

till she brought forth her firstborn son,¹⁶ one must know that the first child to be born is the firstborn, even though it may also be the only-begotten. Firstborn means having been born first, and does not by any means imply the birth of others; on the other hand, the 'till' signifies the fulfillment of the appointed time, without excluding the time after that. Thus, the Lord says: 'And behold I am with you all days, even till the consummation of the world,'¹⁷ without meaning that He is to be separated after the consummation of the world. The divine Apostle certainly says: 'And so shall we be always with the Lord,'¹⁸ meaning after the general resurrection.

How, indeed, would she have given birth to God and have known the miracle from the experience of subsequent events and then have allowed intercourse with a husband? Far be it! The thinking of such things is beyond the bounds of prudent thought, let alone the doing of them.

However, this blessed one, who had been found worthy of gifts surpassing nature, did at the time of the Passion suffer the pangs which she had escaped at childbirth. For, when she saw Him put to the death as a criminal, whom she knew to be God when she gave birth to Him, her heart was torn from maternal compassion and she was rent by her thoughts as by a sword. This is the meaning of 'And thy own soul a sword shall pierce.'¹⁹ But her grief gave way to the joy of the resurrection, the resurrection which proclaimed Him to be God who had died in the flesh.

¹⁶ Matt. 1.25.

¹⁷ Matt. 28.20.

¹⁸ I Thess. 4.16.

¹⁹ Luke 2.35.

Chapter 15

The saints must be honored as friends of Christ and children and heirs of God, as John the Theologian and Evangelist says: 'But as many as received him, he gave them the power to be made the sons of God.'¹ 'Therefore they are no longer servants, but sons: and if sons, heirs also, heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ.'² And again, in the holy Gospels the Lord says to the Apostles: 'You are my friends. . . I will not now call you servants: for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth.'³ Furthermore, if the Creator and Lord of all is called both King of kings and Lord of lords and God of gods,⁴ then most certainly the saints, too, are both gods and lords and kings. God both is and is said to be their God and Lord and King. 'For I am,' He said to Moses, 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,' and God appointed Moses the God of Pharaoh.⁵ However, I say that they are gods, lords, and kings not by nature, but because they have ruled over and dominated sufferings, and because they have kept undebased the likeness of the divine image to which they were made—for the image of the king is also called a king, and, finally, because they have freely been united to God and receiving Him as a dweller within themselves have through association with Him become by grace what He is by nature. How, then, should these not be honored who have been accounted servants, friends, and sons of God? For the honor shown the more sensible of one's fellow servants gives proof of one's love for the common Master.

These are become repositories and pure dwelling places of God, for 'I will dwell in them and walk among them,'

¹ John 1.12.

² Gal. 4.7; Rom. 8.17.

³ John 15.14,15.

⁴ Apoc. 19.16; Ps. 49.1.

⁵ Exod. 3.6; 7.1.

says God, 'and I will be their God.'⁶ So, indeed, sacred Scripture says that 'the souls of the just are in the hand of God: and death shall not touch them.'⁷ For the death of the saints is rather sleep than death, since 'they have labored unto eternity and shall live unto the end,' and 'precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.'⁸ What then is more precious than to be in the hand of God? For God is life and light, and they that are in the hand of God abide in life and light.

Moreover, because through their mind God has also dwelt in their bodies, the Apostle says: 'Know you not that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you?'; 'Now the Lord is the Spirit'; and again: 'If any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy.'⁹ How, then, should they not be honored, who are the living temples of God, the living tabernacles of God. These in life openly took their stand with God.

In the relics of the saints the Lord Christ has provided us with saving fountains which in many ways pour out benefactions and gush with fragrant ointment.¹⁰ And let no one disbelieve. For, if by the will of God water poured out of the precipitous living rock in the desert, and for the thirsty Sampson from the jawbone of an ass,¹¹ is it unbelievable that fragrant ointment should flow from the relics of the martyrs? Certainly not, at least for such as know the power of God and the honor which the saints have from Him.

In the Law, anyone who touched a corpse was accounted unclean.¹² But these of whom we speak are not dead. Because Life itself and the Author of life was reckoned amongst the

6 2 Cor. 6.16; Lev. 26.12.

7 Wisd. 3.1.

8 Ps. 48.9,10; 115.15.

9 1 Cor. 6.19; 2 Cor. 3.17; 1 Cor. 3.17.

10 The special epithet *myroblytus*, or 'gushing ointment,' is applied to certain saints whose relics exude a fragrant oil. The two most famous *myroblytae* are St. Demetrius of Salonica and St. Nicholas of Bari.

11 Cf. Exod. 17.6; Judges 15.19.

12 Cf. Num. 19.11.

dead, we do not call these dead who have fallen asleep in the hope of resurrection and in the faith in Him. For how can a dead body work miracles? How, then, through them are demons put to flight, diseases driven out, the sick cured, the blind restored to sight, lepers cleansed, temptation and trouble driven away; and how through them does 'every best gift come down from the Father of lights'¹³ to them who ask with undoubting faith? What would you not do to find a patron to present you to a mortal king and intercede with him in your behalf? Are not the patrons of the entire race to be honored who make petitions to God in our behalf? Yes, indeed; we must honor them by raising churches to God in their name, by making fruit-offerings, and by celebrating their anniversaries and taking spiritual joy in these, such as will be the very joy of our hosts, but taking care lest in endeavoring to do them honor we may give them annoyance instead. For by some things honor is given to God and they who serve Him rejoice in them, whereas by others He is offended and so, too, are His shield-bearers. 'In psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles,'¹⁴ in compunction, and in compassion for the needy let us faithful do honor to the saints, through whom most especially is honor rendered to God. Let us set up monuments to them, and visible images, and let us ourselves by the imitation of their virtues become their living monuments and images. Let us honor the Mother of God as really and truly God's Mother. Let us honor the Prophet John as precursor and baptist, apostle and martyr, for 'there hath not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John,'¹⁵ as the Lord said, and he was the first herald of the kingdom. Let us honor the Apostles as brethren of the Lord, as eye-witnesses and attendants to His sufferings, whom God the Father 'foreknew and predestinated

13 James 1.17.

14 Eph. 5.19.

15 Matt. 11.11.

to be made conformable to the image of his Son,¹⁶ 'first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly shepherds and teachers.'¹⁷ And let us honor the holy martyrs of the Lord who have been picked from every rank and whose corps commander is Christ's archdeacon, apostle, and protomartyr Stephen; let us honor them as soldiers of Christ who have drunk of His chalice and have then been baptized with the baptism of His life-giving death, and as participants in His sufferings and His glory. Let us also honor those sainted fathers of ours, the God-bearing ascetics who have struggled through the more drawn-out and laborious martyrdom of the conscience, 'who wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being in want, distressed, afflicted: wandering in deserts, in mountains and in dens and in caves of the earth: of whom the world was not worthy.'¹⁸ Let us honor the Prophets who preceded the Grace, the patriarchs and just men who announced beforehand the advent of the Lord. Let us carefully observe the manner of life of all these and let us emulate their faith, charity, hope, zeal, life, patience under suffering, and perseverance unto death, so that we may also share their crowns of glory.

Chapter 16

Since there are certain people who find great fault with us for adoring and honoring both the image of the Saviour and that of our Lady, as well as those of the rest of the saints and servants of Christ, let them hear how from the beginning God made man to His own image.¹ For what reason, then, do we adore one another, except because we have been made to the image of God? As the inspired Basil, who is deeply learned in theology, says: 'the honor paid to the

¹⁶ Rom. 8.29.

¹⁷ 1 Cor. 12.28.

¹⁸ Heb. 11.37,38.

¹ Cf. Gen. 1.26.

image redounds to the original,² and the original is the thing imaged from which the copy is made. For what reason did the people of Moses adore from round about the tabernacle which bore an image and pattern of heavenly things, or rather, of all creation?³ Indeed, God had said to Moses: 'See that thou make all things according to the pattern which was shewn thee on the mount.' And the Cherubim, too, that overshadowed the propitiatory, were they not the handiwork of men?⁴ And what was the celebrated temple in Jerusalem? Was it not built and furnished by human hands and skill?⁵

Now, sacred Scripture condemns those who adore graven things, and also those who sacrifice to the demons. The Greeks used to sacrifice and the Jews also used to sacrifice; but the Greeks sacrifice to the demons, whereas the Jews sacrificed to God. And the sacrifice of the Greeks was rejected and condemned, while the sacrifice of the just was acceptable to God. Thus, Noe sacrificed 'and the Lord smelled a sweet savor'⁶ of the good intention and accepted the fragrance of the gift offered to Him. And thus the statues of the Greeks happen to be rejected and condemned, because they were representations of demons.

But, furthermore, who can make a copy of the invisible, incorporeal, uncircumscribed, and unportrayable God? It is, then, highly insane and impious to give a form to the God-head. For this reason it was not the practice in the Old Testament to use images. However, through the bowels of His mercy God for our salvation was made man in truth, not in the appearance of man, as He was seen by Abraham or the Prophets, but really made man in substance. Then He

² Basil, *On the Holy Ghost* 18.45 (PG 32.149C).

³ Cf. Exod. 33.10.

⁴ Cf. Heb. 8.5; Exod. 25.40,20.

⁵ Cf. 3 Kings 6.

⁶ Gen. 8.21.

abode on earth, conversed with men,⁷ worked miracles, suffered, was crucified, rose again, and was taken up; and all these things really happened and were seen by men and, indeed, written down to remind and instruct us, who were not present then, so that, although we have not seen, yet hearing and believing we may attain to the blessedness of the Lord. Since, however, not all know letters nor do all have leisure to read, the Fathers deemed it fit that these events should be depicted as a sort of memorial and terse reminder. It certainly happens frequently that at times when we do not have the Lord's Passion in mind we may see the image of His crucifixion and, being thus reminded of His saving Passion, fall down and adore. But it is not the material which we adore, but that which is represented; just as we do not adore the material of the Gospel or that of the cross, but that which they typify. For what is the difference between a cross which does not typify the Lord and one which does? It is the same way with the Mother of God, too, for the honor paid her is referred to Him who was incarnate of her. And similarly, also, we are stirred up by the exploits of the holy men to manliness, zeal, imitation of their virtues, and the glory of God. For, as we have said, the honor shown the more sensible of one's fellow servants gives proof of one's love for the common Master, and the honor paid to the image redounds to the original. This is the written tradition, just as is worshipping toward the east, adoring the cross, and so many other similar things.⁸

Furthermore, there is a story told⁹ about how, when Abgar was lord of the city of Edessenens, he sent an artist to make a portrait of the Lord, and how, when the artist was unable

7 Cf. Bar. 3.38.

8 Cf. Basil, *op. cit.* 27.66 (PG 32.188B).

9 The earliest form of the Syriac legend of Abgar, the first Christian king of Edessa, is to be found in Eusebius (*Eccles. Hist.* 1.13). The later and more amplified version containing the incident of the portrait here referred to is to be found in the Syriac document known as the *Doctrine of Addai* (translated and published by G. Phillips, London 1876).

to do this because of the radiance of His face, the Lord Himself pressed a bit of cloth to His own sacred and life-giving face and left His own image on the cloth and so sent this to Abgar who had so earnestly desired it.

And Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, writes that the Apostles handed down a great many things unwritten: 'Therefore, brethren, stand fast: and hold the traditions which you have learned, whether by word or by our epistle'; and to the Corinthians: 'Now I praise you, brethren, that in all things you are mindful of me and keep my ordinances as I have delivered them to you.'¹⁰

Chapter 17

The God proclaimed by the Old Testament and the New is one He who is celebrated and glorified in Trinity, for the Lord said: 'I am not to come to destroy the law, but to fulfil.'¹ For He worked our salvation, for the sake of which all Scripture and every mystery has been revealed. And again: 'Search the scriptures: for these give testimony of me.'² And the Apostle too, says: 'God, who, at sundry times and in diverse manners, spoke in times past to the fathers by prophets, last of all, in these days, hath spoken to us by his Son.'³ Through the Holy Ghost, then, both the Law and the Prophets, the evangelists, apostles, pastors, and teachers spoke.

Therefore, 'all scripture, inspired of God, is quite profitable,'⁴ so that to search the sacred Scripture is very good and most profitable for the soul. For, 'like a tree which is planted

10 2 Thess. 2.14; 1 Cor. 11.2.

1 Matt. 5.17.

2 John 5.39.

3 Heb. 1.1-2.

4 2 Tim. 3.16.