

However, you should fear what comes at the end: *and truthful* [Ps 86(85).15]. Those he's supporting at present, despite their sins, he'll be judging eventually, because of their scorn.

Are you scorning the riches of his patience and gentleness, in ignorance of the fact that God's forbearance is leading you to repentance? Through your hardness of heart and your impenitent heart, however, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, and of the revelation of the just judgement of God. For he will render to each person according to his works [Rom 2.4-6].

The Lord is gentle, the Lord is patient, the Lord is merciful. However, the Lord is also just and he is truthful. He generously allows you room to reform yourself. You, however, are fonder of postponement than of improvement. You were wicked yesterday, were you? Then be good today. You've spent today indulging your spite, have you? Well, why not change for tomorrow? You're always waiting hopefully for something, and you've been promised so much by God's mercy. It's as if he has not only promised to pardon you if you repent, but has also promised you a longer life! How do you know what tomorrow will bring?

In your own heart you speak correctly: 'When I have reformed myself, God will disregard all my sins.' We can't deny that God has promised pardon to those who reform and convert. You can indeed read to me the passage from a prophet where God promised pardon to anyone who has reformed; but you can't read to me any passage from the same prophet¹⁵ where God promises you a long life.

(8) We are in danger, therefore, from either side, from hope and from despair, contradictory things, contradictory emotions. Who is it that's deceived through hoping? The person who says, 'God is good, God is merciful, I will do whatever I like, whatever pleases me. Let me relax the reins of my passions and satisfy the longings of my soul. And why? Because God is merciful, God is good, God is gentle.' That is the sort who are in danger from hope.

On the other hand, people are in danger from despair when they fall into serious sins and think that they can't now be pardoned even if they repent. Then they decide that they're destined without doubt for condemnation, and say to themselves, 'As we're already condemned, why not do whatever we want?' They say this in the spirit of gladiators condemned to the sword. That's why desperate men are troublesome: they no longer have anything to fear, so they need to be strenuously feared themselves.

The one lot are killed by despair, the other by hope. The spirit vacillates between hope and despair. You need to be afraid of being killed by hope, in case by harbouring too great a hope of mercy you come under judgement. You need to be afraid on the other hand of being killed by despair, in case by thinking that it's too late for you to be pardoned for your serious offences, you fail to repent, and encounter the judge, Wisdom, who says, *And I shall mock your affliction*' [Prov 1.26].

What does the Lord do, then, with those who are at risk from these two types of illness? This is what he says to those who are at risk from hope: *'Do not be slow to turn to the Lord, and do not delay from day to day. For his anger will arrive suddenly, and he will destroy you in the time of retribution'* [Ecclus 5.7].

What does he say to those who are at risk from despair? Every day that *the wicked man turns back, I will forget all his transgressions* [Ezek 18.21-2].

For the sake of those at risk from despair, he offers the haven of forgiveness; for the sake of those at risk from hope, who are cheating themselves by delaying, he makes the date of one's death uncertain. You do not know when your last day will arrive. Are you ungrateful because today you've been given the means to reform yourself?

This is the sense, then, in which he said to that woman, *'Neither will I condemn you.'* I have stopped you worrying about the past; beware of what's in the future. *Neither will I condemn you.* I have blotted out your offences; attend to my commands, so that you will come to find what I have promised you.

Sermon 302

On the feast of St Laurence

(1) Today is the feast-day of the blessed martyr Laurence.¹ The readings we have heard from holy scripture² were appropriate to this celebration. We heard them and we sang them, and we have listened attentively to the gospel reading.³ Now we must follow in the footsteps of the martyrs by imitating them; otherwise our celebration of their feast-days is meaningless. Everyone knows the merits of the martyr we are commemorating. Has anyone prayed to him, and not had the prayer answered? Think of all the sick who have been granted temporary gifts through his merits – gifts

of the sort to which he was indifferent himself. They were not granted so that they'd remain sick. No, it was so that giving them earthly gifts might inspire them with a passion to seek something better. Sometimes a father with little children lets them have something small and unimportant, if they are going to cry unless they are given it. When he allows them or gives them these things, he is indulging them out of fatherly kindness, even though he won't want his children to keep them when they are older and more grown up. So he gives nuts to his children even while he is preserving their inheritance for them. The devoted father allows them to play and enjoy themselves with whatever silly toys they have, so as not to expect too much of them at their tender age. But that is not building them up, it is keeping them happy.

Now you have heard in the gospel what the martyrs have built, what they succeeded in winning, what their generous hearts won for them, why they shed their blood: *'Your reward will be great in heaven'* [Mt 5.12].

(2) My dear friends, there are two lives, one before death, the other after death. Both of these lives have had their lovers and still have them. Surely I needn't remind you how short life is. We know from experience that it is full of suffering and complaining. It is beset by temptations, it is filled with fears. It burns with passions; it is at the mercy of chance. It hurts in misfortunes; with success, it grows arrogant. It greets profit with unrestrained joy; and is tormented by losses. Even while someone is rejoicing over his profits, he is trembling in case he loses what he has already got, and has that to complain about. Though before he ever got it, of course, he wasn't complaining. In short, it is genuine unhappiness, or deceptive happiness.

While someone is at the bottom, he is keen to make his way up; when he gets to the top, he is afraid of slipping down. If someone hasn't got something, he envies whoever has it. If he has got it, he despises whoever hasn't. Now who could spell out in words quite how unpleasant, and how obviously unpleasant, this life is? But even this unpleasantness has its lovers. In fact, we would be lucky to find a handful of people who love everlasting life – which cannot end – as much as they love this life, which comes to an end so soon. Even while it lasts, every day we are afraid of losing it from hour to hour.

How am I to respond? What can I do? What can I say? Can I find any threats sharp enough to pierce hearts that are hard and apathetic, any encouragement fiery enough to burn hearts that are numbed and frozen by worldly preoccupations? To move them to shake off their earthly

sleepiness at last, and to be fired with longing for something that lasts for ever? What can I do, I ask you? What can I say? But I do have something, which occurs to me from time to time: in fact, day-to-day experience gives me guidance, and suggests to me what to say. Move on from loving this temporary life, if you can, to loving everlasting life, the life that the martyrs loved, while counting this life as nothing. I entreat you, I beg you, I urge you, not only you, but those with you – and also myself: let's fall in love with everlasting life!

I don't expect us to love it enormously (although it is an enormous thing). No, just in the way that its lovers love this temporary life – though not in the way the holy martyrs loved their temporary lives! They had little or no love for them. They found it easy to put everlasting life first. I wasn't thinking of the martyrs when I said, 'Let's fall in love with eternal life in the way people love their temporary lives.' No, I meant the way lovers of this temporary life love it. Let's fall in love in the same way with eternal life. That is the love that Christians confess.

(3) That is why we became Christians, not for the sake of this temporary life. Think of all those Christians who are carried off before they grow up; and of the idolaters who survive this life and live to a frail old age. On the other hand, many of them also die young. Christians suffer many losses; the impious often make profits; but then again, Christians often make profits while the impious suffer losses. Many of the impious receive honours, and many Christians get rejections; but then again, many of the impious get rejections, and many Christians win honours. Success and failure are shared by both groups.

Did we become Christians then, my brothers, in order to avoid failure or to achieve success? Is that why we have enrolled with Christ, and presented our foreheads to receive this great sign? You are a Christian. You carry the cross of Christ on your forehead. This mark teaches you what it is that you confess. While he was hanging on the cross – the cross you carry on your forehead; it doesn't inspire you as a symbol of the wood, but as a symbol of him hanging on it – to repeat, while he was hanging on the cross, he looked at the violent people around him, he put up with their insults, and he prayed for his enemies. He was a doctor – even while he was being put to death, he was healing the sick with his own blood, by saying, *'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'* [Lk 23.34].

His prayer was not empty or in vain. Later on, thousands of people after them came to believe in the man they had put to death. Then they learned to suffer for his sake, as he had suffered for them, at their hands.

So learn from this sign, my brothers, learn from the mark that the Christian receives even when he becomes a catechumen⁴ – learn from this why we are Christians. It is not for the sake of temporary and short-lived things, whether good or bad. It is in order to avoid evils that will never pass away, and to acquire goods that will never come to an end.

(4) But to continue what I started to say, my brothers, we must give our minds – please do this – to the subject I suggested and proposed just now: the way that the lovers of this temporary life fall in love with it. We human beings are so terrified in case we die – but we are going to die! You can see men shaking with fear, running away, searching for hiding places, hunting for protection, prostrating themselves, giving whatever they have in order to be granted their lives – if only it can be done – to live for one more day, to extend a little bit longer a tenure that can never be secure.

Those are the lengths to which people will go; but who does this sort of thing for the sake of eternal life? Let us have a word with a lover of this present life.

‘Why are you doing all this? Why are you rushing around, why are you afraid, why are you running away, why are you looking for somewhere to hide?’

‘In order to live’, he replies.

‘Are you sure you will live? That you’ll never die?’

‘No.’

‘So you can’t manage to get rid of death, but only to postpone it? If you’re prepared to do all this so that you will die a little later, why not do something so that you’ll never die?’

(5) Think how often we come across people saying, ‘The tax-collector can take all my property, as long as I can die a little bit later.’ But how rare it is to find someone saying, ‘Christ can take all my property, as long as I never die.’

‘But listen!’, I would say to the lover of this temporary life, ‘If the tax-collector takes everything, he’ll leave you empty-handed in this world. If Christ takes everything, he will keep it safe for you in heaven. We want the means to live for the sake of this life; and for its sake we are willing to give up the means to live. If you have been storing up the necessities of life and you give them away in order to stay alive, well, maybe you will die of hunger. But you will still say, ‘Let him take them: what does it matter to me?’ You give it away to stay alive, and you’re ready to beg to stay alive.

‘You’re prepared to give away even what you need and beg in this world. But you are not prepared to give out what you don’t need and reign with Christ! Please, weigh the matter up. If you can find a fair set of weighing scales in the cupboard in your heart, bring them out. Then put these two options on it and weigh them: begging in this world and reigning with Christ. There’s nothing to weigh. The one weighs nothing compared with the other one.’

Even if I said: reigning in this world and reigning with Christ, there would be nothing to weigh. I’m sorry that I said ‘weigh’. There is nothing to weigh. *What does it profit someone if he gains the world but suffers the loss of his soul?* [Mt 16.26; Mk 8.36; Lk 9.25]. Anyone who has not suffered the loss of his soul will reign with Christ. Is there anyone, though, who reigns securely in this world? Even grant that he reigns securely; will his reign last for ever?

(6) Notice again the point I was making, that there are so many lovers of this present life – temporary, brief, unpleasant, yet it has so many lovers! Often enough, you end up a beggar, with no clothes because of this life. You ask him, ‘Why?’ He answers, ‘To stay alive’.

‘What have you fallen in love with? What do you love that’s drawn you to it? You’re a corrupt lover of a bad woman: what are you going to say to her? How are you going to address this life of yours that you’ve fallen in love with? Talk to her, chat her up, win her over if you can. What are you going to say? ‘Your beauty has reduced me to this state of rags?’ She shouts back, ‘But I’m ugly. Are you in love with me?’ I can hear her shouting, ‘I’m a hard woman, and you’re embracing me?’ She’s shouting again, ‘I’m the flighty type – are you going to try and chase me?’ Listen to the woman you love answering you: ‘I won’t stop with you; if I spend a bit of time with you, I won’t stay with you. I could strip you of your clothes – but I couldn’t make you happy.’

(7) Since we are Christians, then, let’s beg the assistance of the Lord our God against the attractions of a life that it’s stupid to love. Instead let’s fall in love with the beauty of the life that *no eye has seen, and no ear has heard, nor has it reached the human heart*. For *God has prepared this for those who love him* [1 Cor 2.9]. And God himself is that life. I can hear you applauding, I can hear you sighing. We should be deeply in love with this life. May God allow us to love it. We should beg him in tears not just to let us win this life – but even to let us love it!

How do we give this warning? How can we prove it? Do I need to read out the scriptures to show them how insecure, how short-lived, how non-existent almost, are those other things, and how true are the words of

scripture: *What is your life? It is a mist that appears for a short while, and then vanishes* [Jas 4.14]?

He was alive yesterday, he's gone today. We saw him a little while ago; now the man we saw no longer exists. They escort him to his tomb; they return in tears, and they quickly forget. The saying goes, 'Human beings are nothing!'; and it's a human being who says it. But humanity fails to reform itself so that it might become something rather than nothing.

And so the martyrs, in short, were lovers of that sort of life; it is that life that the martyrs have won. They possess the thing they loved, and they will possess it even more fully at the resurrection of the dead. And so, by suffering as much as they did, they have paved the way for us.

(8) St Laurence was an archdeacon. Somebody was pursuing him in order to get the church's money from him, so tradition tells us. As a result he suffered so many tortures that you would shudder to hear them. He was placed on a gridiron, he was burnt all over his body; he was tormented by the flames – what a horrific punishment. But he overcame all his physical anguish, with the help of God who had made him as he was, because his love was so strong. *For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand for us to walk in them* [Eph 2.10].

He managed to enrage his pursuer, although he wasn't intending to anger him. In fact, he was eager to make his own faith an example to those who would follow, and to show how little he cared about death. What he said was this: 'Let me have some carts so I can bring you the riches of the church in them.' The carts were brought, and he loaded them up with poor people. Then he ordered them to be taken back with the words, 'These are the riches of the church.'

And it is true, my brothers. The needs of the destitute amount to vast riches for the church, if only we understand where we ought to be storing our possessions. The destitute are in front of our eyes; if we look after them we won't lose them. We needn't fear that someone will take them away. God gave them to us and he looks after them. We could hardly find a better guardian, or a more trustworthy guarantor.⁵

(9) Let's keep all that in mind, and actively imitate the martyrs, if we want the feast-days we celebrate to be of help to us. I have always given you the same advice, my brothers. I have never stopped, I have never been silent on the subject. We must love eternal life, and we must count our present life as nothing. We must live well, and we must hope for what's good. If we are bad we must change; when we have changed, we must be

taught; when we've been taught, we need to persevere. *For whoever perseveres to the end will be saved* [Mt 10.22; 24.13].

(10) People say, though: 'So many evil people, so much evil!'⁶ What would you like? Good coming from the evil? Don't look for a *grape on a thornbush* [cf. Mt 7.16]; you're not allowed to do that. *The mouth speaks from the overflowing of the heart* [Lk 6.45]. If you can, if you are not bad yourself, then pray for the bad person to become good. Why do you treat those who are bad violently? You reply, 'Because they are bad'. As soon as you treat them violently, you add yourself to them. Let me give you some advice. There's some bad person that you dislike? Well, don't let there be two. You criticise him, and then you join him? You swell the ranks that you're condemning. Are you trying to overcome evil with evil? To overcome hatred with hatred? Then there will be two lots of hatred, and both will need to be overcome. Can't you hear the advice your Lord gave through the apostle Paul: *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* [Rom 12.21]?

Now maybe he is worse than you; but you are still bad, and so there will be two of you who are bad. I'd rather that at least one were good. And in the end the violence leads to death.⁷ Then what about after his death, when the one bad man can't be touched by punishment any longer, while the other one is taken up with hatred alone? But this is not punishment, it's madness.

(11) What can I say to you, my brothers? What can I say to you? That you mustn't approve of such people? But would it ever occur to me that you would approve of them? Don't let me even suspect you of that. But it's not enough for you not to approve of them, not enough at all. More than that is asked of you. No one should just say, 'God knows I didn't take part in it, God knows I didn't take part in it, God knows that I didn't want it to happen.'

Notice that you have said two different things: 'I didn't take part in it', and 'I didn't want it to happen.' That's still not enough. It's not even enough that you didn't want it to happen, unless you also tried to prevent it. Bad men have their own judges and their own authorities. As the apostle Paul said, *He does not wield a sword without reason. He is an avenger of his anger, but on the evil-doer* [Rom 13.4]. In anger, he is an avenger on the evil-doer. *If you do evil, he says, then fear him. For he does not wield a sword without reason. Do you want not to fear the authorities? Do good, and you will have praise from them* [Rom 13.3].

(12) Now someone could ask, 'What had St Laurence done wrong to be killed by the authorities? How were the words *Do good and you will have*

praise from them fulfilled in his case? He did good, and his reward for it was being horribly tortured.'

But if the holy martyr Laurence hadn't had praise from the authorities, we wouldn't be honouring him today, I wouldn't be preaching about him, he wouldn't be being praised so publicly. So he has had praise from them, even against their intentions. The apostle did not say, 'Do good and the authorities themselves will praise you'. All the apostles and martyrs did good, and the authorities didn't praise them, they killed them. So if he had said, 'Do good and the authorities will praise you', he would have misled you. But he chose his words with care, he examined them, he weighed them, measured them and kept them short.

Discuss the words you actually heard: *Do good and you will have praise from them*. If the authorities are just, you will have praise from them in that they themselves will praise you. But if they are unjust, if you die for your faith, for justice, and for truth,⁸ you will have praise from them even though they treat you violently. You will have praise from them, even though they don't praise you themselves. They provide the opportunity for you to be praised. So do good, and you will have praise, and you will be safe.

(13) 'But', you might say, 'think of the things that that crook did, of the numbers of people he oppressed, the numbers of people he reduced to begging and poverty'.⁹ He has his own judges, his own authorities. There is an established government: *all that there are are established by God* [Rom 13.1]. Why are you so violent? What authority have you been given? But, of course, this isn't public punishment, it's simply terrorism in the open.¹⁰ Well then? Think about this: suppose that even under the established system of authority there is a condemned criminal, sentenced to death, with the sword hanging over him. Even then no one is allowed to strike him except the person who holds the appropriate office. This office belongs to the public executioner; it's his job to execute the condemned man. But suppose the judicial clerk¹¹ puts him to death when he is already condemned and sentenced to death. Certainly the person he kills has been condemned. But still, the clerk will be found guilty of murder. True enough the man he killed was already condemned and sentenced to punishment; but it still counts as murder if someone is attacked against the regulations.¹² Yet if it counts as murder to attack someone against the regulations, then please tell me what it counts as if you attack some crook who has not been given a hearing or been judged, and when you have no authority to attack him? I am not defending those who are bad, and I am

not denying that they are bad. But leave the judges to account for this. Why do you want the difficult task of accounting for someone else's death? The burden of authority isn't yours to carry. God has given you the freedom of not being a judge. Why take over someone else's position? You need to be giving an account of yourself.¹³

(14) Lord, when you said, '*If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to cast a stone at her*', you certainly stabbed those violent men in their hearts. They felt your words penetrating their hearts, sharp and weighty.¹⁴ They recognised the voice of their own consciences. Then they were embarrassed to be in the presence of justice. They began to leave, one by one, and they left the pitiful woman all alone. But she was not all alone, the defendant. The judge was with her, but he was not yet judging, he was offering pity. The violent men departed; pity and the pitiable were left. The Lord then said to her, '*Has no one condemned you?*' She replied, '*No one, Lord.*' '*Neither will I condemn you*', he said, '*Go, and do not sin again*' [Jn 8.10-11].

(15) 'But that soldier¹⁵ did awful things to me.' I'd like to know whether you wouldn't have done the same, if you were a soldier. I certainly don't mean that I want soldiers to oppress the poor. I don't in the least want that. I want them too to hear the gospel. Soldiering doesn't prevent you doing good, but hating does.¹⁶ Soldiers came to John for baptism and said to him, '*What are we to do now?*' He replied, '*Do not intimidate anyone; do not bring false charges against anyone; be satisfied with your wages*'¹⁷ [Lk 3.14].

To tell you the truth, my brothers, if soldiers behaved like that, the empire would be a happy place, especially if not just soldiers, but also tax-collectors behaved as it says there. For the 'publicans', that is the tax-collectors, said: '*Then what shall we do?*' He replied, '*Demand no more than your set fee*' [Lk 3.12-13]. The soldier has been told off; the tax-collector has been told off. Now it's the turn of the ordinary citizen to be given a lesson. Here is a straightforward lesson for everyone. *All of us, what are we to do?* '*Let anyone who has two tunics share with someone who does not have one at all. Let anyone who has food do the same*' [Lk 3.11]. If we want soldiers to listen to Christ's commands, then we should listen as well. Christ isn't just for them, and not for us. He's not their God only, and not ours.¹⁸ We should all listen, and we should live in harmony and peace.

(16) 'But he took advantage of me when I was in business.' Have you always traded honestly yourself?¹⁹ Have you never cheated anyone in business? Have you never sworn a false oath during negotiations? Have

you never said, 'In the name of God who carried me across the sea, I paid this much', when in fact you didn't pay that much? My brothers, I tell you explicitly, and as far as the Lord allows it, freely: only bad men use violence against other bad men.

The actions authorities need to take are a different matter. Usually a judge unsheathes his sword only when forced to. When he strikes, he does so unwillingly. Personally, he would have liked to have avoided bloodshed when sentencing; but maybe he did not want public order to collapse. He was obliged to act in this way by his office, by his authority, by the demands of his situation. But what are you obliged to do, except to beg God, '*Deliver us from evil*' [Mt 6.13]? You have said, 'Deliver us from evil.' God deliver you from yourself!

(17) To put it bluntly, my brothers, why do I keep going so long? We are all Christians. But I also carry a greater burden of danger.²⁰ People often ask about me, 'Why does he go to the authorities? What does a bishop want with the authorities?' But you all know that it's your needs that force me to go there, even though I don't want to. I have to wait my chance, stand outside the door, queue while they go in – worthy and unworthy alike – have my name announced – then sometimes I only just get admitted! I have to put up with the humiliation, make my request, sometimes succeed, sometimes leave disappointed. Who would put up with all that if he weren't forced to? Please do put me out of a job. Let me off it all! Please, don't let anyone make me do it. Look, just allow me this much – just give me a holiday from it all. Please, I beg you, don't let anyone make me do it.

I don't choose to have dealings with the authorities. God knows that I am forced into it. If we find Christians in authority we treat the authorities as we ought to treat Christians. If they are pagans, we treat them as we ought to treat pagans. We are well intentioned towards everyone. The critic objects, 'But he ought to warn the authorities to behave well.' And should we issue these warnings in front of you? Do you know whether we've issued a warning? You don't know whether we have or not. I know that you don't know, and that you're making a hasty judgement. However – my dear brothers, please – someone could say of me about someone in authority, 'If he had warned him, he would behave well.' My reply is this: 'I did warn him, but he didn't listen to me.'²¹ However, I gave him the warning when you couldn't hear me.'

Can you take a whole community on one side and give them a warning? But I could take one man aside to warn him and say, 'Do this',

or, 'Do that', in front of no one else. But who could take a whole community on one side and issue a warning to them without anyone knowing about it?

(18) It is the demands of the situation that force me to speak to you like this. Otherwise, I will give a poor account of myself to God over my responsibilities for you. I do not want God to say, 'If you had warned them, if you had put down the money, I could have demanded the payment' [cf. Lk 19.23]. So keep out of it, keep completely out of all this bloodshed. When you see that sort of thing or hear about it, it's not your job to do anything – except feel pity for him.

'But the dead man was bad!' All right, then you should grieve for him twice as much, because he is dead twice over, once in this temporary life, and once in eternal life. If a good man had died, then we would be grieving out of human emotion, because he had left us, and because we wanted him to be living with us still. But we ought to grieve twice over for those who are bad, because after this life they are taken off into eternal punishment. It is up to you to grieve, my dear brothers, it is up to you to grieve rather than be violent.

(19) However, as I have already said, it is not enough to refrain from this sort of thing yourselves, and it is not enough to grieve, unless you also do your very best to prevent an action that ordinary people have no authority to carry out. I do not mean, my brothers, that one of you could go out and simply prevent the people from doing it. I couldn't do that either. But in your own homes you have each got your sons, your slaves, your friends, your neighbours, your dependants, your juniors.²² Make sure that they don't behave like this! If you can persuade any of them not to, do so. As for the others, if they are under your authority, treat them severely. One thing I do know, and everyone else knows it as well. I can find plenty of houses in this city without a single pagan in them; I can't find a single house where there are no Christians. To put it more precisely, we won't find a single house where there are not more Christians than pagans. It is true; I can see you agreeing with me. You can see that this awful thing could not have been done if the Christians hadn't wanted it. You've got nothing to say in reply.

Now bad deeds might be carried out in secret. But if Christians weren't happy about it, and tried to prevent them, they couldn't be done in public. Then each of you would keep a hold on your son or your slave. The excesses of youth would be restrained by strict fathers, strict uncles, strict teachers, by the strictness of good neighbours, or by the strictness

of that more serious punishment.²³ If all this had been done, we wouldn't be feeling so distressed now about this awful business.

(20) My brothers, I am afraid of God's anger. God has no fear of mobs. People are quick to say, 'What the crowd has done, it has done. Who can manage to punish a whole crowd?' I agree, who can? Not God? Was God afraid even of the entire universe? After all, he created the flood [cf. Gen 6.13ff]. Was he afraid of so many Sodoms and Gomorrahs? After all, he sent fire from heaven to destroy them [cf. Gen 19.1-29]. I don't want to go into the recent troubles; I don't want to remind you of their seriousness, of where they took place, and of what resulted, in case I seem offensive. Surely God, when he was angry, didn't distinguish those who were actually doing wrong from those who were not? No, rather he put together those who were doing wrong with those who were doing nothing to prevent them.²⁴

(21) Let me now bring my sermon to a close at last. My brothers, I urge you, please, by the Lord and his gentleness, to live gently and peaceably; and to allow the authorities to do their job in peace. They will have to give an account of themselves to God and to their superiors.²⁵ Whenever you need to make some request, do so peaceably and respectfully. Don't get involved with wrong-doers, or with people who turn violent in an extreme and tragic way. Don't be eager to get involved in such things, or even in watching them. As far as you can, each of you in his own household and his own neighbourhood, whenever you are with anyone connected to you by ties of duty or love, warn them, persuade them, teach them, tell them off.²⁶ Even use threats in any way you can to restrain them from such horrific behaviour.

Then, at last, God may have pity on us and put an end to the evils of human life. He may cease dealing with us according to our sins, and not repay us according to our injustice, but put our sins as far away from us as east is from west. Then he may set us free for the honour of his own name, and be merciful towards our sins *in case the nations say, 'Where is their God?' [Ps 79(78).10].*

POSTSCRIPT (22)²⁷ My brothers, don't be reluctant or hesitant about crowding into the church, who is your mother, or staying there a while, because of the other people who are seeking sanctuary with her, or because she is a refuge shared by everyone. The church is indeed worried about what the crowds might attempt: they are not well controlled. However, as far as the authorities go, Christian emperors have promulgated laws in the name of God that provide the church with enough protection and more,²⁸ and these people are

unlikely to attempt anything against their mother that would end in humanity blaming them and God judging them. I pray that they don't. I don't believe they will, and I don't see evidence of it.

But just in case the crowd does get out of control and attempt something, you ought to be thronging into your mother the church. For, as I said, she is not the refuge of one or two people, but shared by everyone. If anyone hasn't got a reason to come, he ought to be afraid in case he finds one. I tell your beloved selves the unjust flee to the church from the presence of those who live justly, and those who live justly flee there from the presence of those who live unjustly.²⁹ Sometimes, too, the unjust flee from the presence of the unjust. There are three categories of refuge: the only exception is that the good don't flee from the good, the just don't flee from the just. However, the unjust flee from the just, the just flee from the unjust and the unjust flee from the unjust. But if we want to distinguish between them and remove wrongdoers from the church, then there will be nowhere for those who do good to hide. If we are willing to allow the guilty to be removed, there will be nowhere for the innocent to flee. It is better then that the church's protection includes the guilty, than that the innocent are dragged away. Hold to this advice: let them be afraid of your numbers (as I said) rather than your violence.

Sermon 13

418

At the altar of Cyprian, 27 May¹

On the words of Psalm 2.10, Be instructed, all you who judge the earth.

(1) *Be instructed, all you who judge the earth.* To judge the earth is to tame the body. Let us listen to the apostle² judging the earth: *I am not boxing as if I were beating the air; I pound my body and reduce it to servitude, in case in preaching to others I myself fail to win approval [1 Cor 9.26-7].* Listen then, earth, to the earth's judge; and judge the earth in case you become earth yourself. If you judge the earth, you'll become heaven, and you will proclaim the glory of the Lord created in you. *For the heavens proclaim the glory of God [Ps 19(18).1].* If, on the other hand, you fail to judge the earth, then you will become earth. But if you become earth, you will

the Sanhedrin, he defended Jesus' right to a fair hearing (Jn 7.50). He aided with the burial of Jesus (Jn 19.39).

4 In saying this, A. wishes to establish a legal basis in Roman as well as in the Mosaic law for charging them with calumny and collusion (cf. below, § 4). Cf. Deut 1.16 (LXX): 'And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge justly between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him.'

5 A. is referring to the doctrine of the virginal birth of Christ.

6 There are two ways to understand *cognitor*, which we have translated 'judge'. The other possibility is to translate *cognitor* 'defender'. By agreement of the parties involved in a litigation, a 'defender' could stand in for and speak on behalf of either party. Cf. Gaius, *Institutes* 4.83; *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 2.13.20, and *C. Th.* 2.1.1–7. Cf. also Buckland and Stein, *Text-Book* 708–10; Thomas, *Textbook* 103–12. Until the reign of the emperor Justinian (527–65), the *cognitor* also shared, in whole or in part, the legal jeopardy of the party he represented.

Against this interpretation, Christ is himself cast in the role of judge (*cognitor*) who investigates and 'brings justice' into the proceedings. Such an interpretation is suggested by the text of Is 4.2, alluded to in the statement following (cf. below, n. 7). Moreover, in late antiquity, *cognitor* was also used as a term for 'judge'. Cf. *C. Th.* 10.10.20 (8 April 392): *cognitores ordinarii*. A. occasionally uses the term when he clearly means 'judge' (cf. especially *conf.* 10.1.1; *ep.* 144.3; 153.16; *c. Iul. imp.* 2.10.34). The wider context of the commentary also supports this understanding; in the end it is Christ who, as judge, refuses to condemn the woman (cf. below, § 6).

7 Cf. Is 11.2–4: 'And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him . . . and he shall judge the poor with justice . . .'

8 Cf. Lev 20.10; Deut 22.22–4.

9 Cf. Mt 5.17–18.

10 *praevaricator legis*. In Roman law, the charge of *praevaricatio* concerned a collusion to offer a counterfeit prosecution or defence.

11 *praevaricatores legis*: cf. above, n. 10.

12 Here, A. calls Christ the 'voice of justice' (*vox iustitiae*). The technique used to unmask and defeat his adversaries is rhetorical, and derives from Socratic dialectic. The question 'who is without sin' is tactical; it establishes a common ground for assent between the parties to the dispute and thus lays the ground for the defeat of Christ's opponents. On the technique in general, cf. Cicero, *De finibus* 1.6.18. On A.'s admiration for Socrates' verbal acumen, cf. *civ.* 8.3; 14.8. Cf. also Cicero, *De oratore* 3.16.60.

For A., legal and rhetorical defeat of the Pharisees and Scribes was not

the sole end of Christ's use of dialectic. As Christ employed it, the art of dialectic drew out the implications of justice as yet uncovered from within the Mosaic Law. Christ therefore demonstrates that, in principle, justice thus holds truth and gentleness in perfect balance.

13 A. holds that Christ's unique condition of freedom from original sin and from all personal sin guarantees that he is the only completely just judge in history. Cf. Sermon 13.4–5 (pp. 121–3).

14 Cf. Letter 153.15 (pp. 79–80), where this same argument appears in relation to A.'s defence of bishops who appeal for clemency on behalf of criminals convicted of capital offences. Cf. also Sermon 13.8 (pp. 124–5).

15 I.e., Isaiah.

Sermon 302

1 Laurence was a Roman deacon martyred under the emperor Valerian, probably in 258. Deacons in the ancient Roman church also served as treasurers or bursars. A. preaches this sermon on his feast-day shortly after the mob killing at Hippo Regius of an unidentified imperial official, associated perhaps with enforcing the collection of customs duties (cf. p. 274 n. 15). The theme of Christian non-violence is thus skilfully interwoven into A.'s representation of Laurence as a martyr who resisted unjust civil authorities by verbal, rather than physical, means.

2 Reading *sanctae* with *lectiones*.

3 Probably Mt 5.1–12, commonly referred to as the Beatitudes, and frequently read in A.'s church during the eucharist when martyrs' feast-days were commemorated.

4 The sign of the cross was traced on the forehead of initiates (catechumens) at the onset of their formal introduction to the Christian religion.

At this point they were said to belong to Christ (cf. *Io. ev. tr.* 3.2), and looked forward to a more formal preparation for baptism. Cf. *conf.* 1.11; *cat. rud.* 26.50; *serm.* 32.13; 97A.3; 301A.8.

5 On 'guarantor' (*fideiussor*), cf. p. 261 n. 2.

6 Or, 'Many evil people say, "So much evil!"'

7 Referring to the mob killing of an imperial official, the major concern of this sermon. Cf. §§ 15–21.

8 On the conditions which A. held as requisite for true martyrdom, cf. p. 264 nn. 9 and 10.

9 On the role of this corrupt official, cf. p. 274 n. 15. It is possible that the higher import tariffs fraudulently charged at the city's port caused a sharp rise in the prices of goods sold in the market at Hippo Regius. Exorbitant tariffs might therefore have led to more widespread financial hardship and even ruin.

- 10 Literally 'banditry'.
- 11 A court stenographer who minuted trial proceedings as the judge's secretary.
- 12 On A.'s knowledge of the laws concerning homicide, cf. above p. 269 n. 16 and p. 133 n. 2.
- 13 *rationem reddere*, to 'render an account'. The New Testament reminds Christians that they will have to 'render an account' to God (Mt 12.36; 1 Pet 4.5; Rom 14.12); church leaders will 'render an account' of their flock (Heb 13.17). The phrase was also used in secular life; for example, servants in a propertied household would render regular accounts to their masters. In philosophical terms, to 'render an account' meant to give a rational explanation. A. uses the phrase in connection both with his responsibility to God as a bishop for his flock, and with his intellectual defence and exposition of Christianity. Cf. Letters 134.1 (p. 63); 136.2 (p. 29).
- 14 Note the similar tone at Commentary on the gospel of John, 33.5 (pp. 104–5), where A. refers to these words of Christ as the 'weapon of justice' which acts like a 'wooden club'. Cf. the reference at § 2, regarding any threats sharp enough to 'pierce hearts that are hard and apathetic', referring to his auditors.
- 15 *miles*, a soldier. The term is also used in late antiquity to describe certain civil servants in the imperial bureaucracy (*militia officialis*). Citing Lk 3.12–14, A. implies an association between the official in question, and the 'soldiers' and 'publicans' (whom A. equates with 'tax-collectors', *telonearii*) addressed by John the Baptist. At § 16, he indicates that a merchant (*negotiator*) who conducts his trade by sea complained of having been defrauded by the official. For these reasons, the victim may have been a *custos litorum*, a soldier assigned to assist customs officials (*curiosi litorum*) with the assessment and collection of duties on goods entering the port of Hippo Regius. Cf. Delmaire, *Largesses sacrées* 287–8.
- 16 A. is punning in Latin: '*non . . . militia, sed malitia*'.
- 17 Cf. Letter 138.15 (pp. 38–9), where A. employs this text in rebutting the charge that the Christian religion proscribed recourse to physical force in all circumstances, even by legitimate civil authorities.
- 18 Or 'God doesn't belong just to them, and not to us.'
- 19 Note the parallel structure in A.'s questions to the implied question of Christ, 'If any of you is without sin . . .' (Jn 8.7). Cf. § 14.
- 20 That is, of being a bishop, with responsibility for his community.
- 21 A. indicates that he had interceded with the soldier in question, and asked him to stop oppressing merchants with exorbitant charges.
- 22 Cf. p. 289 n. 4, on *paterfamilias*.
- 23 Following the *PL* text. Lambot includes '*corporis*', with several manu-

- scripts, and explains this as a reference to corporal punishment. However, corporal punishment is too much taken for granted by A. to be described so solemnly. Secondly, the grammar is peculiar, suggesting the possibility that *corporis ipsius* is a later gloss. But the phrase remains obscure.
- 24 Cf. Letters 91 and 104 (pp. 2–8 and 11–12) concerning A's views on the collective civic responsibility to prevent unjust violence in the Calama affair.
- 25 Cf. p. 274 n. 13.
- 26 Cf. § 19, where A. also urges the head of the household to employ verbal persuasion against any resort to violence by family members. A.'s confidence in the power of language as a fundamental means for the promotion of justice is a consistent, major theme throughout the sermon. Cf. §§ 2; 3; 8; 14; 15; 16.
- 27 Some scholars have argued for the inclusion of this section, known as *Sermo Morin Guelferbytanus* 25, as the conclusion or peroration of Sermon 302; others have raised serious objections to its inclusion. A. may be speaking here of church asylum for those suspected of killing the imperial official. However, by this interpretation, it remains unclear why, in addition to civil authorities, a crowd would be threatening to storm the church. A second interpretation suggests that the murdered official had sought sanctuary in the church, and that A. is referring to the crowd which stormed the church, seized him and killed him. Cf. Ducloux, *Ad ecclesiam* 176–80. But this suggestion lacks any textual foundation.
- 28 On the legally sanctioned right of asylum in churches, cf. p. 261 n. 3. A. may also be thinking of a number of imperial edicts which granted protection to church buildings from acts of violence (cf., for example, *C. Th.* 16.2.31: 13 January 409).
- 29 Cf. Translator's note on Just.

Sermon 13

- 1 The sermon was preached at the basilica of St Cyprian at Carthage. A. was in the city attending a bishops' council.
- 2 St Paul.
- 3 Cf. Translator's note on Security.
- 4 I.e., as if to speak in a law-court.
- 5 Cf. p. 271 n. 2.
- 6 Cf. *Cresc.* 1.11.14–18.22, where A., in reference to this text, calls Christ a 'dialectician' (*dialecticus, disputator*: *Cresc.* 1.17.21). Christ's questioning and subsequent rebuke of the Pharisees and scribes over their efforts to corner him in a dilemma over the paying of taxes to Caesar conforms to