'Whoso dwelleth,' the meaning is the same: we are to seek God's help not only to enable us to do good works, but also to protect us and deliver us from evil. But notice that it says 'protection' only, and not 'presence.' An angel rejoices in God's presence and is blessed in it; but as for me, if only I could stay in His protection and be safe!

* Whoso dwelleth under the defence of the Most High : shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.—*According to the Book of Common Prayer.*

CHAPTER 2

*'He will say unto the Lord, Thou art my guardian and my refuge; my God, I will hope in Him.'**

'WHOSO dwelleth in the help of the Most High,' the prophet says, 'will say to the Lord, "Thou art my Guardian and my Refuge: my God, I will hope in Him."' He will say this in gratitude, rendering thanks to the Lord and His mercy for His twofold help. For everyone who has dwelt hitherto in the help of God but does not as yet dwell in His Kingdom often has need to flee, and sometimes falls. To flee, I say; for as long as we are in the body it behoves us to flee before the face of pursuing temptation. If we do not flee fast enough, we get knocked down; but the Lord looks after us. He himself is the Refuge to which we must make haste to flee, when he who stones the sluggard with the dung of oxen is coming after us.⁶ The Lord is our Guardian also even when we fall. He stretches out His Hand and sees to it that we are not battered to bits. So when we feel the attack of temptation in thought, let us betake ourselves to Him forthwith and humbly ask His help. And if the temptation has been too much for us, as happens sometimes when we have been slower than we should in taking refuge with Him, let us be very anxious indeed for the Hand of God to take us in charge again. For men must fall sometimes, while they remain in this world; even the just falls seven times a day.⁷

There is, however, a difference between the just man's fall and that of the unjust. The just is guarded by the Lord and rises the stronger. The unjust, on the other hand, when he has

fallen makes no attempt to rise, but falls still further into shame or shamelessness. For either he makes excuse for his fall, which is adding sin to shame, or else he brazens it out and fears neither God nor man, but proclaims his sin publicly, as Sodom did. But the just man falls on the Hand of the Lord, and in some marvellous way even his sin subserves his righteousness. For 'we know that all things work together for good to them that love God'; and surely the fall that makes us humbler and more careful works for our good. And the man who is sustained by humility is upheld by the Lord even when he falls. 'I was sore thrust that I might fall,' the prophet says, but my attacker achieved nothing, for 'the Lord sustained me.' Let then the faithful soul say to the Lord, 'Thou art my Guardian.' All things can say, 'Thou art my Creator'; the animals can also say, 'Thou art my Shepherd'; and every human being can say further, 'Thou art my Redeemer.' But only he who dwells in the help of the Most High can say, 'Thou art my Guardian.' *'And my God,'* he adds. Why not 'our God'? Because in Creation, in Redemption, and in all the other benefits that He imparts to us God is the God of all; but in their temptations His chosen ones possess Him each man for himself. For He is as ready to succour the falling and to rescue the fugitive, as if He had abandoned all the rest and was bestowing His attention on the one alone.

Every soul should therefore look on God not only as his personal Helper but also as his personal Observer. For how shall a man grow slack, when he is always aware that the eyes of God are upon him? And how shall he not regard Him as his own, when he knows that He never ceases to watch and to appraise all his actions and even his most secret thoughts at every hour of the day? He has good reason, then, to say, 'My God, I will hope in Him'—*'will hope,'* you notice, not 'I hoped'

or 'I hope.' 'It is my firm intent,' he says, 'my heart's determination so to hope. Hope has been put into my heart, and I will persevere in it. I will not give up hope, nor hope in vain, nor will I be of those who do not hope; but *I will hope in Him.*'

* I will say unto the Lord, Thou art my hope, and my strong hold : my God, in Him will I trust.

CHAPTER 3

*'For He hath delivered me from the snare of the hunter : and from a hopeless word.'**

'HE hath delivered me from the snare of the hunters'—there is the fruit, the recompense of hope! But woe to my poor soul! Are we then beasts, that hunters seek for us? Indeed we are! For 'man when he was in honour did not understand: he was put on a level with the unreasoning beasts and made like unto them.' What cause hast thou for pride, O Man, who art become a beast for which hunters lay snares? And who are these hunters? Most wicked and cruel hunters they are; they blow no horn to warn us of their coming, but shoot in secret at the undefiled. They are the rulers of these darkneses, past masters of crime and cunning and devilish deceit; the cleverest of men, compared with them, is therefore as a beast before the hunter, unless he be one of those to whom it is given by the wisdom of God to discover the wiles of the malicious ones. You whom God has newly planted, who have not yet learnt to distinguish between good and evil, I do beseech you not to follow the counsel of your heart or go by your own feelings; lest the crafty huntsman should deceive you, callow as you are. For the wild and wholly beast-like beasts—that is, for people living in the world, he sets open traps, for he knows he will catch them easily enough. But for you, who are as wiser harts that long for the living fountain, he lays more subtle snares, and overcomes you by shrewder evidence of his deceit. I implore you, therefore, to humble yourselves under the mighty Hand of God your Shepherd, and

to submit to those who better know the hunter's tricks, from long experience both with themselves and with many others.

So much for the beasts and the hunters; now we must think about the snare. Let us ask blessed Paul to tell us what is the snare from which the faithful soul rejoices that it has been freed. 'They that be rich in this world,' he replies, 'fall into temptations and into the snare of the devil.' The riches of the world, then, are the snare! And alas! how few we find who are glad to be freed from it! How many are there, on the other hand, who grieve because they are so little involved in its toils, and try to get themselves entangled and enmeshed therein! You who have left all and followed the Son of Man Who hath not where to lay His head, rejoice that He has freed you from this snare; render Him thanks with all your heart and soul and strength. And that you may understand how great a benefit this is, and what it is that God has given you, observe what follows: '*and from a hopeless word.*'⁸ O Man—or rather I should say, O Beast, you did not fear the snare, but you had better be afraid of this! 'A hopeless word,' it says. What word is that, save that of ever-hungry hell that cries, 'Come, come, strike, tear, slay speedily, make haste to bring the spoils!' 'Let the wicked be taken away, that he see not the glory of God,' the prophet says; that also is a hopeless word! And how the hunters gloat over the beasts that they have taken, crying, 'Come along! In with the spits! Pile on the coals! Put on the bubbling cauldrons!' It was a 'hopeless word,' too, that the rebellious House of Israel uttered, 'Away with Him! Away with Him! Crucify Him!' How terrible, how cruel, how hopeless a word was that! Thou sufferedst that hopeless word, O Lord—and why, except to save us from the like? Grant of Thy tender love that we may not endure what Thou hast deigned to bear on our behalf.

When we try to incite worldly men to repentance, they answer, 'This is a hard saying.' That is what they said in the Gospel when the Lord told them, 'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.' He was speaking of repentance then, though in a figure as to those to whom it was not given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God; for what does it mean to eat His flesh and drink His blood, if not to share His sufferings and imitate the life He lived on earth? The pure Sacrament of the Altar, in which we receive the Lord's Body, signifies just this: that when we take into ourselves the visible substance of bread, we know that through the life which He lived on earth He Himself comes into us, to dwell in our hearts by faith. For when righteousness comes in, He enters, too, Who is made Righteousness for us by God the Father. And he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Many, however, still tell us that this is a hard saying. Our light affliction, that is but for a moment and worketh in us an eternal weight of glory, is it really so hard? Is it so difficult to bear so very light a load and for so short a time, to save ourselves from pains and torments unending and beyond imagining? You think it hard when you are bidden to repent; but you are wrong. The hard, the hopeless word to hear will be, 'Depart from Me, ye wicked, into everlasting fire.' Fear that, look upon that as hard; and you will find that the Lord's yoke is easy and His burden light. Or, if you cannot yet regard it as easy in itself, at least you know that it is comparatively so.

But you, my brethren, you are birds in whose sight the net is spread in vain. You who have forsaken this world's riches, what have you to fear from the hopeless word, when you have already been delivered from the snare? Do not your hearts rejoice because of this? Are they not filled with spiritual joy? Do you not count your poverty more precious

than the treasures of the world, seeing it is your poverty that frees you from that word? For how shall God exact from us that which we have already left for love of Him? And you are doing more; for Christ is being fed and clothed by the work of your hands, that nothing may be lacking.⁹ Be thankful, then; rejoice and say, 'He hath delivered me from the snare of the hunters and from the hopeless word.' Rejoice, I say; but let it be with trembling as long as you are in this present life. I want you to be happy, but not to feel secure; to rejoice in the Spirit, and yet to dread and beware of falling away. For there is one thing left for you to fear, the worst of sins, the sin of Judas—that is, apostasy. It is well that you have been given the wings of a dove, that you may flee away and be at rest; for there is no rest on earth, only toil and sorrow and affliction of spirit. And what has a bird such as you to fear, except that it may chance to spy some carrion or suchlike on the ground and, drawn by longing for it, may be seen by those most evil hunters and taken in their snares? The last state of such a man will be worse than the first; and we need most utterly to fear lest any return to his vomit, either in heart only or in his body, too. We read of the children of Israel that they returned to Egypt with their heart,¹⁰ their physical return being debarred by the fact that the Red Sea had closed upon their heels. This is what every one of us should go in dread of, lest perchance we offend God so grievously that He casts us out and spues us forth. And if shame forbids apostasy of body, lukewarmness of itself begets apostasy of heart after a little while; and men carry worldly hearts under their Religious habits and embrace whatever bits of worldly comfort they can get. For we are certainly not holier than the Apostle, who feared lest he himself should be a castaway, though he had preached to others. We must fear apostasy, until the snare be broken and the soul lays the body down. For the body itself is

a snare in a sense; and it is written that 'the eye lays waste the soul.'¹¹ A man has no cause whatever for feeling secure as long as he carries his snare about with him; so much the better, then, is it to dwell in the help of the Most High, so that through Him the snare may be avoided.

* For He shall deliver thee from the snare of the hunter : and from the noisome pestilence.

CHAPTER 4

*'With His shoulders shall He overshadow thee : and under His wings shalt thou trust.'**

To those who render humble, hearty thanks still greater benefits are promised, not undeservedly. The Spirit answers our thanksgiving thus: 'God will do more than that,' He says, 'with His shoulders He will overshadow thee.' I think we should take these shoulders as meaning God's twin promises, the one for this present life and the other for that which is to come. For had He only promised men the Kingdom and left them without food upon the way, they would have complained, 'It is indeed a great thing that is promised, but no means has been supplied of reaching it.' And for that reason He, Who has promised life eternal after this, has in His loving foresight promised an hundredfold in this world, too. Then what excuse have you, O Man? Your life here may be long; but that is all the Enemy can tempt you in! And even if your life is long, why should you fear, when such strong food is given to prevent your fainting by the way? The food the angel brought Elijah was of the sort men reckon as the poorest—namely, bread and water; but he derived such strength from it that he went for forty days without being tired or hungry! Do you desire angels to serve you with this food? It will be very strange if you do not!

If you do want it, and do not scorn the angels' ministry but rather humbly seek it, hear what is written of the Lord when He was tempted. The devil urged Him to make bread from stones, and He refused and said, 'Man does not live by

bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' Then, when He had overcome all temptations and routed the Tempter, the angels came and ministered unto Him. You therefore, if you would have the angels minister to you, must flee the consolations of this world and resist the temptations of the devil. Your soul must refuse to take comfort in other things, if you want to find delight in the thought of God. When you are hungry, the devil tells you to run and get some bread; but you must listen to the Lord Who says, 'Man does not live by bread alone.' Why be so distraught about food and drink and clothes and bedding, except for what your body needs of bare necessity, when in the Word of God you can find all these in one? For the Word of God is Manna, containing in itself all sweetness, and it is also true, genuine, sweet, wholesome, happy, holy Rest.

That is the promise for this present life. Now what about the future? If the hope of the righteous is gladness, and gladness so great that nothing that can be desired on earth is to be compared with it, what then shall that expected gladness be? Eye hath not seen, O God, beside Thee, the things Thou hast prepared for them that love Thee. So there are four benefits bestowed on us beneath these shoulders: first, we are hidden beneath them; secondly, we are protected by them from attack by hawks and kites—that is, the powers of the air; thirdly, we find a cool and healthful shade from the too great heat of the sun; and fourthly, we are fed and cherished. We need to hide while the days are evil and we are in a strange land and under a wicked rule, where the kingdom of peace is not and the God of peace does not reign; for if He reigns, why do we pray 'Thy Kingdom come'? We need to hide, if we have got hold of anything of value, for the man who found the treasure of the Kingdom hid it. That is why we hide

ourselves even physically in remote places and woods. And if you want to know what reward we reap from secluding ourselves like this, I think there is no one here who would not be revered as a saint and esteemed as an angel in the world, if he did there a quarter of what he is doing here; and yet here he is chidden every day for negligence! Do you think this too little a reward, not to be reckoned saints before you are? Are you afraid you may get no reward hereafter, if here you have so small a recompense? You need to be secluded, therefore, not only from the world but from yourselves. 'When ye shall have done all those things that are commanded you, say: "We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do."' Those are the words of the Lord, and woe to us if we do not fulfil them! It is truly a great virtue and supreme security to live holily and at the same time think more of what you lack than of what you seem to have achieved, forgetting those things that are behind and pressing on to those that are before. This is the hiding beneath the shoulders of the Lord, of which we spoke—such a hiding, maybe, as that with which the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary, to veil the mystery that so completely passed all understanding.

'Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle,' says the prophet, speaking of protection. When the mother-bird sees the hawk coming, she spreads out her wings so that the chicks may run in underneath them and be safe. And so our Lord in His supreme, unutterable lovingkindness is ready to extend to us the shelter of His breast; wherefore it said before, 'For Thou art my Refuge.' For just as the heat of the material sun, good and most necessary as it is, is hurtful to the weak head if it be not tempered, and its brightness also damages weak eyes; so is it with the Sun of Righteousness,

and for that reason it is written, 'Be not righteous overmuch.' Not that righteousness is not good; but because of our present weakness it needs to be held in check, lest we become unduly and unwisely elated. For why is it that we cannot obtain the fullness of grace for which we are perpetually asking and imploring? Has God become a miser? Has He run out of grace, or does He lack the power to bestow it? Does He refuse to listen when we pray? Far from it, very far! But He knows whereof we are made, and with His shoulders He overshadows us. We are not, however, to leave off praying because this is so; for though He does not give us all we want, He gives us quite enough to keep us going; although He shelters us from too great heat, He fosters us with His own warmth, as does a mother. And this is the fourth benefit which I told you we received beneath His shoulders: namely, that we are cherished like chicks by the warmth of their mother's body, lest we wander abroad and die, because love waxes cold. For love is not poured out on us save by the Holy Spirit Who is given us. Beneath these wings, therefore, you will hope securely, expecting future benefits with confidence because your present blessings are so manifest.

* He shall defend thee under His wings, and thou shalt be safe under His feathers : His faithfulness and truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

CHAPTER 5

*'His truth shall compass thee as with a shield : thou shalt not
be afraid of the Terror by night;
'Nor of the Arrow that flies by day : nor of the Thing that
walks in darkness : nor of the Noonday Demon.'**

5.1

'WATCH and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.' So, on the threshold of His Passion, said the Lord. He was about to suffer it, and not His disciples; yet it was not for Him that He bade them pray, but for themselves. And if they needed so to fear during the Passion of the Lord, how great is our need so to do in our own suffering! Watch, then and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; for you are surrounded by temptations on all sides, so much so that Job says, 'The life of man upon earth is temptation,' and that is why we have that clause in the Lord's Prayer, 'Lead us not into temptation.' For as you are encompassed with temptations, so will His Truth encompass you as with a shield; so that where there are wars on every side, the succouring forces may surround you too. The Truth surrounds you, for He Who promises is true. 'God is faithful,' says the Apostle, 'Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.'

The grace of Divine protection is fitly compared to a shield, which is wide at the top to guard the head and shoulders and narrower below, because the shins are thinner and a wound in them is not so dangerous. For Christ allows His soldiers meagre and scanty means for protecting their lower part—that is to say, their flesh, and does not want them

to be burdened with a host of temporal things; rather He wills that, having food and raiment, we may be content therewith and have the ampler protection, the fullness of spiritual grace, for our higher parts. His saying, 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all things shall be added unto you,' refers to food and clothing, about which He has told us just before that we must not be anxious. For our Heavenly Father in His most kind love does provide us with these things, and that for two reasons: first, lest we think Him hostile to us if He give them not, and so lose hope; and second, lest an overcare for them should hinder the free action of our souls. Without food and clothing we can indeed neither live nor serve God. Nevertheless, the straiter the provision made, the better.

'His Truth,' then, 'shall encompass thee as with a shield. Thou shalt not be afraid of the Terror by night, nor of the Arrow that flies by day, nor of the Thing that walks in darkness, nor of the Noonday Demon.'

These are four temptations that compass us on every side, and we have need of the shield of the Lord around us on the right hand and on the left, before us and behind. I would warn you, brethren, that no one lives on earth without temptations, and if you chance to be relieved of one, then you may confidently expect another—or rather I should say that you should fearfully expect it, praying that you may be delivered from it, as one who dares not promise himself perfect freedom or rest as long as he is in this mortal body. And in this matter we should think how kindly the Divine Love deals with us, in that for long we are so occupied with certain temptations that we do not encounter others more perilous; and then again we are set free from one, in order that we may be exercised in others which His wisdom knows may work us greater profit. Let us then think about these four

temptations which are mentioned here. They are, I think, the chief of all temptations, and those who are in process of conversion meet them in just the order that is given here.

5.2

In Holy Scripture night is a symbol of adversity; and we know that the first thing we have to fight at the outset of our conversion is in connection with bodily vexations. For the flesh, untamed as yet, resents the discipline we put upon it; and, mindful of the liberty it has so lately lost, it lusts against the spirit more fiercely than before, and that especially in regard to those practices of mortification whereby you die daily, practices which so tax your strength and are so contrary to nature and to your former wont. Small wonder these things trouble you, especially those of you who have not yet formed the habit of swift recourse to prayer and holy meditations to ease the burden and heat of the day! We certainly need the shield of the Lord in our beginnings, that we may not be afraid of the Terror by night. The Terror by night you notice the Psalm says—not the night itself. For the temptation lies not in the affliction of itself but in the fear of it. We all endure the labours, but we are not all tempted; and those who are tempted suffer more from the fear of future hardship than from their present distress.

Because the fear is the temptation, it is fitly said that he who is encompassed by the shield of the Lord will not be afraid of it. He may be attacked, he may be tempted, he may fear the night, but that fear will not hurt him. Rather, if he has not been overcome by it, he will emerge unspotted; and he will be purified, as it is written, 'Those who have been frightened shall be purged.'¹² It is a furnace, is that fear; but Truth makes it search out our souls and not consume them.

A dark, nocturnal fear it is, undoubtedly; but the ray of Truth easily dispels it. For in that light we see the sins that we have done; and in comparison with the unending torments we deserve for them, we reckon everything we suffer now a pleasure. Or we reflect upon the heavenly rewards towards which we aspire; and account the sufferings of this present time unworthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. Or again, remembering the sufferings that Christ bore for us and pondering how much that Majesty endured for His unprofitable servants, we blush not to endure a little for ourselves.

But Truth so multifold, surrounding us on every side, has now availed, maybe, not only to repel this fear but also to expel it. The Night is past; as a son of light and one that walketh honestly, as in the day, do you now fear the Arrow! Lightly it flies, lightly it pierces; but I assure you it is not a light wound that it inflicts but one that very quickly will effect your death. The Arrow is vainglory. It does not attack the slack and the fainthearted; it is those who seem to be more fervent who should fear it and look out for it, and be more than ever careful to keep beneath the inexpugnable shield of Truth; for what is more opposed to vanity than Truth? Yet we do not need deep mysteries of Truth for dealing with the Arrow; let the soul know herself, let her find out the truth about herself! If I am not mistaken, it will be very difficult for a man to be led astray by the praise of other men, if he has seriously examined his own interior in the light of Truth. If he ponders his own condition, will he not say to himself, 'Why is earth and ashes proud?' If he considers his own corruption, will he not have to admit that there is in him nothing that is good? And if he does seem to have got anything, I think he will not be able to answer the Apostle when he says, 'What hast thou that thou hast not received?' and in another place,

‘Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.’ And lastly, if he has assessed himself faithfully, he will readily reflect that with his ten thousand he cannot meet Him that cometh against him with twenty, and he will account all his righteousness as filthy rags.

The other two temptations also must be met with Truth. For the ancient Enemy does not give up, but has resort to subtler methods. He has found the citadel immune on either side; he cannot shatter it by fear-begotten cowardice upon the left, nor yet by human praise upon the right. ‘But if I cannot knock it down by force,’ he says, ‘perhaps some traitor will beguile them into opening the gates.’ Who is this traitor, do you think? It is cupidity, the root of iniquity, the secret poison, the hidden plague, the mother of hypocrisy, the parent of envy, the rust of the virtues, the canker of holiness, and the blinder of hearts. ‘He despises vainglory,’ the Enemy goes on, ‘because it *is* vain; but perhaps something more substantial, such as wealth or honour, will appeal to him!’ How many has this Thing that walks in darkness thrust into outer darkness, soiling their nuptial robe and voiding their practice of the virtues of its religious value! And what does the worm feed upon, except mental perversion and forgetfulness of the Truth? And what, except the Truth, can track down the traitor and rebuke the Thing of darkness? ‘What is a man profited,’ asks Truth, ‘if he gains the whole world and loses or suffers damage to himself?’

The three temptations we have spoken of were suffered by the Lord; but the Enemy did not presume to use the fourth, which is of ignorance, with Him Who had so wisely answered in the others. Urged in the first temptation to turn stones to bread, He had not said He could or could not do it; He stated simply that there was another food. The second temptation was that of the pinnacle; He was urged to cast Himself from

it, on the ground that, if He were indeed the Son of God, He would sustain no hurt and the whole city would marvel and admire. Again the Lord did not say that He was the Son of God, nor yet that He was not. The third temptation, to fall down and worship the Tempter and so gain the kingdoms of the world, was to ambition. To be ambitious is to worship the devil; it is by the road of ambition that he promises to lead his worshippers to the honour and glory of the world. But, as I said, he did not use the fourth temptation against Him Whose answers had already shown the greatness of His prudence.

Against others who love righteousness and hate iniquity, however, what will the devil do? What can he do, except to cloak iniquity in the semblance of virtue? He tries to persuade those, whom he knows to be wholehearted lovers of the good, that evil is not only rather good but wholly so. This is the Demon not only of the Day but of the Noonday. Was it not this that Mary feared at the angelic salutation? Had not the Apostle this in mind when he said, 'We are not ignorant of their devices'? And did not the disciples fear the same, when they saw the Lord walking on the water and cried out, thinking that they saw an apparition? And how fitting it is that it was granted them to be on their guard against this fourth temptation in the fourth watch of the night! And that here again it is the Truth, and the Truth alone, that can discover the falsehood is so obvious that there is no need for me to mention it.¹³

5.3

We live in hope, and fail not in the present tribulation, brethren, because we look for joys that cannot fail. And there is nothing vain about our hope or doubtful in our expectation, for they rest on the promises of the Eternal Truth. We look

forward to His future gifts with confidence, because we see what blessings He is giving even now. For the Lord of virtues is also the King of Glory; in the hymn we address as 'Father of endless glory, Father of mighty grace'¹⁴ Him of Whom we sing in the Psalm that 'God loveth mercy and righteousness: the Lord will give grace and glory.' Let filial love then suffer manfully the struggle in this world, and bear unmoved whatever persecution comes. Having the promises for this life and the next, how should a man not endure everything, in order to gain all? When the foe attacks him, let him fight back bravely; for if he does so he will have a Champion at his side Who never fails and, when he triumphs, One Who makes most generous reward will not be far away. 'His Truth shall compass thee as with a shield.'

It is obvious that we need the Truth's unconquerable protection not only while we still live in the flesh but also when presently we must depart from it. Now we need protection in our dangerous conflicts; then we shall need it against the preternatural assaults of evil spirits. Even the very holy soul of glorious Martin suffered this attack—yes, and the same shameless temerity dared even to approach the King of Glory, as Himself declares, 'The prince of this world cometh and findeth nought in Me.' Happy the soul that has so warded off temptation's darts in this life with the shield of Truth that it is uninfected by their poison and will not be ashamed when it speaks with its enemies in the gate! Happy is he whom the shield of Truth surrounds both in his going out from this life and in his entering in on that which is to come!

Meanwhile, therefore, beloved, glorify Christ and carry Him in your own body. He is a delectable burden, a pleasant load, a saving pack to carry, even if He does sometimes seem to weigh rather heavy. Even if He thrashes you about the ribs

and beats you sometimes when you kick, even if at times He curbs and pulls your jaws to His will with muzzle and bridle, it is an altogether happy thing to carry Him. Be as a beast of burden, you who carry the Saviour; but do not be as a beast of burden in your heart. 'Man when he was in honour did not understand,' the prophet says, 'he was put on a level with the unreasoning beasts of burden and made like unto them.' Yet in another place he says to God, not without satisfaction, 'I am become as a beast before Thee, and I am always with Thee.' I think—in fact, I do not think, I know—that there is something about beasts of burden that a man should take to heart. The thing to imitate is not their lack of understanding but their patience. The first quotation would have held no hint of anger, had it read, 'Man when he bore the load of God kicked not: he was made before Him as a beast of burden.' For who would not greatly envy the beast of burden on whose humble back the Saviour deigned to sit, to show His own unspeakable humility, if with the bearing of that precious load it could have understood how great and how unique an honour it enjoyed? Be you then like a beast, and yet not like; bear your load patiently, but understand how greatly you are honoured; consider wisely and delightedly both what your burden is and what great benefit you get from it.

The great Ignatius, who was a pupil of the disciple whom Jesus loved and is our martyr, since his precious relics here enrich our poverty, wrote letters to a certain Mary whom he calls *Christofera*—Christ-bearer.¹⁵ It is a title plainly of the highest dignity and indicates the greatest honour. For to serve Him is to reign; to carry Him is to be laden with honour, not with loads. But was the Saviour's little ass, of whom we spoke, afraid lest he should fall upon the way with such a Burden, think you? Did he fear attack from wolves or robbers, or steep places, or any other peril, with that Hand on the

reins? Happy is he who has so carried Christ that he is found worthy to be brought into the Holy City by the Holy of Holies Himself. He has nothing whatever to fear; he will neither stumble on the road nor be turned back at the gate. The faithful made ready the road for the little ass; the holy angels make it ready for this beast of burden, for 'He has given His angels charge concerning thee, that they may keep thee in all thy ways, lest haply thou shouldst strike thy foot against a stone.' But we must not comment on that verse until we come to it.

* Thou shalt not be afraid for any terror by night : nor for the arrow that flieth by day;

For the pestilence that walketh in darkness : nor for the sickness that destroyeth in the noon-day.

CHAPTER 6

*'A thousand shall fall beside thee, and ten thousand at thy right hand : but it shall not come nigh thee.'**

'A THOUSAND,' says the next verse of our Psalm, 'shall fall beside thee, and ten thousand at thy right hand: but it shall not come nigh thee.' The previous passage told us of the four great and grave temptations that beset us in this life, and from which the Truth's protection sets us free. But I think that this which follows has reference to the life which is to come. 'Godliness is profitable unto all things,' the Apostle says, 'having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.' The fruit of holiness, the reward of righteousness, is such that even the unjust desire it. 'Let me die the death of the righteous,' says the false prophet Balaam, 'and may my last end be like his!' But the promise that this verse contains is not for such as he; nor has it much appeal to those willows of Babylon who prefer lamentation to the song of Sion, for the song of Sion requires a certain vehemence of holy longing, a readiness to rise out of themselves, in those who hear it sung. This promise, that a thousand shall fall beside thee, and so forth, is made only to him who, dwelling in the help of the Most High, abides in the protection of the God of Heaven. You must remember that.

Listen now, you who in eager anticipation already approach the gate of salvation, while yet you battle daily here, waiting till your change come. 'Whom God foreknew, them also He did predestinate,' so the Apostle tells us, 'to be conformed unto the image of His Son.' And just as the predestination is eternal and without beginning, so also is the

glorification to which we are predestined eternal and without end. How will He glorify us, do you think, and by what stages? For all the things of God are orderly, and surely you do not imagine that from predestination to glorification is but a single leap! You must look out for a bridge for yourself—and here it is, waiting for you to cross. For ‘whom He did predestinate, them also He called; those whom He called, them did He also justify; and those whom He justified, them too He glorified.’

This seems a good road to many people, and a good road it is, and nothing to be feared about its end. Have no misgivings about what lies ahead; march on with confidence and all the more alertly as you see those last things drawing near. But keep the middle of the road; ‘repent,’ the Scripture says, ‘because the Kingdom of Heaven is near.’ ‘But the Kingdom of Heaven,’ you will tell me, ‘suffers violence, and the violent carry it off. There is no way to it except through the massed forces of the enemy; there are giants in the middle of the road, they fly about in the air, they block the path and watch all those who pass.’ Nevertheless, go on in trust and do not be afraid. They are great, and they are many; but ‘a thousand shall fall beside thee, and ten thousand at thy right hand.’ They will fall all around thee, never to harm thee more to all eternity. Nor is that all; they shall not come nigh thee; for the mercy of thy God shall go before thee, and the same mercy follow after thee, guarding thy coming in and thy going out, as I said before. For how else could the mind of man sustain so fearful an attack of spiritual wickednesses and not be broken by intolerable fear? When Thou art there, Lord Jesus, those frightful forms that fall on us themselves will fall; however much they throng, they will but melt and perish at Thy look, as wax before the fire. Why should I be afraid of them, when they themselves are failing? Why should I

tremble, when they shake with terror? Why should I fear, when they are falling down? Though I walk through the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, so long as Thou art with me, O Lord my God. And, indeed, the Day will soon breathe in, the shadows soon will be dispersed and the dark powers will fall. We walk amid their vile and subtle promptings now by faith and not by sight; and yet our faith prevails. How much more easily will clear and unveiled knowledge of the Truth avail to blow those murky forms away? Nor must you fear their numbers. Remember that a whole legion left the man possessed at one word from the Saviour, nor did they dare to go into the swine until He bade them do so. So however many there may be of them, they will fall down on every side in mighty wonder and confusion where He is your Leader, crying, 'Who is she that mounts up like a rising dawn, fair as the moon, chosen as the sun, terrible as is an army set in array for battle?'

* The Prayer Book version is the same.

CHAPTER 7

*'Yea, with thine eyes shalt thou behold : and see the reward of sinners.'**

'His Truth shall compass thee as with a shield,' the prophet says, 'thou shalt not fear the Terror by Night, nor the Arrow that flies by day, nor the Thing that walks in darkness, nor the Noonday Demon.' In dealing with this passage we have seen that the Truth Himself deigns to provide the means for guarding the faithful soul both in its present temptations and in the ordeals it must shortly face. And the same prophet puts the matter in a nutshell elsewhere when he says, 'Through Thee I shall be rescued from temptation, and through my God I shall leap over the wall.' Swift rescue is denoted by the first expression, and sure and full deliverance by the second. Now, after saying that 'a thousand shall fall beside thee' and so forth, he adds, 'Yea, with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of sinners,' and that, I think, contains a promise of no small felicity. So may it be, O Lord, I pray. Let them fall down and be afraid, but let not me do so. Let them be confounded, but not me.

By these few words I am assured both of the soul's immortality and of the body's resurrection. For when they fall, it will be I who see them, and that with mine own eyes—the eyes that languish now for lack of sight, 'for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?', the eyes that now you scarcely dare lift up to heaven, the eyes that now so often flow with tears of penitence. You will not be furnished with new eyes; you will have your own, your present eyes, made new.

Perhaps this seeing with the eyes is promised because the supreme desire of the soul in this life is 'to see good things.' It longs to open the windows of its body to the supernal Truth, it yearns to walk by sight, and not by faith. Faith indeed comes by hearing, not by sight; it is therefore 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' In consequence, in faith just as in hope, the eye is weak; only the ear makes progress. 'The Lord God will open mine ear,' the prophet says; but He will open mine eyes too some day. In that Day He will say no more, 'Hearken, O daughter, and know, and incline thine ear'; He will say rather, 'Lift up thine eyes and look!' Your God is laying up treasures of delight and joy for you; eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him. For the eye will compass in the Resurrection more than either hearing or thought can now lay hold upon. 'I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh shall I see God my Saviour; Whom I myself shall see and not another, and mine eyes shall behold. This my hope is laid up in my bosom.'¹⁶

'Yea, with thine eyes shalt thou behold, and see the reward of sinners.' Grievous indeed will be this recompense, and very great their anguish to see those consoled, secure, and exalted, whom they so viciously attacked. But what profit or pleasure is there for us in that? What could be more irreligious, more inhuman, more execrable, than to gloat and delight over the torments of the wicked? But the blessed will be called into the Kingdom before those who are accursed are cast into the furnace of eternal fire; and just as the latter will suffer there the more acutely for seeing what they have lost, so also will the righteous behold and rejoice for what they have escaped. In that supreme separation, while the goats are

filled with envy at sight of the lambs, the elect will find endless ground for praise and thanksgiving in the condition of the reprobate, from which, as they freely acknowledge, only the Redeemer's mercy has preserved themselves.

* Yea, with thine eyes shalt thou behold : and see the reward of the ungodly.

CHAPTER 8

*'For Thou, Lord, art my hope : Thou hast set Thy place of refuge very high.'**

LET us consider further the promise of the Father, the expectation of the children, the end of this our pilgrimage, the reward of labour and the fruit of bondage. For we do indeed endure a grievous bondage of two kinds; firstly, that which is common to mankind; and secondly, the strict and fettering discipline, the prison-house of penitence to which, in our desire to mortify our wills and even lose our lives in this world, we have by our own will consigned ourselves. Bondage is pitiable only when it is enforced, and not when it is entered willingly. When you make sacrifice to God of your own accord, and no constraint is put upon your will save by itself, then there is something to the matter, than which I think there can be nothing greater. How can you grumble about anything, however great or hard, if it is done for God? The labour involved may provoke compassion; but, if you think about it, you will find in it much greater reason for congratulation. And are not all good works performed not only for but through Him? 'For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.' He is Himself the Author and the Rewarder of the work, and He is also its entire Reward; the Supreme Good, so simple in Itself, is twofold in Its operation as the Cause of good in us; It works effectively, and finally. It is well, then, brethren, that you are not only standing your ground in all these toils of yours, but are also overcoming for the sake of Him Who loved you; and that, moreover, obviously by His help. 'For as the sufferings of

Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.'

'For God's sake' is a common, well-worn phrase; but when not idly spoken how profound it is! Every one seeks and beseeches help for himself 'for God's sake'; and we all readily ask to be given 'for His sake' things that are not according to His will. And yet it is indeed a living and effective phrase when it is used, not carelessly or rashly, but as the utterance of the heart's rich devotion and single-minded aim. The things of this world lack stability; when it passes away, they will be voided too. All flesh is grass, and those who sow according to the flesh have the corruption of the flesh to fear. He Who Is alone is the unfailing Cause; only the Word of God abides for ever. 'Heaven and earth,' He says, 'shall pass away; but My words shall not pass away.'

You have made a wise choice, then, beloved, in keeping to hard ways for His words' sake, and sowing where no single seed can perish. He that soweth sparingly does not lack for harvest altogether; he reaps as he has sown. And he who reaps assuredly receives reward; and well we know Who promised that he who gave a cup of cold water to a thirsty person should in no wise fail of his reward. What then of him who, instead of giving water, by shedding his own blood drinks of the Saviour's cup offered to him? Will not his reward be commensurate with that which he has given? That is no cup of water, but the Chalice that inebriateth, and how excellent it is! It is a cup of undiluted wine, for only my Lord Jesus, Who alone is wholly pure and can moreover always purify what was conceived of unclean seed, He only has pure wine. He only has pure wine, Who in His Godhead is the Wisdom that reacheth everywhere by reason of its purity and no defiled thing comes into it, Who in His Manhood did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. He alone tasted death,

not as obliged thereto but of His own free will; not for His own advantage, for He lacked not the good things of which we stood in need; nor yet as giving grace for grace, for He died for His friends only that He might win them, and make friends for Himself from enemies. For while we were yet enemies, we were reconciled to God by the Blood of His Son. Or rather, we already were His friends in that we were beloved, although we did not yet return the love. For herein is grace, not that we loved God, but that He first loved us. First by how long a time, you ask? God the Father, the Apostle says, chose us in Him before the world's foundation. And further on in the same place he says, 'He hath graced us in His Son.' How could we not already be beloved when we were chosen? How not acceptable to Him in Whom we had been graced? In point of time, then, Christ died for the ungodly; but in point of predestination He died for brethren and friends.

His wine, as I have said, alone is pure; the wine of every other man is mixed with water, as the prophet says. It is so for four reasons: first, because none of us can boast of a clean heart; second, because we all must pay the debt of death some time; third, because when we may merit life eternal by laying down our lives for Christ, woe to those who are ashamed to confess Him; fourth, because we return too little love for the great love that He has first so freely given us. Yet He, Whose wine has none of this admixture, does not despise our mingled stuff, but deigns, as the Apostle confidently says, to fill up in our body the things that are wanting to His sufferings. As therefore all the chosen will get their same one penny of eternal life, yet in that life one star will differ from another star in glory; so will it be in the Resurrection of the dead—one House with many resting-places, wherein he who has but little will not lack, nor he whose wealth is more be

over-rich, but each will receive according to his labour, and nothing perish that has been sown in Christ.

I have said all this, brethren, to point the meaning of that so spiritual word that is our subject for to-day, 'For Thou, Lord, art my Hope.' Whatever there is to be done, renounced, endured, or chosen, Thou, Lord, art my Hope. This is the sole ground of my expectation. Others may boast that they bear the burden and heat of the day, or pride themselves on fasting twice a week and being different from other men; but it is good for me to hold me fast by God and set my hope upon the Lord my God. Others may put their trust in other things, their learning or their worldly wisdom, their noble lineage or what not, but I have counted all these things as loss for Thee; for Thou, Lord, art my Hope. Let others trust in the uncertainty of riches; I look not even for the bare necessities of life except from Thee, for Thou hast promised to provide these things for those who seek Thy Kingdom first, and I am trusting solely to Thy Word. If rewards are promised, it is through Thee that I look to win them. If battles arise against me, if the world raves and the wicked gnash upon me, and if my own flesh lusts against the spirit, I will hope in Thee.

To know this, brethren, is to live by faith. But if we know it, why do we still delay to cast away our wretched, futile, empty and deceitful hopes, and cleave with the entire devotion of our heart and all the ardour of our soul to this one Hope that is so sure, so perfect and so blessed? If there is anything He cannot do, why, then by all means look elsewhere for somebody to trust. But He has but to say the word and it is done; and what is easier than speech? Is it His will, and not His power, that you doubt? But 'greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,' and what stronger proof of His will towards you could you have than that? When has that Majesty, that is so

anxious for our trust, failed anyone who gave it? Who has ever hoped in Him and been put to confusion? It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for His word to fail of its fulfilment.

‘Thou hast set thy place of refuge very high,’¹⁷ it says. The tempter will not get up there, the slanderer will not scale those heights, nor will that vile Accuser of the brethren reach it. But remember the beginning of the Psalm. These words are spoken to the man who ‘dwelleth in the help of the Most High,’ and finds there shelter from the storm and his own cowardice—a double reason for thus taking refuge, you observe, from outward struggles and from inward fears. He would have less need to flee, if either he had the inward stoutness of heart to meet exterior tumults manfully, or if there were an outward calm to soothe his inward weakness. ‘Thou hast set thy place of refuge very high,’ it says. Flee thither often, brethren; it is a fortified place where no foe need be feared. If only one could stay there always! In this world we cannot. But one day what is now a refuge will be an habitation, an eternal dwelling. In the meantime we must run back thither often, although it is not permitted us to stay. A city of refuge opens its gates to us in every temptation, every trouble, every difficulty of whatever kind; a mother’s arms are stretched to fold us to her bosom, the clefts of the rock are ready for us to enter, the revealed mercy of our God invites us to come in. He who refuses this refuge does not deserve to escape.

This would have been sufficient comment on our text, if it had run, ‘For I have hoped in Thee,’ as in some other psalms. But this one reads, ‘For Thou, Lord, art my Hope’; which means not only that we hope *in* Him, but that our Hope *is* He. Some folk desire to get this or that temporal or spiritual blessing from the Lord; but perfect charity thirsts only for the

highest; with passionate and utter longing it declares, 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and apart from Thee what have I wanted on the earth?' To-day's lection from the prophet Jeremiah puts it beautifully. 'Thou art good, O Lord, to them that hope in Thee, to the soul that seeks Thee.'¹⁸ He speaks of *them* that hope in God, using the plural number as of something that is common to the many. But of the soul that seeks Him the singular is used, because to seek for nothing except Him requires singular purity and grace and perfectness.

'Thou hast set thy place of refuge very high.' The soul that thirsts for God like this will not want to make a tabernacle for Him on an earthly mountain, as did Peter, nor yet to touch Him, with the Magdalen; but rather it will cry, 'Flee away, O my Belovèd, and be like the roe and the fawn upon the mountains of Bethel!' For it has heard Him say, 'If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I,' and also 'Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father.' And being not unmindful of the heavenly counsel, it cries with the Apostle, 'Although we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know Him no more.' 'Upon the mountains of Bethel'—above principalities and powers, angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim (for those are the 'mountains' of the House of the Lord, which is what 'Bethel' means), even at the Right Hand of the Father, where the Father is no longer greater than He, there at the Right Hand of the Most High the soul desires to find the Co-Highest. For this is life eternal, brethren, that we may know the Father as True God, and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent as True and One God with Him, blessèd above all for ever. Amen.

* For Thou, Lord, art my hope : Thou hast set Thine house of defence very high.

CHAPTER 9

*'There shall no evil happen unto thee : neither shall the scourge come nigh thy tabernacle.'**

FAITH and hope have this in common, that they both lay hold of what is not more easily than of that which is. 'God has prepared for the faithful great and unthinkable benefits,' says Faith; and Hope says, 'They are being kept for me'; while Charity in the third place declares, 'I, for my part, hasten towards these things.' But it is difficult, if not impossible, for any one to form a notion of their quality, unless he has received a special revelation from the Spirit. 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man what things God has prepared for those who love Him,' the Apostle says. And Paul himself, for all his relative perfection while still living in the flesh, has to admit that 'now I know in part,' and (in another place) that 'now we see through a mirror, in a riddle, but then face to face.' But that which can be known by man in this life grows more attractive when it is thought about with loving expectation; and the afflicted naturally reckon deliverance from vexations as the height of happiness, and to be no longer wretched seems to them the highest bliss. So in the verse we have to think about to-day we read, 'There shall no evil happen unto thee: neither shall the scourge come nigh thy tabernacle.' Are you such boors, such dunces in spiritual matters that you do not know the difference between yourself and your tabernacle, and between what is here called evil and what is called the scourge? There are, indeed, some people who take as much

care of their flesh as if their tabernacle never had to fall, as fall it must and that ere long; they even behave as though they were all tabernacle and had no soul at all! 'If thou wilt separate the precious from the vile,' the Lord says through the prophet, 'thou shalt be as My mouth'—that is to say, if you have so shrewdly discerned between your outward and your inward being that you fear the scourge for your tabernacle no more than you fear evil for yourself, 'Depart from evil and do good.' Evil is that which robs a soul of itself, which shuts you off from God; so that where evil reigns the soul is as dead in itself, being without God, as the body is dead when it has no soul; wherefore a corpse is rightly termed *inanimate*.

All the same, I am not telling you to hate your flesh. You should love it, as given you to be your helper, and to be prepared to be your consort in eternal bliss. It is your Eve whom you, Adam, must love; and yet not love in such a way that you obey its voice rather than God's, or are afraid to chastise it! Carnally-minded persons tell us, 'Yours is a cruel life. Why don't you spare your flesh?' No, we do not spare the seed we sow, why should we? Is it not better to renew and multiply it in the field, than to let it rot in the barn? If we are cruel in not sparing our flesh, you who do spare yours are much more so. It is expedient for the flesh to suffer chastening now, so that it may escape the same hereafter and the scourge may not come nigh thy tabernacle then.

We need then to remember constantly that (as I said before) the true life of the soul is God, and spiritual evil (which is sin) is that which separates the soul from Him. We rightly want to be set free from evil of the body too, eventually; but in this present life the thing to shun is sin, and not its punishments; it is the evil, not the scourge, that is to be avoided, for it is altogether more disastrous for the soul to

be cut off from God than from the body. But when at last all sin has been taken out of the way and its cause removed, its effects also will be done away. Evil shall not come nigh thee then for evermore, nor shall the scourge approach thy tabernacle.

O blessèd hope! O happy expectation!

* There shall no evil happen unto thee : neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

CHAPTER 10

*'For He hath given His angels charge concerning thee : to keep thee in all thy ways.'**

10.1

HE Who guards Israel slumbers not nor sleeps; His mercy watches over us unwearyingly. Sometimes He Himself fills our souls with splendours; sometimes He visits us by means of angels; sometimes He teaches us through men; sometimes He comforts and instructs us through the Scriptures. If then I ask, 'How am I to escape the evil and the scourge, how can I flee and put such distance between me and them that they can not come nigh me?' I am told, 'He hath given His angels charge concerning thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.' *Thy ways*—the ways by which thou departest from evil and fleest from the wrath to come, not any ways! For there are many ways and many sorts of ways, and great is the traveller's peril if he does not choose his road with prudence and discretion. For God has told His angels to take care of us not in all ways but only in our ways; we need to be kept *from* some ways, not kept *in* them!

Let us, then, brethren, consider our own ways, and also—if your prayers will help me in so great a task—the ways of evil spirits, the ways of blessed spirits, and the ways of the Lord. The ways of the sons of Adam are conditioned by need and by desire. The former has to do chiefly with the body; and we all know from our own experience how multifold is the physical necessity by which we are driven. We have need to cry to the Lord, 'Bring Thou me out of my necessities'; and yet of the two evils it is far better to be

driven by need than to be drawn by desire. 'Turn away from thine own desires,' the Wise Man says, 'and follow not thy lusts.' Both these ways seem good to men; but there is no end to them till they debouch in hell. Is it not of these ways of men that it is said, 'Destruction and unhappiness is in their ways'? For a man's unhappiness is in proportion to his absorption in the things of earth; and woe to him who says, 'I am rich and lack for nothing,' when he is poor and naked and wretched and miserable! Woe to the sons of men for this false happiness! And as need arises from the weakness of the flesh, so does desire arise from the heart's hunger and forgetfulness. The soul begs for strange bread, because it has forgotten to eat its own.

The ways of the evil spirits are presumption and stubbornness; and it is a case of 'Like master, like man,' for in them they follow their prince. Was it not the vastest, the most terrible presumption when he said, 'I will sit in the mountain of the Covenant; I will be like the most High'? And having thus presumed and fallen, stubbornness forbade that he should rise again. The evil powers are utterly resolved to make us follow these same ways. Consider how this happens. First a man dissembles his own weakness and iniquity and unprofitableness; he flatters himself into thinking that he is something, when in fact he is nothing. The next step is ignorance of self; he has grown so used to the apron of fig leaves with which he has deliberately veiled his wounds from sight, that now he *cannot* see them, and makes excuse for having thus excused his sins. Swiftly from this he comes to the third step; if he defends the wrong, what evil is there that he will not do? So the fourth step—or rather precipice—down which he falls is contempt; and that is the sin that hath never forgiveness, neither in this world nor in the next. For the hard and hardened heart neither fears God nor respects

men; he who cleaves to the devil in all his ways has become of one spirit with him.

As to the ways of the holy angels, the Only Begotten has told us what they are. 'Ye shall see the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.' Ascension, for their own sake; descension, condescension, for our sake. The blessed spirits go up through contemplation to the Face of God; they come down through compassion at His nod, to keep thee in all thy ways. Yet their coming down does not deprive them of the sight of glory, for they always behold the Face of the Father.

And what are the ways of the Lord? The prophet says, 'All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth.' By these He comes to each and all alike, and comes by both at once. Therefore, when truth and mercy meet, righteousness and peace kiss each other; nor can He, Whose place is in peace, be absent. How much we have heard about this happy partnership of truth and mercy! 'Thy mercy,' says the prophet, 'is before mine eyes: and I will walk in Thy truth.' And the Lord says concerning him, 'My mercy and My truth are with him.'

Think also of the open Comings of the Lord. In that which has already taken place, you have as your merciful Saviour Him Who is promised you at the last as your true Requiter; and yet even in the Judgement mercy will not be lacking, 'For God loveth mercy and truth: the Lord will give grace and glory.' These ways of the Lord are the ways of eternity; and the ways of the elect among men are directed into them, as well as those of angels. A man's first step in mercy is when he learns to pity his own soul, and is pierced at heart along with Him Who first was pierced on his behalf. It remains for him, then, to follow the royal road and come to truth, by letting confession with the mouth accompany the heart's contrition,

as I have so often urged that you should do. He has to be converted and become as a little child in his own eyes. That is how a man enters the ways of mercy and truth, the ways of the Lord, the ways of life; and the fruit of those ways is the salvation of the traveller.

The ways of the angels also lead to these, quite obviously. When they ascend in contemplation, they seek Truth, and with the Truth their longing is fulfilled, and in fulfilment is itself renewed. But when they descend, they show us mercy, to keep us in all our ways; for they are our servants, not our masters, after the example of the Sole-Begotten Who came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and was as he that served among the disciples. The fruit of the angels' ways as regards themselves is their own beatitude and the obedience of charity; as regards us, it is the obtaining of God's grace and the guarding of our way.

You must notice also that God has charged His angels not to remove you from your ways but to keep you in them, and as it were to direct your ways into His ways, by means of their own. You, urged by your own need, I mean, descend and condescend to show mercy to your neighbour; which thing the angel does more purely, from charity alone. And then you, with the angel, try to lift up your heart to the supreme and everlasting Truth. Nor is it surprising that they should not disdain to admit us along with themselves to the ways of the Lord, seeing that they deign to keep us in their own.

10.2

'He hath given His angels charge concerning thee.' O wonderful condescension and truly mighty love! That supreme Majesty has charged His angels, those lofty, blessed beings who are so close to Him, concerning *thee*! And what has He commanded them to do? To chase thee as a dry leaf

driven by the wind? To take away the wicked, that he see not the glory of God? No. He bids those who would gather up the insown tares straightway to wait until the harvest, lest perchance they pull up the wheat along with them; and He tells His angels to take care of thee meanwhile.

O wheat among the tares! O grain amid the chaff! O lily among thorns! Thanks be to Him, my brethren, for us and you alike! He had given us a precious trust, the fruit of His Cross, the purchase of His Blood; and that uncertain, feeble guardianship was not enough for Him. He hath set watchmen on thy walls, Jerusalem; for these walls and buttresses need these watchmen very much indeed. 'He hath given His angels charge concerning thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.' What reverence, what devotion, what confidence, should that inspire in you! Go carefully; your angel is there with you all along the road, and you must reverence him at every turn. You cannot see him; but sight is not the only proof of presence even with material things, and how much more must spiritual things be spiritually sensed! Doubt not the angels' presence, not only with you but on your behalf; for they are there to guard you and to work your good. Nor must you be ungrateful to those who with so great a charity obey God's bidding and help us in such dire necessity. We must repay such mighty guardians with our heart's devotion; we must return their love and give them all the honour that we can and that is their due. Yet let us render all our love and honour in the first place to Him from Whom both they and we derive all that we are, from Whom alone we have the power to honour or to love, or merit to be loved and honoured ourselves. Let us love the angels tenderly as our co-heirs to be, and in the meanwhile our governors and tutors appointed by the Father. But though we are like little children now and have so great and dangerous a road to tread, what need have

we to fear? Our keepers can be neither conquered nor deceived, nor can they deceive us. They are faithful, they are wise, they are powerful. What, then, are we frightened about? Let us but follow them, and we shall abide in the protection of the God of Heaven.

* For He shall give His angels charge over thee : to keep thee in all thy ways.

CHAPTER 11

*'They shall bear thee in their hands : that thou dash not thy
foot against a stone.*

*'Thou shalt go upon the adder and the basilisk : the lion and
the dragon shalt thou tread underfoot.'**

11.1

SEE how necessary that protection and that keeping are. 'They shall bear thee in their hands,' it says, 'that thou hurt not thy foot against a stone.' And then, in case you think a stone is but a little thing, it adds, 'Thou shalt go upon the asp and the basilisk: the lion and the dragon shalt thou tread underfoot.' A small child, more than anyone, needs somebody to guide and even carry him among these things! 'They shall bear thee in their hands,' it says; they will guard the child and lead him by the way a child can take. How facile is the passage of him whom those hands carry! How easy it is to swim, as the saying is, when somebody else is holding up your chin!

As often, therefore, as a serious temptation presses and severe tribulation is at hand, invoke your keeper, your leader, your helper, and cry, 'Lord, save us; we perish!' His 'hands' are spiritual, and multifold are the ways in which the angels give spiritual aid to every chosen soul allotted to their care, according to the nature of the particular stone that stands in his path at the moment. Is someone sorely troubled by some distress of body or temporal vexation, or languishing from accidie of spirit and discouragement of mind? Already he is being tempted almost above what he is able to endure, and he will stumble on this stone if there is none to help. But what

stone is it? I think myself that it is the Rock of offence and the Stone of stumbling on which, if any one fall, he will be bruised and if it fall on him, he will be crushed, the Cornerstone, elect and precious, which is the Lord Christ. To dash one's foot against this Stone is to murmur against Him, to be tripped up through faintheartedness and through the storm. So he who has failed like this or is about to do so has need of angelic consolation, of angelic hands.

And shall I tell you what I think those hands, those two hands mean, in which the angels bear us men meanwhile? They represent a twofold showing, first of the shortness of our present tribulation, and then of the eternity of its reward. Make friends with the angels, my brothers; resort constantly in earnest thought and loving prayer to those who are ever present to keep and comfort you.

11.2

The holy angels, who keep us in all our ways, carry us also at our journey's end. We read quite recently how our most blessed father Benedict saw the soul of Bishop Germanus of Capua being borne to heaven by angels in a globe of fire;¹⁹ and the Truth Himself tells us that the beggar's soul was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. Indeed, how could we walk by ourselves in the country that is so new and so unknown to us? How much we need, moreover, to be carried, and that by angel hands? For 'thou shalt go upon the adder and the basilisk,' it says, 'the lion and the dragon shalt thou tread underfoot.' The 'foot' of man is his frame of mind, and how would that maintain itself among monsters as frightful as these? They are spiritual wickednesses, and they are not unfitly given different names, to denote the divers

ways in which the power of evil works—now biting like an adder, now poisoning the sight, now terrifying with its roars, now slaying with its breath. I have read of one kind of evil spirit that ‘it goeth not out except by prayer and fasting.’ Is not that the adder, the deaf adder that stoppeth its ears, lest it hear the voice of the charmer? If you want to go safely and fearlessly upon the adder when you die, see that you do not follow or imitate it now. For it is stubbornness, of which I spoke the other day. They say that the adder presses one ear to the ground as firmly as ever it can, and stops the other with its tail, to prevent it hearing! What can the voice of the charmer, the word of the preacher, do there? When I see a man like that, with whom no human pleading, however fervent, avails anything, I will pray for him and humble myself with fasting; I will be baptized in floods of tears for the dead soul that he is. It is adderish enough (if I may use the word) that the obstinate fellow should thus apply his head to the earth instead of to heaven, seeing that the wisdom that is both pure and peaceable is from above. But even so he would not be completely deaf if he did not further stop his hearing with his tail. What is his tail? It is the object at which a person aims. A desperate deafness is that of the man who sticks to his own will as to the earth, and as it were bending his tail meditates some project and applies his mind to obtain what he desires.

The basilisk, they say, poisons the eye; it is the worst and most accursèd beast of all. A poisoned eye, if you would like to know, is envy. Were it not for the envy of the basilisk, death would never have come into this world. Let no one ever look with jealous eye upon another’s good, for to do so is to be infected with this weakness, and in a sense it is to be a murderer, as the Truth Himself declares.

Alas for you if the dragon gets you! This enormous beast, whose fiery breath kills everything it touches, is none other than anger. How many people, even of high spiritual attainment, have we groaned to see fall shamefully into the dragon's jaws, when they have first been shrivelled by its breath! How much better it would have been, had they been angry with themselves, so that they should not sin! Anger is natural to man; it is the misuse of the natural gift that is disastrous. Let us use our anger on the things that really call for it, so that it may not burst out on the unlawful ones. In this way it will be with anger as with love and fear; one sort drives out another. The thing you ought to be angry with is that which alone can hurt you, alone can hinder all things else from working for your good—namely, your own iniquity. Be angry with that; for no adversity will hurt you if no iniquity rules you. He who is perfectly angry with this is unmoved by other things, in fact he embraces them. 'I am ready for the scourge,' he says, 'for my sorrow is ever in my sight.'²⁰

He who is unscathed by the dragon's breath acquires not only gentleness, but also courage; so that he is not frightened when the lion roars. 'Your adversary like a roaring lion,' Peter says. Thanks to the great Lion of the Tribe of Judah, this lion, though he roars, is powerless to strike. Let him roar as much as he likes, Christ's sheep must not take flight. What fearful threats he makes! How he exaggerates! What dire things he means to do! Let us not panic like beasts at that empty roaring. Those who are versed in such matters tell us that no beast can stand its ground when the lion roars, unless it actively resists him with all the courage it has got; often in that case it overcomes the lion when he strikes, although it could not bear it when he roared. He is indeed a beast, indeed irrational, who is such a coward that he yields from fear alone

and, being overcome by nothing but his own exaggerated notion of the toils ahead, is conquered by the trumpet, not the dart! 'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood,' says that nimble leader who knew how empty was the lion's roar. 'Resist the devil,' says another, 'and he will flee from you.'

* They shall bear thee in their hands : that thou hurt not thy foot against a stone.

Thou shalt go upon the lion and adder : the young lion and the dragon shalt thou tread under thy feet.

CHAPTER 12

*'Because he hath hoped in Me, I will deliver him : I will protect him, for he hath known My Name.'**

'COME unto Me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you,' says the Lord. 'Take My yoke upon you, and ye shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.' He invites those who labour to refreshment, and those who carry heavy loads He calls to rest. And yet He does not take either the labour or the load away; rather, He substitutes another load, another toil, a light load and an easy yoke, in which are refreshment and rest for him who carries them, despite appearances. Iniquity is a heavy burden, like a lump of lead. But what is Christ's light burden? I think it is the burden of the things He does for us; and that is a sweet load for him who appreciates and makes use of it, but a heavy and dangerous load for him who heeds it not. Man is a burden-bearing animal as long as he is in this mortal flesh. If he is still carrying his sins, his load is heavy; if he has already been relieved of them, his load is less heavy but, if he thinks sanely, he will find that his unburdening is really a bigger burden than the one he bore before. God burdens us, when He unburdens us; when He lifts the load of sin, He lays on us the load of His own goodness to us.

This earnest care and this so generous goodness on God's part call for our thankfulness and invite our love. 'He hath given His angels charge concerning thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.' What more could He do for you than that? I know what you are thinking, honest creature! You thank the

angels, but it is to the Lord of angels that you really render the thanks that is His due. His messengers are not enough for you; you pray, you ask that He Himself, Who said that, may be with you, that He may kiss you, not at second-hand, but with the kiss of His own mouth. You know you are to go upon the adder and the basilisk, the lion and the dragon; and you have not forgotten the victory that Michael and the angels won. But you desire not Michael, but the Lord Himself. 'Deliver Thou me, and set me beside Thee,' you cry, 'and let any man's hand fight against me!'²¹ 'For Thou, Lord, art my Hope,' you say, so that you may be told, 'Thou hast set thy place of refuge very high!'

And the merciful Lord takes pity and does not disdain to be the Hope of the wretched; He refuses not to show Himself at once the Deliverer and the Protector of those who hope in Him. 'Because he hath hoped in Me,' He says, 'I will deliver him. I will protect him, for he has known My Name.' Verily, except the Lord keep the city, the watchman—be he man or angel—wakes in vain. The hills stand about Jerusalem; but that would be too little, did not the Lord stand also round about His people. When the Bride in the Canticle finds the watchmen (or rather is found by them, for she was not seeking them), she does not stop, as though they were enough for her, but after a few short questions about her Belovèd she hastens after Him more quickly than before. 'In the Lord put I my trust,' she might have said when they urged her to tarry, 'how say ye then to my soul, "Get away to the hills like a bird?"' 'Because he hath hoped in Me, I will deliver him.' 'He has hoped,' He says, 'not in the watchmen, not in a man, not in an angel, but in Me; he looks for nothing good to come to him through them that does not come from Me. For every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and

cometh down from the Father of lights. From Me is all the watchfulness of men over the works that I have put into their charge. From Me, and also through Me, since neither angel's eye nor man's can penetrate thereto, derives the angels' vigilance over the secrets of the hearts of men.'

Let us recognize this threefold guardianship, my brethren, and make a suitable response to each. Let us study to be above reproach with men, with angels, and with God; let us endeavour to please all in all things, but chiefly Him Who is great over all. Let us obey those set over us, who guard us as those who must give account for their souls; that they may not do so with sadness. And, indeed, thanks to God of Whose only gift it cometh, I have not much advice to give you about this, nor much to fear on this account. For what is my joy and my glory, except your prompt obedience and blameless conversation? And what would it be if I knew for sure that the angels with their penetrating vision see nothing in you that is unbecoming, that none of you is hiding aught of the accursed thing of Jericho, or grumbling or slandering in secret, or acting with deceit or negligence, or entertaining shameful thoughts? A great increase of joy it would be, certainly, to know all this; but not yet its fullness. For we are not so great that we are above being judged by man, and still less are we clear before the bar of our own conscience. And if even the great stand in awe of the Judge Who searches out all secrets, what trepidation ought we to feel at the thought of His searching of us? O that I could be certain that there is nothing in any single one of us that offends the Eye that alone knows perfectly all that is in a man and sees in him what he does not see in himself! Let us search out and ponder this judgement, brethren, with the more fear and trembling for that we cannot understand the unsearchable depths of the

judgements of God and His inviolable ordering. Hope that goes hand in hand with fear like this is meritorious; we hope to good effect when we thus stand in awe.

‘Because he hath hoped in Me, I will deliver him.’ How kind, how generous of God not to fail those who hope in Him! For a man’s whole merit lies in his putting all his hope in Him Who saves the whole of man. ‘Our fathers hoped in Thee, they trusted in Thee and Thou didst deliver them. They called upon Thee and were saved, they trusted in Thee and they were not confounded.’ Hope in Him, all ye congregations of the people! For whatever place your foot has trodden shall be yours; and your foot means your hope. Your hope will get whatever it includes, no matter how great, if only it be set wholly on God, so that it may be firm and may not waver.

‘Because he hath hoped in Me, I will deliver him. I will protect him, for he hath known My Name.’ He does not know His Name who takes that Name in vain, who says to Him, ‘Lord, Lord!’ and does not do what that same Lord enjoins. Nor does he know the Name who has regard to vanities and lying follies. But he who said, ‘There is none other Name given to men whereby we must be saved,’ he knew the Name! We also, if we know the Holy Name that was invoked upon us, must desire and pray that it may be hallowed, according to the Saviour’s teaching, ‘Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name!’

* Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him : I will set him up, because he hath known My Name.

CHAPTER 13

*'He hath called on Me, and I will hear him : I am with him in tribulation, I will rescue him, and I will glorify him.'**

'HE hath called on Me, and I will hear him.' The fruit of knowing the Name is the outcry of prayer; and the fruit of the outcry is the Saviour's hearing. For how could a man be heard if he had not called, and how could he call if he knew not the Name of the Lord? Thanks be to Him Who hath made known the Name of the Father to men, and made salvation the fruit of its invocation, as it is written, 'Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved.'

'He hath called on Me, and I will hear him.' This is a covenant of peace indeed, a treaty of loyal love, a pact of compassion and mercy. 'He has known My Name, I will protect him; he has called on Me, and I will hear him.' He does not say, 'He was worthy, he was righteous and upright, clean in hands and pure in heart; therefore will I deliver and protect and hear him.' If He did say that or something like it, who would have any hope? Who can boast of his pure heart? But this is a kind law that makes hearing the reward of clamorous petition. 'He called on Me, and I will hear him.' He who is slow to cry deserves not to be heard; nor does he who does not ask at all or asks lukewarmly and indifferently. An ardent longing is a great cry in the ears of God. God is a Spirit, and the man who desires his cry to reach Him must cry in the spirit too. For God looks not on the face of man, as do men themselves, but on the heart; it is the heart's voice, therefore, that He listens for, and not the body's.

'He hath called on Me and I will hear him.' This is not wholly undeserved. For a great need has wrung out the great

cry. What did he ask for when he cried, save that he might be comforted, set free, and glorified? Why is he heard in these respects, if his prayer was for something else? 'I am with him in tribulation,' says God; 'I will rescue him, and I will glorify him.'

There is reference here, I think, to the great Triduum that we are about to celebrate. For He Himself met with tribulation and grief when for the joy set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame. But the things concerning Him had an end, as He Himself foretold before His death, and as He said at His death, 'They have been consummated,' and forthwith entered on His Sabbath rest. Nor was the glory of the Resurrection long delayed; on the third day, at the first streak of dawn the Sun of Righteousness arose for us out of the tomb. So were the fruit of the tribulation and the reality of the rescue revealed in the manifest glorification. And we have the same sort of Triduum ourselves. 'I am with him in tribulation,' He says. When should that be, but in the day of our tribulation, in the day of our cross, when His own saying is fulfilled, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation'? For the full and perfect liberation cannot be before the day of burial, because a heavy yoke rests upon the sons of Adam from the day that each comes forth from his mother's womb until the day of his burial in the mother of all. 'In that day, therefore, will I rescue thee,' He says, 'when the world will have nothing more that it can do to either body or soul.' Glorification, however, waits for the Last Day, the Day of Resurrection, when that which is being sown now in dishonour shall be raised in glory.

How do we know that He is with us in tribulation? We know it surely from the very fact that we ourselves are in it. For who could bear it, who could stand it, who could go on without Him? Let us count it all joy, my brethren, when we fall into divers temptations, not only because it is through

many tribulations that we must enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but also because the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a troubled heart. 'Though I walk through the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.' He is with us all the days, unto the end of the world. But when shall we be rescued with Him? Surely when we are caught up to meet Christ in the air, and so shall we be ever with the Lord. When shall we appear with Him in glory? Surely when Christ our Life shall have appeared. It is necessary now that the glory be hidden, for the tribulation must precede the rescue, and the rescue the glory. 'Turn again unto thy rest, O my soul,' says the voice of him who has been liberated, 'for the Lord hath done good to thee; for He has delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.' Happy is he who has Thee for his Comforter and Helper now, O Lord, in need and tribulation! And how much happier still will he be when Thou hast rescued and ransomed him out of such great evils; when he has been delivered from the snare of the hunter and snatched away, so that evil can nevermore pervert his mind nor falsehood deceive his soul! But by far his greatest happiness will be when Thou hast taken him to Thyself, filled him with the blessings of Thine House, and made him like Thyself in Thine own glory.

And now, little children, let us cry to heaven, and our God will have mercy upon us. Let us cry to heaven, for under heaven all is toil and grief and vanity and vexation of spirit. The heart of man is wicked and impenetrable, his senses are prone to evil. There is in me no good, at least, not in my flesh; for the law of sin dwells in it and it lusts against the spirit. The whole world also lieth in the Evil One. How wicked is this present age in all respects! How wickedly, as well we know, do its desires militate against the soul! The princes of this world, this present darkness, are spiritual wickednesses, and among them the serpent is craftier than any living thing. All

these are under the sun, all these are under heaven. With which of them will you take refuge? From which of these do you hope for any comfort or help? If you seek within you, you find yourself as one who is dead from the heart. If you look below you, the corruptible body weigheth down the soul. If you look around you, the earthly habitation presses down the mind that museth upon many things. Seek above you, therefore; but mind you overleap the gangs of robbers that infest the middle of the way like adverse winds! Pass by those wicked watchers, who try so indefatigably to prevent any one's escaping to that City, pass them by! If they strike and wound you, leave your cloak in their hands as Joseph left his with the adulteress; leave your linen cloth and flee from them naked, as did the youth in the Gospel. For did not God give more than just His cloak and His linen cloth, when He gave His flesh also into their power? Lift up your heart, then, and lift up your cry; lift up your desires, lift up your conversation and intention, and let all your hope be from above. Cry to heaven, that your Father Who is in heaven may hear you and send you help out of the holy place and guard you out of Sion. May He send you help in your tribulation now, deliver you out of it soon, and glorify you in the Resurrection finally. These are great things, but Thou, great Lord, hast promised to perform them. Because of Thy promise we hope, and we dare to say:

‘If we cry with loving heart,
Thou art bound to do Thy part.’²²

* He shall call upon Me, and I will hear him : yea, I am with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and bring him to honour.

CHAPTER 14

*'With length of days will I fill him : and I will show him My salvation.'**

THIS verse, my brethren, is well suited to this present time. We are about to celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord; and in these words each one of us receives a promise of his own. The members, therefore, will more joyfully remember what happened to their Head, because they look for it to happen to themselves one day. It is a fitting ending to the Psalm, that promises so blest an end to him who sings it; a happy finish that pledges so happy a fulfilment. 'With length of days will I fill him, and I will show him My salvation.' Paul says that 'godliness has promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come,' and in another place, 'Ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.' That is the 'length of days' that this verse promises, for what is longer than eternity? It is a good end, is eternal life—a good end that has no end. And surely what has a good ending must itself be good. Let us embrace holiness, therefore; for holiness is good because its end is endless life. 'Let us follow holiness and peace, without which no man can see the Lord.'

'With length of days will I fill him.' Here He explains more fully the former promise, 'I will glorify him.' It must needs be a great glorification that comes down from the excellent glory; such Immensity could not bestow a glory that was not itself immense. How pitiful it is of us to seek glory from each other, and not to want the glory that alone

proceeds from God, which only is enduring, which alone satisfies!

It is a profitable tribulation that tests us and leads us to glory. 'I am with him,' He says, 'in tribulation. I will rescue him, and I will glorify him.' We need the tribulation that is turned into glory, and we need the sorrow that is turned into joy, lasting joy that no man taketh from us, joy multifold and full; we need the straitening that begets a crown. Let us not be scornful, brethren; the seed is small, but a big fruit grows out of it. In this we do not look at what we see, for the things that are seen are temporal; it is the unseen and eternal part that we must think about. Let us foretaste in tribulation the first-fruits of glory; for the glory itself, as well as the hope of it, is contained in the tribulation, just as the fruit is hidden in the seed because the seed contains the hope of it. And that is why the Apostle gloried in his tribulations. It is in this sense also that the Kingdom of God is within us, here and now, a vast treasure hidden in an earthen vessel, in a common field. Hidden, I say; but who is the happy man who finds it? He, surely, who thinks more about the reaping than the sowing. The eye of faith discovers this treasure because it judges, not by appearances but by that which does not appear. How truly had he found this treasure, who declared, 'Our light affliction, that is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding weight of glory'! He does not say, 'The tribulation *will have* its reward,' but 'it *is working* for us an eternal weight of glory.' The glory, my brethren, lies hidden in the tribulation, eternity is hidden in this present moment, and the surpassing weight of glory is concealed in our light affliction now. Let us hasten, then, to buy for ourselves that field, so that we may also buy the treasure hidden in it. Let us count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations. Let us say from our hearts, and really

mean it, 'It is better to go into the house of mourning than to the house of feasting.'

God says, 'I am with him in tribulation.' Shall I then ask for something different? It is good for me to hold me fast by God and to put my trust in the Lord, for 'I will rescue him,' He says, 'and I will glorify him. I am with him in tribulation, My delights are with the sons of men.' Emmanuel: God with us. 'Hail, thou that art full of grace!' says the angel to Mary, 'the Lord is with thee.' He is with us in the fullness of grace; and in the fullness of glory we shall be with Him. He comes down, in order that He may be nigh to them that are troubled at heart, to be with us in our tribulation. He will be with us when we are caught up to meet Christ in the air, and so to be ever with the Lord. Let us then give all diligence meanwhile so to have Him as our Companion by the way that He may be hereafter the Restorer of our Homeland, or rather that He Who then will be Himself our Home may meanwhile be our Way. As long as Thou art with me, Lord, it is better for me to be troubled, than without Thee to reign and to feast and to boast. It is better for me, Lord, to embrace Thee in tribulation, to have Thee with me in the fiery furnace, than to be in heaven without Thee. For what have I in heaven but Thee, and apart from Thee what have I wanted on the earth? The furnace tries the gold, and the testing of tribulation tries just men. There, there art Thou with them, O Lord; there in the midst of them that call upon Thy Name Thou standest, even as once Thou deignedst to be seen with the Three Children, even by a heathen, who exclaimed, 'The form of the Fourth is like the Son of God!' Why do we fear? Why do we hesitate? Why do we flee this furnace? The fire rages, but the Lord is with us in the tribulation. If God is with us, who can be against us? And if He rescues us, who is there that can snatch us from

His Hand? And lastly, if He glorifies, who is there that can put to shame? If He exalts us, who shall cast us down?

Now hear the sort of glory with which He glorifies. 'I will fill him,' He says, 'with length of days.' The plural denotes multitude, not sequence. We read of holy and perfect men that they departed out of these days of ours 'full of days'; and that means simply that they were full of graces, having been transformed into that plenitude from day to day and from glory to glory, not of themselves but by the Lord the Spirit. If then a grace is called a day, and if the false glory which we seek from each other is the day of man, must we not regard the fullness of true glory as the true day, or rather the full noonday, where 'the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days'?

'With length of days will I fill him.' It is as much as to say, 'I know what he wants, I know what he thirsts for. He has no taste for gold or silver or lust or desire for knowledge or worldly position; he counts all that as dung. He has emptied himself interiorly, refusing to let himself be occupied with the things that he knows well can never satisfy him. He knows in Whose Image he was made, Whose greatness he is able to receive. Therefore with length of days will I fill him, whom nothing but the true Light can remake and only things eternal satisfy. This length of days will have no end, this glory will not wane, and there will be no surfeit in this satisfaction. And I will show him My salvation; he shall be rewarded with the sight that he has longed to see, when the King of Glory shows him the glorious Church, having no spot or wrinkle through the splendour of that Day and the complete fulfilment that it brings.'

‘With length of days will I fill him.’ And as if you had asked Him how there can be days in the City of which we read that the sun will not shine in it by day, for there will be no night there, He adds, ‘I will show him My Salvation’—as much as to say, ‘The Lamb is the light thereof. I will no longer train him in faith or practise him in trust; I shall show him My Salvation, I shall show him My Jesus, that to all eternity he may behold Him in Whom he has believed, Whom he has loved, Whom he has always desired.’ Show us Thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us Thy Salvation. Show us Thy Salvation, Lord, and it sufficeth us; for whoso seeth Him sees Thee, for He is in Thee and Thou art in Him. For this is life eternal, that we should know Thee, the true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent. Then, therefore, O Lord, do Thou suffer Thy servant to depart, according to Thy word, in peace, when mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation, Thy Jesus, our Lord, Who is God above all, blessèd for ever, Amen.

* With long life will I satisfy him : and shew him My salvation.

NOTES

[Throughout this new edition and as appropriate, roman numerals have been replaced with arabic numerals. Scriptural references in these notes have been aligned to Bible versions of greater currency than those made reference to by the translating editor: the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (RSV-CE) for the Authorized (King James) Version and Revised Version; and the Douay Version (DV) for the Vulgate.—Ed.]

¹ See 4 Kings 4:38–41 (DV) or 2 Kings 4:38–41 (RSV-CE).

² See Saint Luke's version of the Parable of the Strong Man and the Stronger, Saint Luke 11:21–22, and also the story of David and Goliath in 1 Kings 17 (DV) or 1 Samuel 17 (RSV-CE), and especially v. 51.

³ Saint Matthew 4:6.

⁴ Ecclesiasticus 24:29 (DV), cf. Sirach 24:21 (RSV-CE). It is Wisdom who speaks.

⁵ Ecclesiasticus 18:6 (DV), cf. Sirach 18:7 (RSV-CE).

⁶ Ecclesiasticus 22:1–2 (DV).

⁷ Proverbs 24:16.

⁸ The Latin is *a verbo aspero*, where our own version has 'from the noisome pestilence.' The latter follows the Massoretic vocalization of the Hebrew text, which reads *MDBR HWT* as *middébbber* [cf. *middebher*] (Patrick Boylan, *Psalms 72–150*, vol. 2 of *The Psalms: A Study of the Vulgate Psalter in the Light of the Hebrew Text* (Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son, 1924), 117, <https://goo.gl/ckkrrM>) *hawwôth*; whereas the Latin is translated from the Septuagint, which read the Hebrew as *midd^ebhar* (ibid., 117–18) *hawwôth*. The first word, whether *debber* or *dābhār* [cf. *debher* and *dabhar*, respectively] (ibid., 118–19), is the Construct case, plague-of, or word-of; and *hawwôth* [cf. *hawwoth*] (ibid., 117–18) is an intensive plural meaning literally abysses or chasms, and figuratively (as here) engulfing ruin or destruction. The Latin *asper*, which means literally 'without hope,' is extraordinarily good for this, and it seemed better to translate it thus, rather than by 'sharp,' as does the Douay Version. The same

difference between the versions occurs in v. 6, where ours has ‘the pestilence that walketh in darkness,’ and the Latin, following the LXX [i.e., the Septuagint], ‘the Thing,’ *dābhār* having the meaning of thing or matter, as well as that of word.

⁹ A reference to Saint Matthew 25:36.

¹⁰ See Numbers 14:3.

¹¹ Lamentations 3:51 (DV).

¹² Job 41:16 (DV), cf. 41:25 (RSV-CE).

¹³ In the last section of serm. 6 (in chap. 5.2) Saint Bernard goes on to show how these four temptations are seen in the history of the Church, remarking that he has given the same explanation before in one of his sermons on the Song of Songs [i.e., the Song of Solomon (RSV-CE) or Canticle of Canticles (DV)]. This is serm. 33 of *Sermones in Cantica Canticorum*, for which see Saint Bernard, *On the Song of Songs* (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1952), 96–100 (in 11.3. ‘Of the four temptations that lie in wait for us’).

¹⁴ From the hymn ‘Splendor paternae gloriae,’ sung at Lauds on Mondays in Epiphanytide.

¹⁵ From a letter to one Mary of Cassobola, ascribed to Saint Ignatius but of doubtful authenticity.

¹⁶ Job 19:26 (DV).

¹⁷ The Latin is: ‘Altissimum posuisti refugium tuum.’ The Douay Version translates: ‘Thou hast made the Most High thy refuge.’ Saint Bernard’s comments suggest that he took it as our Prayer Book version does, ‘Thou hast set thine house of defence very high,’ though it is difficult to be quite sure.

¹⁸ Lamentations 3:25. In the modern Roman Breviary (RB) this passage is read at Matins on Holy Saturday; but in Saint Bernard’s time it must have been read earlier in Lent than that.

¹⁹ From Saint Gregory the Great, *Dial.* 2.35. This is not read on the Feast of Saint Benedict in the modern RB, but the Sarum Breviary prescribes it and the same usage must have been followed at Clairvaux.

²⁰ Psalm 37:18 (DV), cf. 38:17 (RSV-CE).

²¹ Job 17:3 (DV).

²² ‘Si corde clamemus pio, certe debes ex promisso.’ The note to this in Mabillon’s edition of the text says ‘In hymno Quadragesimae,’ but it is not in any of the Office hymns.

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