

ON LUST.

TWELFTH SERMON.

ON THE FOLLY OF IMPURE DESIRES OF SENSUAL PLEASURES.

Subject.

The impure man who seeks to gratify his desire for sensual pleasures finds nothing; for he seeks a pleasure, which 1. Cannot be called a pleasure, and, 2. Which should rather be called a pain.—*Preached on the eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Offerebant ei paralyticum jacentem in lecto.—Matth: ix. 2.
“And they brought to Him one sick of the palsy lying in a bed.”

Introduction.

By the diseases of the body, which we read of in the Gospel, that our Lord cured, are signified the diseases of the soul, the healing of which was the chief reason why the Son of God came down on earth, and became man. And what are those diseases? St. Ambrose in his homily on the Gospel tells briefly what they are: “Our disease is avarice, our disease is ambition, our disease is impurity.”¹ There we have according to the testimony of the Apostle St. John, the three chief maladies of the soul, from which all other sins and vices spring. And that is the reason why I have tried to inspire you and myself with a hatred for them. You have already heard enough about ambition and avarice. But there still remains a vice to consider which occasions the eternal death of most men, namely, the vice of impurity. I will follow the order hitherto observed, my

¹ Febris nostra avaritia est, febris nostra ambitio est, febris nostra libido est, etc.

dear brethren, and show first the vanity and nothingness of impure pleasures. I have said that an ambitious man who seeks honors, and an avaricious man who seeks riches, find nothing; now in the same way I say—

Plan of Discourse.

The impure man who seeks to gratify his desire for sensual pleasures, finds nothing. Why so? Because he seeks a pleasure which cannot be called a pleasure; as I shall show in the first part. He seeks a pleasure which should rather be called a pain; as I shall show in the second part.

O Mary, Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, and you pure Spirits of heaven, holy angels guardian, one thing I beg of you in such a delicate and dangerous subject, which caused me much hesitation and reflection before venturing to speak of it, place prudent and chaste words in my mouth, that I may not hurt pure hearts and ears by the very means I make use of to inspire myself and others with a fear of that horrible vice.

It is a common saying among philosophers that a little may be regarded as nothing;¹ a short pleasure is looked upon as no pleasure. And such is really the case. Who would consider me a rich man, because I have a penny for a long time, or a thousand dollars for a few minutes? In the first case I should have too little, in the last case my wealth lasts too short a time for me to deserve the name of a rich man. Who would say that he really enjoyed himself because he had spent a day looking at a beautiful picture, or a moment tasting something sweet? The first is too small, the last too short to cause real enjoyment. And what better would that rich man have been, who was buried in hell, and who asked Abraham to send Lazarus to him with a drop of water, if his request had been granted.

So it is, my dear brethren, with impurity; the pleasure it gives is so short, that it ends as soon as it has begun; hardly is it tasted when it is gone. Have you ever noticed how eagerly little children run after butterflies in the summer time? They run about for hours and hours; they strive to grasp them in their hands, or to catch them in their hats; and they wonder at what they think to be beautiful birds, with variegated wings. But how short-lived their joy is: for it consists in catching the butterfly after a deal of trouble. And when they have caught

¹ Parum pro nihilo reputatur.

it, what have they? Nothing but a nasty worm which soils their hands; so that their pleasure is at an end. Such, it seems to me, is the case with the impure; they are attracted either by beauty, which in reality merely conceals the food of worms; or their own imaginations draw flattering pictures of pleasure for them, and immediately the passions are excited, the mind is agitated, and there is neither rest nor peace until the imaginary pleasure is enjoyed. And when they have gained the object of their desires, what have they beyond the memory of a short-lived pleasure? If I have acquired great riches, I have certainly an empty good, still I can enjoy it for many years, nay, for my whole life, and my only care need be to prevent it from being stolen, or otherwise taken away from me. If I have attained great honors and dignities in the world, I must acknowledge that I have gained nothing but an empty breath of air; still, the vain pleasure I feel lasts as long as I am in an honorable position. Amongst all pleasures the epithet *momentary*, is especially applicable to impurity. Daily experience confirms this. Acknowledge the truth of it, impure man, who perhaps this very morning have offended God by your sensuality; you have enjoyed that pleasure by consenting to an impure thought, by impure conversation, by unchaste looks, by acts that no one dares to name; say, what have you now of your pleasure? What is left of it? Ah, you must confess, nothing remains of it; it has vanished completely; and has left behind it only mortal sin!

How foolish then, to commit sin for the sake of a momentary pleasure.

And is it then worth while for a man to barter a happy eternity for its sake? Poor Jonathan, how you were to be pitied for having against your father's command, merely tasted a few drops of honey; as you yourself complained: "I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod which was in my hand, and behold I must die;"¹ that short-lived pleasure costs me my life! Unfortunate Esau, who gave up your birth-right for a mess of pottage, in order to satisfy your gluttony, you had reason to regret your folly in resigning your privilege and your father's blessing, and to bewail it bitterly: "And he wept with a loud cry!"² Oh, how much more you are to be pitied, unhappy sinners, who in order to taste a drop of honey, to enjoy a momentary pleasure, forfeit your heavenly birth-right, and

¹ Gustans gustavi in summitate virgæ, quæ erat in manu mea, paululum mellis, et ecce ego morior.—I. Kings xiv. 43.

² Irrugit clamore magno.—Gen. xxvii. 34.

incur the everlasting pains of hell! Filled with compassion at such folly, St. Augustine cries out: "O truly miserable condition, in which the pleasure quickly passes away, and the pain lasts forever."¹ Oh moment! Oh eternity! Oh short joy! Oh long sorrow! Oh impurity, how quickly your pleasure passes! Oh flames of hell how long and how fiercely you burn! Oh miserable mortal who for the sake of the one, expose yourself to the other, how can you be so blind?

And when you have enjoyed this short-lived and vile pleasure, what remains to you? You are like the children who catch the nasty, winged grub in their hands. What a vile enjoyment it is! One feels ashamed even to name it! Even the most impure, when they are in decent company, try to veil their allusions to it under figurative language, lest they should be put to shame; for it is this very vice and almost this alone, which can transform a reasoning being into a mere animal; as we read in the Holy Scriptures, which compare those who indulge in gluttony and impurity, to dogs, swine, wolves, horses and mules. David says in the Psalms: "And man when he was in honor, did not understand; he had been compared to senseless beasts, and is become like to them."² Pride is the sin of the angels; envy, and jealousy, and tempting others to offend God, is the sin of the devils; avarice and vindictiveness is proper to man; but impurity belongs to beasts alone.

It is a hideous and brutal pleasure.

See what a short and degrading pleasure you indulge in, O impure man, and how you defile the temple of the Holy Ghost, of which St. Paul says: "Know you not that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you are bought with a great price. Glorify and bear God in your body."³ From this temple you have driven away God, by your impurity, in order to introduce into it the evil spirit; and you have defiled the members of Jesus Christ, as the same apostle says: "Know you not that your bodies are the members of Christ?"⁴ Members which He has united to Himself in baptism, and which He so often feeds with His own Flesh and Blood in the Holy Communion.

They act wickedly therefore, who defile their bodies with it.

¹ Vere plagenda nimis et miseranda conditio; ubi cito præterit quod delectat, et permanet sine fine quod cruciat.

² Et homo, cum in honore esset, non intellexit: comparatus est jumentis insipientibus, et similis factus est illis.—Ps. xlviii. 13.

³ An nescitis quoniam membra vestra templum sunt Spiritus sancti, qui in vobis est, quem habetis a Deo, et non estis vestri? Emi enim estis pretio magno. Glorificate, et portate Deum in corpore vestro.—I Cor. vi. 19, 20.

⁴ Nescitis, quoniam corpora vestra membra sunt Christi?—Ibid. 15.

ion. Hear this, O Christian, and learn therefrom your great dignity, and also your shameless wickedness in dishonoring Jesus Christ. Your eyes are the eyes of Christ, and you sully them with impure looks; your ears are the ears of Christ, and you allow them to be filled with the filth of impure conversation; your tongue is the tongue of Christ, and you defile it with unchaste discourse; your hands are the hands of Christ, and you use them to offend Him; your heart is the heart of Christ, and you besmear it with foul thoughts and desires; your body belongs to Jesus Christ, but you, like a foul animal, allow it to wallow in the mire of impurity! Wicked Balthasar, men still condemn you when they remember that you profaned the sacred vessels of the temple of Jerusalem, by using them as drinking cups. Godless heretics, all good Christians are horrified at the sacrileges you commit, when you break into Catholic churches and desecrate the sacred chalice and monstrance; although they are merely gold or silver vessels which have only an external holiness. But far more wicked are you Christians, who defile the temple of God and the members of Christ in yourselves by the degrading crime of impurity!

And their
souls, too.

In this temple, you have sullied that beautiful image, your soul, which is made to the likeness of God, and which is so beautiful, that it attracted the love and admiration, not merely of men, but of the angels, of the Mother of God, and even of Our Lord Himself; whose beauty led the Almighty God, to give up His Only begotten Son to become incarnate, and to suffer extreme poverty, and a painful and shameful death; whose beauty forces even the demons to perform the lowest services for men, and to give them the whole world, if they could, in order to gain one soul. This beautiful soul you have so disgraced by your shameful lust, that it is now an abomination to God and His angels, and would be intolerable to all creatures, if they could only see it. Disgraced? That is too weak a word; for every mortal sin does that. You have completely blotted out that image. Take a beautiful picture, and cut it here and there with a knife; it is spoiled; but still the main features may be traced in it; but throw it into the fire, and you will utterly destroy it. It is true that every mortal sin defiles the soul; still there are some lineaments of the former likeness left; it is the fire of impurity alone that completely blots out that image, turns it into that of a beast, and burns it up, so that there is nothing divine left in it. "My Spirit shall not remain in man forever,

because he is flesh,"¹ and lives according to the flesh; such are the words of God himself. By your own acts, O unchaste man, you testify to the deformity of the vice of impurity, for you dare not gratify your desires, unless in private, so that you must be ashamed even of yourself, if you are not dead to all shame! And it is to a thing of this kind that you give the name of pleasure and enjoyment! Is that what men seek with so much trouble and anxiety? Alas, it is; and for such a short-lived, detestable, and disgraceful pleasure, the human heart allows itself to become so infatuated and blinded, that honor and good name, and one's mortal soul, and the riches and eternal joys of Heaven, and God Himself, the Highest Good, are all sacrificed so that hell alone remains as the lot of the impure man for eternity! Why should it be called pleasure? Is it not rather a bitter pain? It is so in reality, my dear brethren, for the unchaste find the very contrary of that which they seek; as I shall now prove.

Second Part.

Cardanus writes that Queen Fennella gave King Kenneth of Scotland, a golden apple, which was so constructed, that when it was held in the hand for a certain time, it sent forth sharp arrows which inflicted a mortal wound; the king, ignorant of the danger, took the apple and lost his life by it. Impure and sensual desires offer a similar dangerous gift to men. St. Gregory of Nyssa says that "Lust is a cruel and tyrannical mistress, that always pierces the souls of its slaves with sharp arrows;"² And is it not true? With how many arrows is not the heart pierced, before the unchaste man is able to gratify his desires? Oh! cries out St. Bernard, how many uneasy and anxious thoughts, how many plans and contrivances, how many abasements and humiliations are required by that passion! If the impure man has still some thought and fear of God left, what uneasiness and terror he has in his conscience! All the principles of faith and right reason are against him; the all-seeing Eye of God, that is looking at him; the severe justice of the Almighty Judge, that he has to expect; the terrible uncertainty of death, that he has to fear in the very moment of his guilt; the miserable eternity that awaits him; the fire of hell that he deserves; the loss of heaven, that he has incurred; what frightful

Luxury is
full of bit-
terness be-
fore it is en-
joyed.

¹ Non permanebit spiritus meus in homine in æternum, quia caro est.—Gen. vi. 3.

² Crudelis domina et rabiosa luxuria est, quasi stimulis servilem mentem exagitans.

phantoms those are that haunt him ! His conscience, if it is not deadened, cries out to him ; Ah, unhappy man, what are you about to do ? Where is your shame ? What about your soul ? Where is your God ? He is present with you ; He goes with you to the very place in which you intend to commit your abominations ! What if He were to avenge Himself on you in the very moment of your crime ? What if death surprised you then, and your soul were hurled down to hell ? Can that be called a pleasure which in the very moment of enjoyment, fills the soul with such bitter thoughts ? Is not that torment of the conscience enough to terrify any reasonable man, and to keep him from committing such a dreadful sin ?

Shown by
an example.

We read in the Bollandists an account taken from Caesarius, of a person living in a religious house, who was so blinded by impure desires, that he made up his mind to go back into the world and there gratify his passions. Acting on this determination, he was on the point of going out at the door of the church, when a crucifix placed itself in his way ; nothing daunted, he proceeded to another door and there was met by a picture of the crucified Saviour ; he was somewhat frightened at this but not converted, so he went on, and again encountered the same picture, which looked at him threateningly, as if to warn him from carrying out his design. (All Christians, my dear brethren, should keep Jesus crucified before their eyes when they are tempted to impurity ; one look at the cross should more than suffice to keep them from yielding to sin, and to lead them back to the way of virtue. For the thought must suggest itself : this head was crowned with thorns for me, those feet and hands were pierced with nails for me, this whole body was scourged and covered with wounds and blood for me. Why then do I not take a scourge and chastise myself, that I may do something for the love of Him who so loved me ? At least, O God, do not allow me to insult Thee by committing this vile sin before Thy very eyes. So should each one think, when tempted to impurity.) Ought not that person to have entered into himself, after having been three times warned by Christ Himself in such a remarkable manner ? But no ; notwithstanding all that, he went to the side door, saying : How much trouble it takes for me to enjoy myself only once in my whole life ! With these words he passed a marble statue of the Blessed Virgin, which stretched out its arm and dealt him such a terrible blow, that he lay half dead on the floor. He spent the night in a state of the

greatest alarm, and from that moment had such a horror of impurity, that he would rather undergo death itself than do the least thing contrary to chastity. All men whose consciences are not hardened have the same fear and dread to experience, although not in a miraculous manner, when they make up their minds to commit a sin of impurity. But even if the unchaste man has hardened his conscience, and forgotten God, he must still carefully hide his excesses from the eyes of men ; he must have recourse to a hundred contrivances to keep his sin concealed, and he must condescend to the most slavish and degrading actions, before he succeeds in gaining his end ; he must bear all his fears and labors alone.

But if all this trouble is in vain, and he fails in inducing the other party to consent to his sinful proposals, he is despised and looked down upon (and how justly do not all servants of God treat such infamous proposals with the contempt they deserve, instead of listening to them ; repelling them even with violence if necessary). And what a disgrace that is to him ! What hatred and rage he feels at it ! And to what a pitch of desperation it drives him to have to hate the person whom he wished to love, and by whom he wished to be loved ! Consider, says St. John Chrysostom, how the unchaste wife of Potiphar became the slave of her inordinate desires ; she who was mistress of her house, threw herself at the feet of her servant, and spared no effort to win his love. Would she not have been a thousand times happier if she had never allowed her desires to get the better of her ? Joseph, who feared God more than he did his mistress, took to flight and left his mantle behind him. How great the rage of the slighted woman, when she saw herself rejected in that manner ! Hatred filled her heart instead of love, and forced her to accuse Joseph falsely and have him cast into prison. Consider how Ammon fared, when he became a victim to his incestuous passion. He faded away and looked like a dead man, so that everyone who saw him asked : " Why dost thou grow so lean from day to day, O son of the king ? " Is that to be called a pleasure, I ask again, which, before it is enjoyed, fills the heart with such bitter cares ?

And full of
pain after
enjoyment.

And suppose the unchaste man succeeds in his attempt ; does the gratification of his passion, which he so much longed for, torture and afflict him ? What sharp thorns pierce his heart ! His wicked desires are like so many executioners that torture him ; nay, we might say that if all the pain and sorrow that the

Even the
very enjoy-
ment of im-
pure love
causes un-
easiness and
torment.

other passions cause one to feel, were put together, they would not equal the tyranny with which the impure passion treats the heart it has mastered. Nor does that passion give to its votaries the joy and pleasure that the other passions sometimes bring with them. All the care and anxiety of the miser in keeping and increasing his store; all the uneasiness and jealousy of the ambitious man in seeking for honors; all the bitterness of the vindictive man against his enemy; all the venom that gnaws at the heart of the envious man; all the chagrin and discomfort that torments the impatient man, and drives him to cursing, swearing, and blasphemy; all these things together must the impure man bear in the prosecution of his evil designs.

As all who
are given
to impure
love experi-
ence.

Unfortunate man, says St. John Chrysostom, how you are to be pitied! Show me one hour out of the twenty-four in which you really enjoy peace and rest; count the numberless desires that unceasingly torment you, when the object of your sinful passion is absent; count the sleepless nights, the disquieting dreams that break your sleep; the cares that plague you; the trouble and anxiety, the despair that takes possession of you, if anything occurs to prevent you seeing the object of your passion; count the uneasy thoughts that assail you when that object is present, knowing that your love is unlawful and cannot last; the very consolation of those who love each other unlawfully consists in the sighs which testify to their mutual anxiety; count the suspicious and jealous thoughts that fill the mind; the envy, rage, hatred and vindictiveness, if there is the least cause given for jealousy; consider the pain caused by the very object of the unlawful love, the least sign of neglect or forgetfulness, a change of manner, a look, a word, even silence itself is enough to fill the heart with melancholy, sorrow, and even despair; the revenge on the favored rival is nothing but an increase of the secret and intolerable torment; if anything happens adversely to either of the guilty parties, the other feels it just as keenly. All this you must acknowledge, impure man; you sing of it in your love-songs, and you declare openly that there is no greater torment than a sinful passion. It is experienced even by those who have sworn constant fidelity to each other in the holy sacrament of matrimony, and who therefore, are bound to love each other. How much more, then, must that torment be felt by those whose love is unlawful, and forbidden by God under the penalty of eternal damnation! "Oh, how bitter are the fruits of

lust," says St. Jerome, "they are more bitter than gall, more cruel than the sword!"

Since impure love re-unites all the pains and bitterness of the other passions, it can enjoy none of their sweets and comforts. The proud and ambitious man, after all the trouble and care he has, can enjoy the position he has gained; the avaricious man, although he plagues himself immensely, has a pleasure in his riches; the revengeful man, although he is tormented with bitter thoughts, has some satisfaction in avenging himself; the glutton has pleasure in eating and drinking; and all these pleasures may be had together; but there is nothing of the kind in unchaste love; for there is no satisfaction in money or honors, or eating or drinking when the beloved person is absent; this absence alone turns every joy into a sorrow. You may talk to the impure man hundreds and thousands of times of the eternal joys of Heaven, he will not feel the least desire for them. He would willingly give them up, if he could satisfy all his wishes on earth. He cannot even imagine a joy which does not consist in impure love. He is inclined sometimes to envy the beast of the field, and to wish that he had neither reason nor freedom, that he might gratify his passions without shame, or the fear of eternal damnation. So that he has lost all pleasure in, and taste for everything; nay, his ruling passion itself gives him no content, because his desires increase more and more, and the greater they are the harder it is to satisfy them. According to Peter of Celle, "the impure man becomes more full of desire the more he gratifies himself, and with the desire the torment he has to suffer increases also." I no longer wonder at the teaching of St. Augustine; just as the tyrants in former times, he says, urged on the executioners to torture the martyrs of Christ, so also the devil makes use of impure desires to torture his martyrs. He himself had to acknowledge, that before his conversion his experience taught him that "the unchaste man is more tortured by his passion, than the martyrs were by shedding their blood." And this he said while he was still given to impurity.

When the enjoyment is passed, and the occasion of it is taken away by death or other separation, what happens then? Disgrace before the world, shame of one's self, gnawing remorse, which according to St. Augustine, is almost like the pain of hell;

For they
have no
real satis-
faction in
their im-
pure pleas-
ures.

After the
sin follow
pain, re-
morse and
shame.

¹ O quam acerbus est fructus luxuriæ; amarior felle, crudelior gladio!

² Imples luxuriam et adhuc esurit; sustines poenam et adhuc crescit.

³ Plus torquetur libidinosus voluptatis amore, quam martyr Christianus sanguinis effusione.

such are the fruits of impurity ; bitter repentance follows on satiety. I have sinned ! All the pleasure is gone ! My honor, my innocence, my soul, my God, Heaven, all is lost ! If I were to die now ? If the earth would open and swallow me up after I have fallen into the hands of the devil ? Such are the cries of conscience that the impure man hears day and night. And besides this, there is another torment, namely that of having to tell his sin with all its circumstances in confession, a thing that appears most difficult ; nay, impossible to some ; so that they prefer to remain for ten, twenty, thirty years at enmity with God, and making sacrilegious confessions and communions, nay, they sometimes actually choose to go to hell, rather than disclose their shame to one unknown man, who is bound to the strictest secrecy ; or else if they get an extraordinary grace and resolve to tell their sins, they have to disclose all their past sinful lives, to their ten-fold confusion, because all their former confessions were bad. See, there you have the fruits of that short, shameful and bitter pleasure !

As they themselves acknowledge.

With reason did Demosthenes say to a lewd woman, who tried to tempt him, and every Christian should make the same answer when similarly tempted : “ I do not wish to buy repentance at so dear a rate ;”¹ away with you ; I am not so foolish as to expose myself to bitter suffering for such a short pleasure ! Some time ago, outside confession, as otherwise I could not say anything about it, and in another place, a person acknowledged to me that he had lived for some years in unlawful intercourse, and that he was so infatuated, that if he had seen hell open before his eyes, he still would refuse to be converted ; now the occasion of sin was taken away, and he was freed from his passion, and, said to me, in a most impressive manner : Father, if this bowl (alluding to one he was holding) were filled with money and it was all to be given to me on condition of my allowing myself to be enslaved by such a passion, even if it were not forbidden by God, I would not consent, solely on account of the continual torment that I should have to suffer. Now since I have done penance, I can live contentedly ; before, my life was like a hell on earth. So it is, says St. Augustine : “ Thou hast commanded, O Lord, and therefore, every inordinate desire punishes itself.”² “ I will go after my lovers,”³ says the lewd woman in

¹ Tanti poenitere non emo.

² Jussisti, Domini, et sic est, ut sua sibi poena sit omnis inordinatus animus.

³ Vadam post amatores meos.—Osee ii. 5.

the Book of Osee ; thinking perhaps, that she will have much enjoyment ; but the Lord says : “ Wherefore I will hedge up thy way with thorns ;”¹ I will overwhelm you with such bitterness that it will utterly poison the short joy you seek.

Nevertheless, such is the infatuation produced by this passion, that unless the occasion is taken from them by violence, those who are infected with it, like the person I have spoken of, find it almost impossible to be converted. They are to my mind like the bear that belonged to a certain prince ; the prince one day caused a pot full of boiling honey to be placed before the bear which rushed at it eagerly, but the scalding honey burned the animal’s mouth, and made him retreat from the pot, growling fiercely ; still he did not forget the sweet taste, and he came back again with the same result as before, and repeated this three or four times, until the scalding honey was too much for him, and he fell down dead at last. That is a true picture of the impure man ; like a madman, he swallows down poisoned draughts of pleasure, until his heart, his mind, his conscience, his honor all are gone, and still he cherishes his fatal passion until death puts an end to it, or some other violent means takes away the occasion of it. See what they gain who seek impure pleasure ! They look for joy and find sorrow.

And yet they cannot refrain from that bitter pleasure. Shown by a comparison.

Oh, certainly they are martyrs of the devil ! Accursed sin, what misfortune thou causest ! Accursed lust, thou art the pestilence that has infected the souls of most men, and for the sake of a few moments of vile pleasure, hast given them over to the torments of hell ! Ah, I should rather weep bitter tears for those unfortunates, than speak to them, for words will do them no good ! Mercy, O God, mercy ! Pity so many of Thy creatures who are made to Thy image and likeness, and whom Thou hast redeemed by Thy blood, but who are so blinded by shameful lust, that they cannot see their misery, so that they become an easy prey to the devil ! How long, O Lord, how long wilt Thou permit the loss of so many souls ? Ah, even one drop of Thy blood is enough to extinguish the fire of passion in us all ! Holy angels, save from this vice the innocent children intrusted to your care, that they may not hear or see anything to scandalize them ! And you who are still innocent, guard your senses if you wish to preserve your purity ; call every day upon the Blessed Virgin and your guardian angels, to save you from all dangerous occasions, and to inspire you with a lasting horror

Therefore we must deplore their miserable state, and beg of God to free us all from impurity.

¹ Propter hoc, ecce, ego septem viam tuam spinis.—Osee, ii. 6.

if even the least impure thought. Think and say in all temptations with the chaste youth, Casimir: I would rather die than commit such a sin; ¹ I will serve my God in purity of heart and soul, and I will love him above all things in time and eternity. Amen.

Another Introduction of the same Sermon for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Text.

Ab æterno ordinata sum.—Prov. viii. 23.

“I was set up from eternity.”—*From the Epistle of to-day*

And so it is; from all eternity it was decreed by God that sin should never have the least part in Mary, that not even for a moment was she to be subject to the stain of original sin, but that she should always be pure and immaculate; because she was chosen to be the mother of Him who takes away the sins of the world. All true Christians and servants of Mary know well that it is unworthy of her dignity for them to question this truth; and it is unnecessary now-a-days to spend longer time in proving it; for to doubt it even in thought, would be a sign of very small love for the Mother of God. To-day's feast, my dear brethren, inspires me with a two-fold wonder; the first is, what a shameful and disgraceful thing it is to be infected with original sin alone; since God did not allow His Mother to be under that stain even for a moment; nay, according to the testimony of the holy Fathers, Mary had such a clear knowledge of the malice and deformity of original sin, that if the choice were given her, either to be the Mother of God, and to have all the graces and privileges attending that dignity, with original sin, or to be free from original sin without that dignity, she would choose the latter. The second wonder is, how little we mortals make of the deformity, not merely of original, but of actual sin; since we so often sacrifice grace, God, our souls and Heaven, for the sake of a momentary and sinful pleasure. Both these things are to be wondered at; Mary's love of purity, and our folly and blindness. This last I will consider to-day, it concerns particularly those who are given to impurity, and who give up God and all His graces, their souls and their salvation, and for what? For an imaginary and false pleasure, nay, for a troubled and painful pleasure. Such is the subject of the present sermon. Plan of discourse, etc., continues as before.

¹ *Malo inori quam foedari.*

THIRTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE INCURABLENESS OF THE VICE OF IMPURITY.

Subject.

1. There is no vice which so blinds the human understanding.
2. None which so hardens the human will in wickedness, as the vice of impurity.—*Preached on the twentieth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Incipiebat enim mori.—John iv. 47.

“For he was at the point of death.”

Introduction.

That is a time when one requires help, when one is at the point of death. But it is also a time when great skill is required to help; and it is a certain sign that a disease is incurable, when nothing but a miracle on the part of God can cure it. With reason then did the ruler, in to-day's Gospel, beg of our Lord to come: “Lord, come down, before that my son die;” ¹ there is no time for delay, because he has already begun to breathe his last. A malady of that kind, my dear brethren, is impurity, of which I have already spoken; and it is an incurable and desperate malady, so that he who is infected with it has already begun to die an eternal death. For when it has once become deep-rooted, it can hardly be cured, unless by a miracle of divine grace. The reason of that is—

Plan of Discourse.

There is no vice which so blinds the human understanding. Such is the subject of the first and longer part of my sermon. No vice which so hardens the human will in wickedness, as the vice of impurity. Such is the subject of the second part. I have no hopes that what I am about to say will do any good to those who are addicted to impurity, because there is hardly any chance of their conversion; so that I address myself chiefly to the innocent, in order to warn them against this frightful vice.

Help me to do so, O Immaculate Virgin, and you too, holy guardian angels.

¹ *Domine, descende prius quam moriatur filius meus.*—John iv. 49.

Impure
desires rep-
resent only
what is flat-
tering to
the pas-
sions.

Zeuxis once painted a picture of a young man carrying grapes, so naturally, that the birds came and pecked at the canvas, thinking that the grapes were real. All who saw the picture praised it, and wondered at the skill of the artist. Zeuxis alone was dissatisfied at it, on account of a great fault he observed in it. And what fault was that? If, he said, the grapes are painted so well that the birds come and peck at them, the boy who is carrying them, must be very badly painted, or else the birds would be afraid to come so near him. Now, what do I mean by this, my dear brethren? A similar picture is drawn before the human understanding by sensual desires; but they paint in vivid colors only what is pleasing and flattering to the senses; so that the ardent desire of enjoying those pleasures may not be interfered with by shame or fear.

And conceal
what is cal-
culated to
deter from
sensual in-
dulgence.

Meanwhile, all the bitterness and torment that such pleasures cause, and everything that could frighten men away from them, is carefully kept in the background, so that the understanding is blinded, and neither sees nor desires to see any of those deterrent causes; nay, once it has become enslaved by impurity, it is incapable of seeing or recognizing them. Thus, the impure man is not frightened by the omnipresence and Almighty power of God, from whom nothing is concealed, and who can annihilate him in an instant, during the actual commission of his shameful crime, (O great God, who can dare to despise and insult Thee before Thy very eyes!) nor by the uncertainty of death, which may surprise him in the midst of his wickedness, and hand him over to the devil as it has done with many already, (what a terrible thing to die in the very act of sin, or at least in the state of sin, and thus to enter into eternity!); nor by the strictness of divine justice, before which even the Saints have trembled, and which he may have to face with his sin still fresh upon him; nor by the thought of the beauty and endless joys of heaven, which he barter so miserably for a momentary gratification, (what folly, to give away eternal and unspeakable joys for the sake of indulging a brutish passion!); nor by the terrors of hell, which follow on the loss of Heaven; it is enough to make one's hair stand on end to think of burning in a fire forever, without any hope of being released! Yes, these are truths which he often thought of formerly, and they inspired him with a fear of sin; they caused him to feel a bitter remorse the first time he gratified his impure desires, and they kept him for a time in constant uneasiness; they are truths

that can terrify any other sinner, no matter how wicked he is, and bring him to repentance and amendment of life.

But the unchaste man, who has become addicted to sensual pleasures, or who has been immeshed in the toils of an impure attachment for any creature, is no more impressed by those truths, than he would be by the fables of the old pagan poets. He does not even think of them; if his blinded understanding is still capable of having a thought of the kind, he puts it away at once. He has no eyes, as St. Augustine, an experienced witness, says, for anything but the filth in which he is immersed. The Holy Scriptures say of the two impure judges, who wished to lead the chaste Susanna into sin: "They perverted their own mind, and turned away their eyes, that they might not look unto Heaven, nor remember just judgments."¹ St. Ambrose writes of a man who was so given to this vice, that it really made him blind, and when he saw that his sight was leaving him day by day, he cried out: "Farewell, friendly light;"² I will rather become blind altogether than give up my pleasures. Farewell, beautiful sun. I shall no more enjoy your light, but it does not matter, so long as I can gratify my passion! The same might be said by all who are resolved to give themselves up to impurity, and to indulge in unlawful affection: good-bye, friendly light of my soul, I do not want you any longer. Eternal principles, divine truths, inspirations of the Holy Ghost, salutary rays of grace, inspirations of my guardian angel, warnings and sermons of the servants of God, farewell! your light will never shine on me again. God will sometimes send you into my heart, but I shall not perceive you; you will knock, and I will not open to you; it will be of no use to send lights from above into my soul; for I shall henceforth wander about in my blindness, although it leads me into the darkness of hell.

The un-
chaste put
away every
thought of
God and
His truths.

The same may be said of all works of devotion; farewell, friendly light. Prayer and good works, I have hitherto been attentive to you with zeal and heavenly consolations; but now I must leave you; I have no more taste for you. Holy Sacrament of Penance, I have often cleansed my conscience by your means, but now I have done with you; it is impossible for me to repent of my sins of impurity, since I love them more than anything else.

They lose
all taste for
piety and
devotion.

¹ Everterunt sensum suum, et declinaverunt oculos suos; ut non viderent cœlum, neque recordarentur iudiciorum justorum.—Dan. xiii.

² Vale, amicum lumen.

Precious Food of Angels, Flesh and Blood of my Saviour Jesus Christ, with which I have hitherto strengthened my soul once or twice a month, I desire you no longer; I prefer, like the prodigal, to satisfy my hunger with the husks of swine, rather than sit at the Table of God, and eat the Bread of Angels. Word of God, which it has been my pleasure and joy to hear, to the great profit of my soul, farewell; I cannot bear you now, for you speak to me of things that I hate to hear of, and you threaten me with eternal damnation for what I most love and am determined not to leave; good-bye, I have heard the last of you! Spiritual books, Lives of the Saints, in the reading of which I used to spend an hour every Sunday and holyday, away with you; I can no longer collect my thoughts, for they constantly turn to where my treasure is. You, O Saints, please me no longer, for your chaste lives are a constant reproach to my excesses! Tender love and devotion to the Mother of God, O what a consolation you were to me often, you were always my refuge in temptation, my helper in want, my consoler in afflictions, my only hope after God when I was doing penance for my other sins; farewell; I have no taste for you any more! I still say the Rosary every day, but I have no hope, nor confidence in it, because I know, O Mary, that thou hatest this impure heart of mine from which those prayers come. God, and all that belongs to His service, farewell; I cannot think of you any more, for you disturb me in my pleasure! Divine light of my soul, farewell!

King David
is a proof of
that.

And so it is in reality, my dear brethen. What a holy and perfect man David was; I wonder as often as I think of it; a man after God's own heart, who always walked in the presence of God: "My eyes are ever towards the Lord;"¹ whose mouth was always filled with the divine praises: "Seven times a day I have given praise to Thee;"² whose heart with all its thoughts and desires was occupied all day long with the law and the commandments of God: "Thy law is my meditation all the day;"³ who used to break his rest during the night, in order to praise God: "I rose at midnight to give praise to Thee;"⁴ who used to value the divine inspirations more than all earthly sweetness: "How sweet are Thy words to my palate, more than honey to my mouth;"⁵ who was so full of the love of God that he could

¹ Oculi mei semper ad Dominum.—Ps. xxiv. 15.

² Septies in die laudem dixi tibi.—Ibid. cxviii. 104.

³ Lex tua tota die meditatio mea est.—Ibid. 97.

⁴ Media nocte surgebam ad confitendum tibi.—Ibid. 62.

⁵ Quam dulcia faucibus meis eloquia tua: super mel ori meo!—Ibid. 103.

swear that he would never forget Him nor His commandments: "I have sworn and am determined to keep the judgments of Thy justice."¹ "Thy justifications I will never forget, for by them Thou hast given me life."² David, I say, had hardly looked with a lustful eye on Bethsabee, and committed sin with her when, as the Sacred Writer tells us, he spent some years without thinking of God, although after the death of Urias he had taken her to wife, and could have a lawful affection for her. So much was he infatuated with this vice, that he did not even see how wicked he was until the Prophet Nathan explained it to him by the well-known parable of the poor man's ewe lamb; then his eyes were opened, and he remembered his God, and how grievously he had sinned, and he cried out: "I have sinned against the Lord."³

If there are any unfortunates here present, who are victims of an unlawful passion, I call them all to witness if such is not their own experience? No matter how pious, devout and zealous they were in the divine service, as soon as they were ensnared by impurity, did they not at once lose all taste and inclination for piety and good works? It cannot be otherwise; St. Paul says: "But the sensual man perceiveth not those things that are of the Spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand;"⁴ the light of his understanding is gone out, and he no longer finds joy or pleasure in anything, but the gratification of his brutish passion. While thus blinded, he pays no attention to his other duties and obligations; his honor and good name, his position and authority, his office and dignity, farewell to them all, once his desires get the upper hand. The father forgets what he owes his children, the child what he owes his parents; the husband forgets his wife, the wife her husband; the man of high position forgets the character he has to keep up before the people; the religious and the priest forget the holiness and dignity of their state; the young man forgets his advancement, the young girl her virginal honor. All these things are utterly disregarded when unlawful love gains the upper hand.

In this blindness sins are heaped on sins with the utmost recklessness. The demon of impurity is called in Holy Scrip-

Daily ex-
perience
teaches that
the un-
chaste for-
get all their
duties.

And think
nothing of
the number
of sins they
commit.

¹ Juravi, et statui custodire judicia justitiæ tuæ.—Ps. cxviii. 106.

² In æternum non obliviscar justificationes tuas: quia in ipsis vivificasti me.—Ibid. 93.

³ Peccavi Domino.—II Kings xii. 13.

⁴ Animalis autem homo non percipit ea, quæ sunt Spiritus Dei; stultitia enim est illi, et non potest intelligere.—I Cor. ii. 14.

tures, Asmodeus, which means in Hebrew, an abundance of sins ; to signify that the unchaste body is like a heap of countless sins of all kinds. And such is really the case. The thief does not steal every day ; the murderer is not always taking away people's lives ; the passionate man is not always cursing and swearing ; the vindictive man does not always seek revenge ; the drunkard is not always intoxicated ; but the impure man who is entangled in the snares of a guilty passion, commits so many sins every day, that his life is like a stormy sea, in which one mountain-wave of sin drives away another. Let us try to count up, my dear brethren, the fearful number of sins committed by such a man, in thought alone ; on the supposition, which is likely to be true, that he thinks of impure things wilfully only ten times a day, that makes already three hundred mortal sins in a month, and more than three thousand six hundred in a year ; what will it be if he continues that mode of life for two, three, five, ten years, or longer ? And yet, I have only reckoned ten sins of thought in a day. As a matter of fact, all his thoughts from morning till night, and even the night is not free from them, are about impure subjects ; he is always, as far as in him lies, ready to gratify his passions, and it is only the want of opportunity which prevents him from carrying his desires into effect. What a countless number of sins are thus committed in thought alone ! I will not speak of sins committed by immodest looks and conversations, by impure letters, by unchaste touches, and in other ways that I dare not name. I will not speak of the different kinds of sins, which arise from impurity committed with married people, with relatives, or with persons consecrated to God. They hardly do anything but sin, so that their whole lives, while they are addicted to an impure affection, are one continued sin. We might say that with other vices, the devil fishes for sins with a hook ; he has to wait a long time often, before the bait is taken ; but with impurity he catches sins as it were, in a net, and by the hundred. If the impure man wishes to confess his sins, he cannot count them all ; it is, humanly speaking, impossible to do so, and his confessor has only to ask how long, how many weeks, months, or years he has been in the habit of impurity so as to be able to give a guess at the vast number of sins, thought, word, and deed he has committed.

In this blindness, there is no sin too great for the unchaste man to commit, if it is necessary to his ends ; if it is required to make an enemy of his best friend, he does so ; to trouble

No sin too great for them, if they can

his brothers and sisters, he makes little scruple of that ; to dishonor his father and mother, he does so without hesitation ; if he must keep up appearances by receiving the sacraments sometimes, sacrilegious confessions, communions, and masses heard without profit, through want of true sorrow, are small matters to him. He has no respect for holy places consecrated to God, if he can there satisfy his lust by impure looks and desires. The blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle does not frighten him any more than if it were a dead thing ; for in its very presence his heart is filled with filthy thoughts, and his eyes seek for new objects of gratification. Mention any of the greatest sins, such as murder, parricide, heresy, idolatry, which he is not ready to commit, for the sake of his impure love.

King David, the holiest of men, imbrued his hands in the blood of Urias, his most faithful and innocent soldier, on account of an impure passion. King Solomon, whose wisdom the world wondered at, bent his knee before idols of wood and stone, and offered incense to them ; to such a degree of folly was he brought by impurity. Tertullian says of him : "Solomon lost the glory that he had with God, by women who brought him into idolatry." The city of Lubeck, as Drexelius narrates,² was shocked by the example of a young man of good family, who after a long indulgence in impurity, became so infatuated with a person of beautiful appearance, that neither the entreaties of his mother and his relatives, nor the fear of God, nor his decaying health, nor the loss of his wealth could bring him to repentance ; so that he at last was reduced to poverty and distress. His mother, who had hitherto supplied all his wants, seeing the bad use he made of what she gave him, refused to do any more for him ; so that the young man, blinded by his passion, rushed on her with drawn sword, threw her down and threatened to take her life, unless she gave him money to carry on his infamous amours. When his crime became known, he was afraid of being severely punished for it, so he withdrew with his companion into a house of public shame, and lived there until he had spent all the money he had extorted from his mother, as well as what he could get by selling his clothes ; until at last being reduced to the extreme of destitution, in a fit of madness he thrust a long knife into his breast and

¹ Solomon quam habuit in Deo gloriam, amisit per mulierem, in idololatram usque pertractus.—Tert. l. s. contr. Marc.

² Drexel, Vicet L. 2, c. 12.

kept turning it round and enlarging the wound (as was verified after by an examination of the dead body) until he breathed forth his accursed soul. In our own times religious and priests have been known to leave their convents, and to forget their sacred character, to deny their faith and become heretics, and nearly always that they might indulge in impurity. If there are any real atheists amongst Christians (that there are real atheists who do not believe in God there is unfortunately no doubt) but if there are any such amongst Christians, they are those who are blinded by the passion of impurity, to such an extent that although they make outward profession of Christianity, they really do not believe properly in God or in any of His truths. This is almost the only vice which makes a man have recourse to witch-craft and devilry, and brings him so far as to deny God and His Saints, and make himself a slave of the devil, for the sake of gratifying his passions, as is proved by many examples, which time does not suffer me to narrate.

Oh, how I pity poor Tobias, when he lost his sight! "Joy be to thee always;"¹ said the Angel Raphael to him. Alas, said the blind man, "What manner of joy shall be to me, who sit in darkness and see not the light of Heaven?"² But I could weep tears of blood, through heartfelt compassion for those unfortunates, who are so blinded by their filthy passion, that they cannot see their misfortune, and actually love it! O unfortunate souls, how are you to be helped? I hardly know how; for as there is no vice which so blinds the understanding, so there is none which so hardens the will in evil, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

This follows necessarily from the first part, and therefore does not need much proof. For, as the will cannot work unless the understanding goes before with its light and knowledge, it is evident that when the understanding is blinded to good, as is the case with those who are given to impurity, the will cannot be led on to good. There is a great difference between the maladies of the body and those of the soul; if I am attacked by a dangerous fever, I may be cured although I know nothing of the nature of my illness, nay, even if through the violence of the disease, I am utterly unconscious, it is enough if the doctor

¹ Gaudium tibi sit semper.—Tob. v. 11.

² Quale gaudium mihi erit, qui in tenebris sedeo, et lumen cœli non video?—Ibid, 12.

knows what to do to cure me. But if I am sick in the soul, that is, in the state of sin, it is not enough that God, the only Physician of souls, knows my miserable state and can cure it; I must first see the malice of my sin, and the misery of my condition, in order to help in the work of my cure by repentance and a purpose of amendment. But what hope of repentance can an unchaste man have? How can he have it, since he is so blinded, that he does not even know the malice, misery and danger of his state, and therefore pays no attention to it?

Besides, even if he did open his eyes and see his misery, it is almost an impossibility for him to resolve to abandon it, and to hate above every evil what he hitherto loved more than anything else; nay, humanly speaking, it is an impossibility for him to renounce an impure passion and affection, as long as he is in the occasion of it. We know that bad habits become a sort of necessity; but there is none that takes a quicker hold of the heart, strikes deeper root and lasts longer than impurity, when once one has become addicted to it. Have you never remarked what the ivy does to the oak? It first creeps over the outside of the bark, and as it gets stronger, it grows into the oak and forms but one tree with it. Try now to separate them from each other, and you will find that you cannot tear down the ivy without bringing away the bark of the oak, and so killing it. So it is with carnal pleasures. The desires of them increase with continued indulgence, until they become a second nature, so that it is easier to separate the soul from the body, than to take them out of the heart. This is the vice of which God says in the Book of Job: "His bones shall be filled with the vices of his youth, and they shall sleep with him in the dust. For when evil shall be sweet in his mouth, he will hide it under his tongue."¹ "His sin even to hell."² I know well that there is nothing impossible to the Almighty, but if anything were impossible to Him, it would be the conversion of one who is entangled in the meshes of an impure love; for what means could God use to bring him to true repentance, as long as he is in the occasion which foment his passion? When camphor is once set alight, it defies all efforts to put it out, and burns even under the water. Agricola says: "The nature of camphor is so suit-

And humanly speaking, will not amend.

They are then blinded in their understanding.

Hence they are also hardened in the will, and do not think of amending.

¹ Ossa ejus implebuntur vitilis adolescentiæ ejus, et cum eo in pulvere dormient. Cum enim dulce fuerit in ore ejus malum, abscondet illud sub lingua sua.—Job xx. 11, 12.

² Usque ad inferos peccatum illius.—Ibid, xxiv. 19.

able to fire, that when it is once alight, it burns until it is altogether consumed, and will burn even under water."¹ See the unhappy state of an impure man. Isaias says, using the words of the Holy Ghost: "You shall conceive heat, . . . your breath as fire shall devour you. And the people shall be as ashes after a fire."² And the Prophet Ezechiel: "Thy uncleanness is execrable; because I desire to cleanse thee and thou art not cleansed from thy filthiness;" that, I have not been able to do; "Neither shalt thou be cleansed before I cause my indignation to rest in thee."³

Shown by
an example.

It is a terrible thing that Father Veja relates of a Sicilian merchant, who went to the Indies in pursuit of wealth, accompanied by his paramour. After a few days they were overtaken by a fearful tempest, which so frightened them, that they resolved to be reconciled to God in the Sacrament of Penance, and to separate from each other. The tempest ceased, and they arrived safe at Manilla. There they forgot their resolution, and recommenced their former sinful life. After some time they again embarked, and such a great storm arose that the ship was driven on a rock and nearly all on board perished. The merchant, by a special act of divine goodness, was enabled to hold on to a piece of the wreck and so to keep his head above water, and what is still more to be wondered at, his companion in sin was enabled to do the same. In this dangerous condition, they floated about for some time, cursing the wicked life they had been leading, and, shedding tears of bitter sorrow, they promised God earnestly that if He would save them, they would never again offend Him by the sin of impurity. The merciful God heard their prayer and on the following day they reached land, and again arrived at Manilla. Who would not think that now at least, the sinful man would have entered a monastery, and the woman, like another Magdalen, have done penance in a cave? And yet they returned to their former mode of life. But God was still patient with them, and found another means of trying to bring them to do penance; He sent a mortal illness to the merchant, so that according to the opinions of the physicians,

¹ Camphoræ natura adeo est amica ignibus, ut si eos semel conceperit, usque dum tota consumatur ardeat, et accensa non extinguatur, ardens in aquis.—Georg. Agricola, de Nat. Fossil., cap. 4.

² Concipietis arcorem, . . . spiritus vester ut ignis vorabit vos. Et erunt populi quasi de incendio cinis.—Isa. xxxiii. 11, 12.

³ Immunditia tua execrabilis, quia mundare te volui, et non es mundata a sordibus tuis, sed nec mundaberis prius, donec quiescere faciam indignationem meam in te.—Ezech. xxiv. 13.

there was no hope of his recovery. What shall I do now, said the sick man? How can I prepare myself for death? There is no hope for me; I am lost. He gave the same answer to the priest who went to give him the last Sacraments; still the latter was so far successful, that the dying man was induced to send away his accomplice in guilt, after which he confessed his sins and received the other Sacraments. Now, at last it seemed as if he had finally made his peace with God, but, oh terrible power of impure desire! no sooner had he begun to get a little better, so that the doctors told him he was out of danger, than he began to repent of having turned his paramour out of doors, and sending for her, he begged her pardon for having done so, throwing the blame on the stupidity of the priest, as he phrased it, who had frightened him with the danger of death; then taking her by the hand, he leaned forward to embrace her, and in so doing, gave up his sinful soul to the devil. So true are the words, "His sin even to hell," so that penance even in the last moment can hardly be a real supernatural penance.

I no longer wonder at that which the Abbot Rupert at first found so strange; namely, that when Noe heard from God that the world was to be destroyed by a deluge, he did not have recourse to the divine mercy in prayer: "The end of all flesh is come before me; the earth is filled with iniquity through them, and I will destroy them with the earth."¹ Noe knew well that he was pleasing to God, and that his prayers would be heard, why then did he not try to avert such a terrible punishment from the human race? Could he not at least have asked God to mitigate it a little, and to destroy only some families? Certainly, Moses acted quite differently when God in His anger threatened to destroy all the people of Israel; for he offered himself as a victim to appease the divine anger: "Either forgive them this trespass, or if thou do not, strike me out of the book that Thou hast written;"² Noe, on the contrary, never said a word to prevent the destruction of the whole world: "Noe, a just and perfect man, remains silent and does not pray for the unjust," says Rupert, "nor try to appease the anger of God that they may not be punished."³ This is the reason, my dear

Unless God
gives them
a wonder-
ful grace
which He
gives to
few.

¹ Finis universæ carnis venit coram me: repleta est terra iniquitate a facie eorum, et ego disperdam eos cum terra.—Gen. vi. 13.

² Aut dimitte eis hanc noxam, aut si non facis, dele me de libro tuo quem scripsisti.—Exod. xxxii. 31, 32.

³ Audit Noe vir justus atque perfectus, et tacet, nullamque precem pro injustis offert, ut Deum teneat, ut viam ejus suspendat.—Rupert, de Vict., l. 2, c. 29.

brethren. The sin of the Israelites in the desert was idolatry, a far greater sin than impurity, but not so difficult to repent of and to avoid, and therefore, after the first promise on the part of Moses, idolatry disappeared. On the other hand, at the time of the deluge, the vice of impurity had gained the upper hand: "The sons of God seeing the daughters of men, that they were fair, took to themselves wives of all which they chose."¹ Noe saw that there was no hope of repentance in such a case, and therefore he did not think it worth his while to pray. The event justified his anticipations, for we do not read of a single one being converted, in spite of the threatened punishment. Hence, all spiritual writers agree in saying that it requires a miracle of grace to make an unchaste man leave off his vicious habits and unlawful amours, and be really converted. What a great happiness it was for you, Augustine, to get that wonderful grace through the prayers and tears that your holy mother Monica offered for you during the space of seventeen years! You acknowledge yourself that you so often wished to be free from the burden, and yet, that you could not overcome yourself nor give up your vicious habits: "I groaned under the iron bondage of my own will."² You acknowledge that God, in His mercy, drew you out of the abyss, as it were, by the hair of the head. Oh, you who now-a-days are converted, and have given up your impure habits, you too can speak of your happiness! Certainly you have great reason to return humble thanks every day of your lives to God, for the extraordinary grace by which He freed you from the occasion of sin, either through the death of your accomplice, or by some other act of His power. Is it not true, that if that occasion was not taken away, it would be impossible for you to resolve to quit it? You must acknowledge in your conscience that such is the case; that you neither could, nor would have done so.

But they do not even desire such a grace.

But you, unhappy people who are still living in sin, do not expect that God will give you a grace which He bestows upon hardly one in a hundred. Yet, what am I saying? You do not even wish for that grace! A physician once said to a sick man, who was asking him for something to allay his thirst: "Wait, and I will give you what you want." "Good," said the sick man; "but I do not wish the thirst to be taken away altogether."³ He

¹ *Videntes filii Dei filias hominum quod essent pulchræ, acceperunt sibi uxores ex omnibus, quas elegerant.—Gen. vi. 2.*

² *Suspirabam ligatus ferrea mea voluntate.*

³ *Sed facta ut non omnino tollatur sitis.*

wished to feel a little thirsty, that he might have more pleasure in drinking. So it is with the impure; they do not wish to be freed from their desires, that they may have the pleasure of gratifying them. St. Augustine says of himself: "I prayed to Thee, O Lord, and yet, I was afraid Thou wouldst hear me too quickly, and free me from the disease of concupiscence, which I preferred to gratify rather than to overcome."¹

How can there be any hope of conversion under such circumstances? Terrible are the words of the Prophet Osee; they should make one dread even the name of this vice: "They will not set their thoughts to return to their God;"² that is, not only will they refuse to be converted, but they will not even once turn their thoughts to God. And why not? "For the spirit of fornication is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord."³ And will they then never think of conversion? No, not even in old age; when their bodily strength has left them, their hearts will still be full of impure desires. But will they not think of God on their death-beds, when most men try to think of Him? No, not even then, and even then least of all; their sin is even to hell. Would to God, my dear brethren, that this were not confirmed by bitter experience!

Therefore they are rarely converted, even on their death-beds.

Passing over the numerous examples that are given in books, I will relate one that was told me by one of our Fathers who is still living. He was once called to a dying man, who confessed his sins, and received the last Sacraments with every mark of fervor, so that the Father went away consoled, thinking the man well prepared for death. Hardly had he left the house, when the maid-servant came running after him, calling him back. What is the matter? asked the Father, is he dead already? No said the maid-servant, with pallid countenance; it is with me that the sick man used to sin; when you went away I had to go into his room for something, and as soon as he saw me, he made impure proposals to me, saying that if I consented, he would die satisfied. The Father ran back at once, but found the man speechless; he tried his best to arouse him to renew his sorrow for sin, but while he was so engaged, the man died. Father Segneri relates a nearly similar example of a girl who lived in improper intimacy with her intended husband (unfortunately such sins are only too common before marriage), God in his

Shown by examples.

¹ *Timebam Domine, ne me cito exaudires, et cito sanares a morbo concupiscentiæ; quam malebam expleri, quam extingui.—S. Aug. Confess., l. 3, c. 7.*

² *Non dabunt cogitationes suas, ut revertantur ad Deum suum.—Osee v. 4.*

³ *Quia spiritus fornicationum in medio eorum, et Dominum non cognoverunt.—Ibid.*

mercy sent her a dangerous illness, in order to put a stop to her crime; the illness lasted some months, so that she had time to repent. She profited by the opportunity and often renewed her sorrow and detestation of her sins, with a firm purpose of amendment. At last she asked her confessor's leave to speak to her partner in guilt, and to warn him to repent, that he might not lose his soul. The priest incautiously consented, not suspecting any evil, and suggested to her what she should say to warn him; but hardly had she laid eyes on her lover, when she forgot all she had intended to say: the old, impure flame burst forth anew, and she cried out with all the strength she had left: I have always loved you with my whole heart, and it is now that I can best prove my love for you; I know that I am to be damned for your sake, but no matter; I am quite willing that it should be so. With these words she fell back exhausted and gave up her unhappy soul! The priest and the young man, who were standing by, were almost frightened out of their lives. O desperate passion! "O infernal flame of impure love!"¹ (I might cry out with St. Jerome), which can hardly be extinguished until it is buried in the flames of hell.

Conclusion
and dif-
ferent ex-
hortations.

Unfortunate souls, what shall I say to you? I can be sorry for you, and that is about all; unless the Almighty God in His mercy, gives you some wonderful grace and opens your eyes! Innocent souls, it is to warn you that I have undertaken to speak of this subject; it is for you also that I repeat the conclusion of my last sermon: Bless God, and thank Him for the special grace by which he has hitherto preserved you from this accursed vice; but be all the more careful to preserve the precious treasure of your purity. The very first thing you learn from this vice, is hurtful to your innocence; a single moment in dangerous company, may be for you the beginning of an unhappy eternity; a single immodest look, or any other occasion, may be the first unhappy moment of an accursed life; a single immodest conversation, or an impure love tale may be the cause of your having to weep and gnash your teeth in hell; a single impure thought, wilfully indulged in, may be the cause of final impenitence to you! Do not tire of the constant violence you must use in combating the desires of the flesh; victory will be followed by an exceeding great reward. What glory for you, chaste souls, to be able to offer a pure sacrifice to the Almighty! The angels in Heaven will honor you as their dearest friends;

¹ O ignis infernalis luxuria!

the Immaculate Virgin and Mother of God will take you under her special protection, as her beloved children; Jesus Christ, the Spouse of chaste hearts, will invite you to His eternal and joyous marriage feast; the calm and peace of your own consciences will give you more comfort and pleasure, than all earthly delights, that the world and the flesh can give, and you can rejoice in the sure hope that you are dear children of God, who will follow the Lamb into eternal joys. Amen.

FOURTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE ANGER OF GOD AGAINST THE VICE OF IMPURITY.

Subject.

1. There is no vice which so excites the anger of God. 2. None against which God has given more proofs of His anger, than the vice of lust and impure love.—*Preached on the twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Iratus Dominus ejus, tradidit eum tortoribus.—Matth. xviii. 34.

"And his lord being angry, delivered him to the torturers."

Introduction.

It was a great act of mercy on the part of this lord to grant the humble petition of his servant, and not only to let him go free, and unpunished, but also to forgive him his debts. This parable, my dear brethren, is an image of the great mercy of God, in admitting to His friendship the sinner who has been guilty of countless crimes, on the sole condition of his being really sorry for them, a sorrow that he may have in a moment of time; and the sins thus forgiven, are forgiven for ever. Eternal praise and thanks to Thee, O most merciful God! What a happiness for me and other poor sinners, that we have to do with a God of such infinite goodness! Alas! how could I pay the debts I have contracted towards Thee by my sins, if Thou wert not so generous in forgiving them? But, oh, how ungrateful we are; it is this very goodness which makes many sinners offend with all the greater audacity and heap debt upon debt,

thinking that they will have no difficulty in obtaining pardon afterwards. Such presumption, my dear brethren, seems to be found chiefly among those who unfortunately form the largest class of sinners, I mean those who are addicted to impurity, and unlawful indulgence in sensual passion, as we have seen in the last sermon. What harm is it, they think, to gratify myself this once? It is a mere human failing; a natural weakness, which God must take pity on; it is a sin that He will easily forgive, as He knows how weak we are, etc. In that way people make nothing of it. I mean to speak against that erroneous and presumptuous opinion in to-day's sermon, and to show that there is no sin that deserves less patience, and towards which God has shown less patience, than the sin of impurity, and that generally speaking, God deals with the impure, as the master in to-day's Gospel did with his servant, when the latter incurred his anger the second time; "And his lord being angry, delivered him to the torturers." To this end I say—

Plan of Discourse.

There is no vice which so excites the anger of God, as the vice of lust and impure love. That I will show in the first part. There is no vice against which God has given more proofs of His anger, than the vice of lust and impure love. That I will show in the second part.

O God of justice, grant that the threats of Thy anger and punishment may inspire us with a horror of this odious vice, that we may serve Thee with chaste bodies and souls; this we ask of Thee through the intercession of Thy Immaculate Mother, and the holy angels guardian.

The malice of every sin consists in its turning away the heart of man from his Creator to creatures.

What is the reason that the good and infinitely merciful God, whose nature is goodness itself, and who loved us men even unto death, is so exasperated by one sin, that He pursues the sinner with His bitterest anger, as the Wise Man says: "To God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike;" so that He punishes that sin with hell? The nature of this sin itself is the answer to my question; for it is a contempt of God, or, as theologians say: "A turning away of the heart from the Creator," whom we should love above all things, "and attaching it to creatures,"¹ whom we should love only for God's sake. Every vice has the same bad quality; the ambitious man turns

¹ Odio sunt Deo impius, et impletas ejus.—Wis. xiv. 9.
² Aversio a creatore, et conversio ad creaturas.

away from his Creator, to whom alone honor is due, and seeks empty esteem and praise from rational creatures. The avaricious man turns away his heart from God, who is the greatest good, and fixes it on lifeless things, such as money and worldly goods. So that it is true of all vices, that, "To God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike."

But there is hardly any sin which so turns away the heart of man from God, and attaches it to creatures, as the sin of impurity and unchaste love. St. Thomas says: "Lust especially turns man away from God;"¹ for it makes him forget God altogether, and despise Him, for the sake of a vile pleasure; as the Almighty Himself complains, by the Prophet Ezechiel: "Thou hast cast Me off behind thy body." To make this clearer; there is no one who doubts that idolatry is a detestable sin, by which God is denied and abandoned; for by it, man subjects the Most High to the judgments of his own mind, and adores senseless stocks and stones as gods. But, due proportions being observed, this is what the impure man does, whose heart is attached to a creature by an unchaste passion. Is it not so? I take all to witness who have experienced this passion, and I ask them, if they do not show far more honor to the object of their idolatry, than to God? They have no longer any relish for God, and for divite things, as I have shown in a former discourse; they have no zeal for piety and good works, no desire for heavenly goods, no fervor in prayer; their only desire is to stifle the reproaches of conscience, and to forget God, that they may sin without anxiety and thus lose God altogether. Their forgetfulness of God goes so far, that they value the love of the object of their sinful passion more than the love of God; so that they are prepared to give up all hopes of Heaven, and to forfeit all the divine promises of eternal joys, provided God leaves them the creature on whom they have fixed their hearts.

Such is especially the case with impurity.

We never hear an avaricious man say to his money, or an ambitious man to his dignity, thou art my God. It is only impure passion which can bring a reasoning being to such a degree of madness. My heart, my soul, my treasure, such are the titles given to a miserable worm of the earth! And what is that but placing one's last end, and highest good in creatures? What is that but denying the true God, and adoring an earthly

He who indulges an impure passion denies God and adores a creature.

¹ Per luxuriam maxime recedit a Deo.—D. Thom. 1. 2. qu. 73. a. 5.
² Projectisti me post corpus tuum.—Ezech. xxiii. 35.

idol? Nay, according to Tertullian, there is a far greater degree of malice in impure love, on the part of a Christian, than in idolatry and denial of the faith. And he is quite right. Why? Because the Christian who denies God, and adores an idol, does so through fear of torture; while the unchaste man gives up God freely in order to gratify his passion. The unchaste man acts with full determination of the will; the apostate Christian acts through fear of pain. Which of the two, asks Tertullian, has the most to answer for? "Which is the worst apostate: he who denies Christ in torments, or he who denies Him in pleasure?"¹

Unhappy Christians, who, through fear of a tyrant, denied God, and adored stocks and stones! You have committed a fearful sin; but I pity you with all my heart, for the drawn swords that were to take your lives away, the crosses, wheels and gibbets on which you were to be tortured to death, the red-hot irons and burning caldrons, the melted lead, the terrible rack and other instruments of torture, were held out to terrify you; and certainly they were enough to make the bravest hang back and deny his faith. Therefore, it is not so much to be wondered at if you outwardly apostatized. But you, wicked Christians, who reject your God, and adore a wretched creature, what excuse have you? What has forced you to do so? What torments have you had to fear? None; nothing but the wilfulness of an untamed passion has brought you to such a degree of impiety. Whose apostasy is the more shameful? Who are more deserving of the anger of God, you, or the renegades of old?

Besides, in what consisted the honor shown by the apostate Christians to idols? In bending the knee, or bowing the head, or burning a little incense; that is all they did to show their adoration of a creature; in most cases, their minds and hearts were still attached to the true God. But, impure man, what do you keep for your God? Nothing. And what do you offer to your idol? Everything without exception, that you can offer. Holy Job says: "I made a covenant with my eyes that I would not so much as think on a virgin."² And why, O holy Prophet, were you so careful? "For what part should God above have in me, and what inheritance the Almighty from on high?"³ If

¹ Quis magis negavit, qui Christum vexatus, an qui delectatus amisit?

² Pepligi foedis cum oculis meis, ut ne cogitarem quidem de virgine.—Job xxxi. 1.

³ Quam enim partem haberet in me Deus desuper, et hereditatem Omnipotens de excelsis?
—Ibid. 2.

I allowed my eyes to wander at will, I should soon become a prey to impure desires, and then, what part would God have in me? In other sins and vices man leaves something for God; if the soul is stained, the body is not defiled; if the mind is turned away from God, the senses at least are free from sin. Impurity alone infects the whole being like a pestilence; eyes, ears, tongue, hands, memory, imagination, understanding, heart and will, all are occupied in lustful excesses; all are sacrificed to the sinful idol. Money and wealth, honor and good name, authority and dignity, sleep and rest, freedom and health, you are all counted as of no value; you are sacrificed at once for the sake of a miserable creature!

All natural inclinations, tendencies and proclivities, no matter how violent they are, are restrained, nay, even eradicated, if the object of the sinful passion requires it; a vindictive man forgives his enemy, if his idol intercedes for him; an irascible man becomes as meek as a lamb; a proud man is ready to humble himself; a coward grows bold; a brave man, as timid as a child; a miser turns into a spendthrift; a drunkard becomes temperate, and conquers the desire for drink, that he would otherwise hardly hope to conquer; even the impious man reforms in everything that concerns the other vices, if his idol expects it of him.

Holy law of God! Gospel of Jesus Christ! Life of the Incarnate God! Example of the Saints of God! Inspirations of the Holy Ghost! Exhortations of the angels guardian! Word of God, you cry so loud and so often, and command so earnestly the mortification of the passions, the denial of one's self, true humility and meekness, patience in trials, love of one's enemies, moderation in eating and drinking, and contempt of earthly goods! And what do you effect? Nothing at all in most cases; all your commands are neglected, all your power is insufficient to move the human heart. Men close their ears and refuse to listen to you; they look on it as an impossibility to do as you command. But when a brutish passion speaks, when a miserable creature shows by a look or a smile that such is her pleasure, oh, then, everything is easy, there is no difficulty any more in any act of obedience! Every joy and sorrow, and suffering and satisfaction of soul and body is shared with the object of unlawful love. What an idolatrous dependence of one's whole being on the whim of a mere creature!

And has not that jealous God, who wishes to be loved above all things, a right to be angry at such a crime? O God of in-

To please this idol, he restrains all his other evil inclinations.

Which he would never do for the sake of God and his love.

Therefore God must be most

He is worse than others who deny Christ.

He takes his heart away from God altogether, and gives it to his idol.

wroth with
such a
crime.

finite perfection, Thou hast created man for Thyself alone ; Thou hast placed one great command above all others, and Thou sayest to each one, "Thou shalt love ;" whom ? None but the Lord thy God. Thou hast given us a heart, a soul, an understanding, a memory, a will, outward senses and bodily strength, and of these things our whole nature is made up, and with all these Thou commandest us to love Thee : "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind." See, O Lord, how despite of Thee, the impure man does quite the contrary ; his whole heart and mind and all his faculties of soul and body are given up to lust, and not even the least part of them is given to Thee ; they are all devoted to the love of a wretched creature. And can any one call that a small vice, or try to make little of it ? Can a sin of that kind be considered as a mere human frailty, which the merciful God will surely pardon ? No, Christians ; if every mortal sin excites the anger of God, because it means a turning away of the heart from Him in order to fix it on creatures, it follows as a matter of course that the vice of impurity and unchaste love is more deserving of the divine anger than any other sin, because it takes away the whole heart, the whole being from God, and devotes it to the love of a creature. And so it is, my dear brethren, as we learn from experience, for since the beginning of the world no vice has been so severely punished by God, as the vice of impurity and unchaste love, as I shall show in the

Second Part.

All the
divine per-
fections are
worthy of
admiration.

There are none of the divine perfections which I find so hard to understand as the mercy and patience of God in bearing with sinners. An Almighty Lord, who by one act of His will created Heaven and earth out of nothing, and who could create infinite numbers of them with just as little trouble ; a Lord of infinite wisdom, who knows every movement of all His creatures from the highest angel to the lowest worm that crawls the earth, and whose knowledge extends to all the past and the future, without being disordered or wearied by the multiplicity and variety of its objects ; an all-wise Lord whom the heavens and the earth cannot contain, and whom no space can enclose ; an all-wise Lord who created so many different creatures in such beautiful order,

¹ Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo, et in tota anima tua, et in tota mente tua.—Matth. xxii. 37

that each has its appointed work to do, and without whose Providence not even a snow-flake falls to the ground ; a Lord of infinite justice who cannot allow the least good act to go unrewarded, or the least bad one to be unpunished ; a most holy Lord, at whose name all in Heaven and on earth and under the earth must tremble ; a Lord infinitely happy, who is not in want of any creature to increase His happiness ; a Lord of infinite beauty, from whom comes all that is beautiful, who has in Himself infinite good, and is worthy of infinite love for His own sake ; these are perfections that our weak understanding must wonder at, but still it must acknowledge that they all belong to God in the highest degree.

But that such a great Lord should allow a creature, whom He can annihilate at any moment without any loss to Himself, to despise and treat Him contemptuously by mortal sin, while He bears the insult with the greatest patience, and even longs for the offending creature to return to Him ; that is what I find most difficult to understand. Try to remember, O sinner, how many years you have been at enmity with this great God ! Count the sins you have committed. See what harm God has done you during that time, nay, reckon up rather the benefits He has been constantly heaping upon you, when He could have easily hurled you into hell ; and then you may cry out, O God of patience and long-suffering, how inconceivably great is Thy mercy, to me a wretched sinner !

Least of all
can we un-
derstand
God's pa-
tience in
dealing
with sin-
ners.

What am I to conclude from this, my dear brethren ? That impurity must be an intolerable vice in the sight of God, for it is the only vice almost, which makes God forget His patience and mercy, and which has at all times, provoked Him to pour out the vials of His bitterest wrath on the sinner. Read the Old and New Testaments, and you will find the words of St. Thomas of Villanova verified : " We read that the crime of lust is punished more severely than other crimes." ¹ Nay, you will find that nearly all the remarkable examples of the divine anger recorded in Scripture are due to lust alone.

Hence God
has a spe-
cial hatred
of impurity,
since he al-
ways pun-
ishes it so
severely.

You will find in the sixth chapter of the Book of Genesis, the history of that fearful punishment, the Deluge, in which the whole human race was destroyed, with the exception of eight individuals ; and the most of those who thus perished, were in the state of sin, and were condemned to hell. " My spirit shall not remain in man forever, because he is flesh," said

As is seen in
the history
of the del-
uge.

¹ Luxuriæ factus præ aliis atrociori vindicta punitum legimus.

God in His anger to Noe; And being touched inwardly with sorrow of heart, He said: "I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth, from man even to beasts, from the creeping thing even to the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them." Certainly those expressions make the divine anger sufficiently evident. As Lesius says, the world was at that time in the bloom of its youth, and was more populous than now, because people lived then to be seven, eight, and nine hundred years old, and were allowed to practice polygamy; so that we can easily imagine what a vast number of people were born in the sixteen hundred years that elapsed between the Creation and the Deluge. Doubtless there were many innocent people amongst them, at least as little children. And yet that vast multitude found no mercy from God, because it had to bear the punishment of impurity. Even while they were engaged in their sensual gratifications, the Deluge overwhelmed them and swept them all away, innocent and guilty together; as St. Matthew says: "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, even till that day in which Noe entered into the Ark and they knew not till the Flood came and took them all away."² The waters gushed up from the earth, and poured in torrents down from the heavens; houses were carried away, the highest trees afforded no refuge, not even the mountain tops were safe resting places, "For the water was fifteen cubits higher than the mountains which it covered."³ With the exception of the few who were in the Ark, all human beings, as well as beasts, birds and every living thing, were destroyed; "And all men and all things wherein there was the breath of life on the earth, died."⁴ Thus God punished the impurities of the world by such a vast number of deaths, and washed away its filth by the waters of the Deluge.

That is shown by the fate of Sodom and Gomorrha.

You will read in the nineteenth chapter of Genesis, of a whole country, seventy miles in circumference according to Cornelius a Lapide, in which Sodom, Gomorrha and other towns were sit-

¹ Non permanebit spiritus meus in homine in æternum, quia caro est . . . Et tactus dolore cordis intrinsecus, delebo, inquit, hominem, quem creavi, a facie terræ, ab homine usque ad animantia, a reptilibus usque ad volucres cœli: pœnitet enim me fecisse eos.—Gen. vi. 3, 6, 7.

² Sicut enim erant, in diebus ante diluvium comedentes et bibentes, nubentes et nuptul tradentes, usque ad eum diem, quo intravit Noe in arcam, et non cognoverunt, donec venit diluvium, et tulit omnes.—Matth. xxiv. 38, 39.

³ Quindecim cubitis altior fuit aqua super montes, quos operuerat.—Gen. vii. 20.

⁴ Universi homines et cuncta, in quibus spiraculum vitæ est in terra, mortua sunt.—Ibid. 21, 22.

uated, being destroyed by fire sent from Heaven, and reduced to ashes, so that after so many thousand years, the fruit of that country is still nothing but ashes inside, an undying evidence of the implacable hatred that God bore to the sin of its inhabitants. And what was that sin? Nothing else but brutal lust; and therefore "The Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrha brimstone and fire from Heaven. And He destroyed these cities and all the country about, all the inhabitants of the cities, and all things that spring from the earth."¹ Before this terrible punishment was inflicted, Abraham, that faithful servant and friend of God, exhausted himself in prayers and tears to avert the divine anger from those unfortunate cities. How often did he not pray to God? With what persistency did he not ask Him to forgive those people? But all his prayers and tears could not avert the punishment. God, who is otherwise so ready to hear the prayers of His servants, and who allows Himself as it were to be compelled to grant them, was not in the least moved on this occasion, to mercy and pity. Those impure people were to be consumed by fire, so that all impure men might learn from their example to dread the fire of hell which awaits them.

You will read in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Book of Numbers, how twenty-four thousand of the chosen people of God were condemned to die, some by the cross and gibbet, others by the sword. What a terrible act of justice! Twenty-four thousand people would make a not inconsiderable town, and had they all to die a violent death? What grief there must have been amongst the spectators of that fearful tragedy! How the women wept and lamented on seeing their husbands, fathers, brothers, children and friends crucified, or hanged, or cut to pieces with the sword! How many brave generals of the Israelite army were thus massacred! How many of the noblest families utterly extinguished! Yet the command of God had to be obeyed; the noblest were condemned to the gallows, the others were slain by their neighbors and friends: "The Lord being angry, said to Moses: Take all the princes of the people and hang them up on gibbets against the sun, that my fury may be turned away from Israel."² Still the punishment was not enough; "And Moses said to the judges of Israel: Let every man kill his

By what happened to the Israelites.

¹ Dominus pluit super Sodomam et Gomorrhā sulphur et ignem a Domino de cœlo; et subvertit civitates has, et omnem circa regionem, universos habitatores urbium, et cuncta terræ virentia.—Gen. xix. 24, 25.

² Iratus Dominus, ait ad Moysen: Tolle cunctos principes populi, et suspende eos contra solem in patibulis, ut avertatur furor meus ab Israel.—Num. xxv. 3, 4.

neighbors . . . ; And there was slain four and twenty thousand men."¹ The principal reason of this severe punishment was the impurity of the people: "The people committed fornication with the daughters of Moab."²

And to the
tribe of
Benjamin.

You will read in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Judges, that only a few of the men of Gabaa were found guilty of impurely abusing a poor woman, and what was the consequence? Punishment was inflicted, not only on the evil-doers, but also on the whole town of Gabaa and the surrounding country; eighteen thousand were slain before the gates of the town, and five thousand were killed in flight, and soon after, two thousand more; so that in one day five and twenty thousand men were slain on account of the sin of impurity. Lest we should think that this was merely the result of accident and not a punishment of lust, God has shown that He was the Author of it, and that it was His Almighty power which strengthened the arms that wielded the sword: "And the Lord defeated them before the children of Israel, and they slew of them in that day five and twenty thousand, and one hundred, all fighting men."³ Besides this, all the towns and villages of the tribe of Benjamin were burned down, and all the people who were left were cut down remorselessly; not even the dumb beasts were spared. Thus that once populous country was filled with dead bodies, and only six hundred men of the whole tribe escaped, who had to keep to the mountains for one hundred and twenty days. Thus fire, bloodshed and devastation were the punishments inflicted on so many for the impurity of a few, and that by a most just, and at the same time, a most merciful God; "The Lord defeated them."

And to the
Nivites.

In the third chapter of the Book of Jonas you will read the terrible prophecy that resounded through Ninive, the great city of three days journey; "Yet forty days, and Ninive shall be destroyed."⁴ A prophecy that would surely have been fulfilled, and, as interpreters say, solely in punishment of impurity, if the inhabitants from the greatest to the least had not done penance in sack-cloth and ashes; "And the men of Ninive believed in God; and they proclaimed a fast and put on sack-

¹ Dixitque Moyses ad iudices Israel: Occidat unusquisque proximus suos, . . . et occisi sunt viginti quatuor millia hominum.—Num. xxv. 5, 9.

² Fornicatus est populus cum filiabus Moab.—Ibid. 1.

³ Percussitque eos Dominus in conspectu filiorum Israel, et interfecerunt ex eis in illo die viginti quinque millia et centum viros, omnes bellatores.—Judges xx. 35.

⁴ Adhuc quadragesima dies, et Ninive subvertetur.—Jonas iii. 4.

cloth, from the greatest to the least."¹ How would it have been for them if they had not done penance?

We read in profane history that the greatest monarchies of the world were destroyed through this vice. Sardanapulus lost Assyria; Balthassar, Chaldea; Darius, Persia; Cleopatra, Egypt; all through indulgence in carnal pleasures. Salvianus shows that the dismemberment of the Roman Empire took place when the vice of impurity was most prevalent. "God wished to show thereby," he says, "how hateful and intolerable this vice is in His sight."²

And from
profane
history.

Do you think, my dear brethren, that God hates it less now, than in former times? Were not the men of old made of flesh and blood, were they not weak mortals, as we are? Those who perished by water, fire and sword, what Holy Scripture had they to teach them chastity? What sacraments had they to strengthen them against temptation? Where was the Blood of Christ, by which we are now saved from the yoke and attacks of the devil? They defiled their bodies, but they were not made members of Jesus Christ by baptism; they had not become temples of the Holy Ghost, as we Christians have. They sinned, but they had not solemnly renounced the flesh and the devil in baptism as we have. If then the anger of God was so great against impurity in those times, what sort of punishment must unchaste Christians expect, since their sin is three and four-fold greater, so to speak, than the sins of those of ancient time?

Impurity is
worse in
Christians,
than in
olden times.

Oh, if we could only see the cause of the chastisements and trials that afflict whole countries and provinces! If we were to ask: whence come the miseries and poverty that are now desolating Europe? Whence come the wars, the bad harvests, the scarcity and famine, the plagues and sicknesses, the inundations, the miserable mortality amongst cattle, the general poverty and want? They are, as Salvianus says, heralds of the divine anger, which is punishing the world on account of impurity; "God wishes to show how hateful and intolerable to Him is this vice." Many a time has the Almighty given proofs of His anger against impurity, by miraculous signs. In England, as Ballard writes, a field of wheat ready for the sickle was once eaten up in a night by a swarm of most hideous flies; some of those flies were caught, and were found to have the words "ira," on one wing, and "Dei" on the other; "ira Dei," that is, anger of God: as if to

And there-
fore the
anger of
God against
them is
greater.

¹ Et crediderunt viri Ninivite in Deum, et predicaverunt jejunium, et vestiti sunt sacco majore usque ad minorem.—Jonas iii. 5.

² Ostendere Deus voluit quam odissit carnis libidinem.—Solv. l. 1, de Provid.

say: The cause of the destruction of your crop is the anger of God; do not think we have come here by accident; the anger of God has sent us.

And their
punishment
more
severe.

I will say nothing of the punishment that the impure suffer individually; it is a matter of daily experience. They suffer in their health by disgusting maladies which their excesses cause; in their lives, which they shorten: in their honor which they sometimes lose by public disgrace; in their repose, which is disturbed by remorse of conscience and mental anxiety, as I have already explained. And even if they had not those things to suffer, if they were left free and unhindered in the gratification of their passions, would not that be punishment enough? Can a more fearful punishment be well imagined than the blinding of the understanding and the hardening of the will which all follow on this vice as its consequence, and do not cease until the soul is buried in hell? O my God, I know that I have deserved Thy anger; punish me in this life, I beg of Thee: behold, I offer Thee my head, my eyes, my ears, my tongue, my hands and feet and my whole body; strike with Thy fatherly rod, as long as it pleases Thee; but one thing I ask of Thee, "Rebuke me not in Thy indignation, nor chastise me in Thy wrath;"¹ do not allow me to be blinded and hardened by my own wicked desires, for that is the worst punishment of all; it is the punishment Thou inflictest on impure Christians, by which the most of them are lost forever.

Conclusion
for the im-
pure.

Ah, blind mortals, who are not yet terrified by those fearful chastisements, who still make so little of the shameful vice of impurity, and look upon it as a small fault that arises from human infirmity, and that God will easily pardon; blind mortals, woe to you! One day, when it is too late, you will learn that no vice so exasperates the Almighty, and incurs such severe punishment from Him in this life and in the next, as that very vice, which you fear so little to commit, and for which you hope to find pardon so easily!

For those
who were
formerly
impure, but
have re-
pented.

To you who were perhaps formerly given to this vice, but who now, through a special grace of God, are freed from it, I have little to say, except that you must not be surprised if God sometimes sends you a fatherly chastisement in the way of crosses and trials. Oh, do not complain that you are treated harshly or unjustly! Remember how you have treated the Almighty God; think of the numbers who are now in hell for the very sins, and perhaps for fewer sins than you have committed. Say then,

¹ Ne in furore tuo arguas me, neque in ira tua corripias me.—Ps. vi. 2.

with humble hearts, in all trials: O my God, I accept this cross from Thy fatherly hand; I know that I have deserved it, and a thousand times more! May Thy holy name be blessed!

In the meantime, my dear brethren, that we may have none of these things to fear, let us fortify our hearts and minds once for all against this odious vice, and make a firm resolution rather to die a thousand times, than for the sake of such a short, brutish and dangerous pleasure, to offend God even by an impure thought, not to speak of impure words and actions. Such is the resolution we mean to keep with Thy help and grace O God. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin.

Text.

Postquam impleti sunt dies purgationis ejus secundum legem Moysi.—Luke ii. 22.

"And after the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished."

O most pure and Immaculate Virgin, Mother of the Word Incarnate, how did the law of Moses, regarding this ceremony, affect thy sacred person, so that thou hast wished to submit to it? It was a hard law, the observance of which must necessarily have seemed derogatory to thy virginal purity; for thou hadst to present thyself to the priest, like an ordinary woman, and to beg to be made clean. There is no doubt, my dear brethren, that she who conceived by the Holy Ghost, the Author of all sanctity, and who brought Him stainless into the world, was not bound by that law; still, since she saw that her Son submitted to the law of circumcision, like a sinner, she wished to follow His example, and to submit to the law of purification, as if she needed it. Oh how pleasing a spectacle that was in the sight of Heaven! But what am I to say of the multitudes of men who remain buried in the filth of impurity for years and years, and never even think of doing penance and cleansing their souls from that stain? What an abomination they must be in the sight of God! Yet, they think, what harm is it to gratify myself this once, etc.—*continues as before.*