

CISTERCIAN STUDIES SERIES NUMBER TWO HUNDRED FIFTY-EIGHT

# Gregory the Great

Moral Reflections on the Book of Job

Volume 3

Books 11–16



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# Gregory the Great

Translated by

*Brian Kerns, OCSO*

Introduction by

*Mark DelCogliano*



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# Abbreviations

## *General*

### **Publications: Books and Series**

- CCSL Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1954–.
- CS Cistercian Studies series. Kalamazoo, MI, and Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications.
- LXX Septuagint
- PL Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latinae. Ed. J.-P. Migne. 221 vols. Paris.
- Praef Praefatio
- SCh Sources Chr tiennes. Paris: Les  ditions du Cerf, 1942–.



# Introduction

*Mark DelCogliano*

**T**he third of the six parts of Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job* is unique. In part 1 (books 1–5) Gregory covered Job 1:5–5:2 (84 verses), commenting at a very leisurely pace as he mostly stuck to his original plan of interpreting each verse three times: first the historical or literal interpretation, then the typical interpretation (geared toward what Christians believe or need to believe), and finally the moral interpretation (what Christians need to do).<sup>1</sup> In the other parts he abandoned this plan, for the most part jettisoning the historical interpretation and focusing chiefly on the typical or moral interpretation (and sometimes both). This new approach enabled him to pick up his pace, as it were, resulting in a greater coverage of verses in each part: in part 2 (books 6–10), Job 5:3–12:5 (179 verses); in part 4 (books 17–22), Job 24:20–31:40 (173 verses); in part 5 (books 23–27), Job 32:1–37:24 (165 verses); and in part 6 (books 28–35), Job 38:1–42:16 (145 verses).

In part 3 (books 11–16), however, Gregory covered Job 12:6–24:20 (324 verses)—the greatest number of verses in any of the six parts. Why? The *Moralia* had its origins in oral discourses that Gregory delivered to a circle of monks and clerics in Constantinople while he was serving as papal ambassador there in the first half of the 580s.<sup>2</sup> These oral discourses were taken down by notaries, and upon his return to Rome in 585 or 586, Gregory revised them for wider

<sup>1</sup> On Gregory's exegetical practice, see Gregory the Great, *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job*, trans. Brian Kerns, CS 249 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), 17–26.

<sup>2</sup> See CS 249:8–11.

circulation, adding much to them and also improving the literary style of his originally spoken comments. But as he himself tells us, he never had the chance to revise the third part. Accordingly, it is not only the most compressed part of Gregory's exposition of Job, since it covers the most biblical verses, but it alone among the six parts affords the best access to Gregory's original discourses in their oral form. As such, it is in a sense Gregory's earliest surviving literary work, since the five other parts of the *Moralia* that he was able to revise were finalized only after his return to Rome in the mid-580s, and his other extant works were written during his papacy.<sup>3</sup>

It appears that Gregory's editing of the third part was mostly limited to the organization of the transcripts of his oral discourses into the six books of this part. This formatting of the material prompted him to add brief remarks at the beginning of each book, providing readers with information that would facilitate their understanding of his commentary, such as a review of the figurative referents of the characters in Job (book 11), summaries of the moral qualities of Job as a saint who also represents the church (books 12–14), and brief transitional notes (books 15–16). Gregory also added brief comments at the beginning and end of part 3 (11.I.1 and 16.LXIX.83): while the latter are perfunctory, the former are a kind of apology for the third part's unique character.

In the *Letter to Leander*, the dedicatory epistle that functions as the preface to the *Moralia*, Gregory explains that he was forced to leave the third part "almost as it was, that is, as I spoke it," because his audience in their eagerness to have him advance his commentary on Job "refused to allow me to correct the earlier draft further."<sup>4</sup> In the opening section of the third part, he says much the same thing: "I have left in this part much that was written down while I was speaking" (11.I.1). But here Gregory attempts to make a virtue out of necessity. First, he claims that he should not be reproached for

<sup>3</sup> See CS 249:11–13.

<sup>4</sup> *Letter to Leander* 2, CS 249:50.

employing stylistic variety in such a long work, for just as variation in culinary fare pleases the palate of those accustomed to the same food, so too should diversity in style please the reader. The second reason is pragmatic: he had so much to say in this part that it would not have fit into a single codex unless it had been said with “extreme brevity.” Gregory opines that for those who are not free to read and study all the time, “the brevity of this part may well be congenial, where we do not so much say what we think as indicate what should be said.” And so in this third part he intends to offer his readers a kind of outline or sketch—an indication of what should be said—of what would have been a much longer treatment had he had the opportunity to express himself fully (saying what he thought).

In terms of literary style and diction, however, the third part does not seem much different from the other parts, though perhaps Gregory is less given to prolixity. The chief difference lies in the rapidity with which he interprets the biblical verses, sometimes in two or three senses, moving from one verse to the next in quick succession. Absent are the long digressions, excursions, and minitreatises that one finds in the other parts. The hallmark of the third part is focus. For example, in commenting on Job 14:4 (11.LII.70), which speaks of purity and impurity, Gregory provides in short compass a moral and christological (typical) interpretation of the verse: humans are conceived impurely but try to become pure; accordingly, they struggle with temptation. But those who are victorious over their temptations should never attribute their purity to themselves but to the one who is pure of himself, namely, the Redeemer. This reference to the Redeemer gives Gregory the chance to make a few christological comments: unlike ours, Christ’s conception was not impure, not from the union of a man and woman, but instead he proceeded from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. He says all this in about a page or so; surely he could have said more and could have added further nuance and elucidation. But he makes the main points clearly, succinctly, and without ambiguity.

The present volume is the third of a projected six volumes containing a new translation of the *Moralia* by Br. Brian Kerns, OCSO, published by Cistercian Publications under the editorial care of Dr. Marsha Dutton. Congratulations to both on reaching the halfway point of this monumental venture, and Godspeed on bringing it to completion.

Mark DelCogliano  
Minneapolis, Minnesota  
March 12, 2016  
The 1412th Anniversary of the Death of  
Saint Gregory the Great

## BOOK I I

I. 1. Although no one should blame me for changing my style in an extended work like this one, lest anyone should reproach me for varying my style of speech, I explained the reasons in the letter prefixed to the work, why I completed the third part of this work without emendations to conform to the pattern of the first two parts. Having completed these two parts, we continue the work from Job 12:6, where it is said, *The tents of robbers spread out*, and the exposition of this third part begins and is carried through until Job 24:20, where we read *the sweetness of their worm*. There are so many words in this part that they cannot fit in one volume, unless they are spoken with extreme brevity. The one who is free from other occupations can read the other multiplied words. For the person who is not free to read and study, however, the brevity of this part may well be congenial, where we do not so much say what we think as indicate what should be said.

Accordingly, since I have left in this part much that was written down while I was speaking, accept this variation of style on my part, kind reader, with an impartial disposition, since diversity in cooking methods often pleases those who eat the same food. As often as you take up the individual parts to read, always be eager to commit to memory that original cause that I have proposed, namely, that blessed Job is called a sufferer, and therein is the passion of the Lord and the sufferings of his Body the church portrayed. His friends play the role of heretics, who, as I have said often enough, when they try to defend God end up displeasing him. When

they falsely counsel the saints, they deeply discourage them. Not everything heretics say, however, is foolish or strays from the knowledge of truth; rather they mix prudence with stupidity and falsehood with truth. When they ask a question out of concern for truth, they easily get falsehood out of it.

The same holds true for blessed Job's friends: sometimes their speech is contemptible, sometimes admirable. The holy man accordingly sometimes reproves and condemns what they say, but at other times he agrees with and approves it; he even applies to the profit of rectitude those things that they say correctly but ill-advisedly. So he has only contempt for those who ridicule his poverty, and while his body sits on the dung heap, he shows them the great height of virtue on which he sits before them, while he declares that the riches of the present life amount to nothing, since he also tells them that reprobate sinners have abundant riches.

II. 2. *The tents of robbers spread out; they insolently provoke God, even though it was he who gave them everything they have.*\* It is easy for people to despise riches when they have them. It is hard, on the other hand, to consider riches worthless when they do not have them. From this obvious fact it clearly appears how much contempt blessed Job had in his mind for worldly possessions, when at the very time that he had lost everything, he said that the abundance possessed by reprobate sinners was nothing. He said, *The tents of robbers spread out; they insolently provoke God.* Evil people, you see, wax more proud against God precisely because their riches come from God's bounty and contrary to their own deserving, and those who ought to be incited to better behavior by the good things they receive are made worse by those gifts.

3. But we must learn how it is that they are called robbers, when it is immediately added, *even though it*

\*Job 12:6

*was he who gave them everything they have.* If they are robbers, you see, it means they took something away by force, and God is certainly no helper for the violent. How then does God give that which robbers wickedly take? We must realize, however, that it is one thing when almighty God mercifully grants something, but it is another thing entirely when he angrily allows a thing to be possessed. Whatever the crooked thieves do, that most impartial steward only allows to happen out of his sense of justice, so that those who are allowed to steal might increase their guilt with their mental blinders on, and that those who suffer the theft might in the loss presently sustained be penalized for a fault previously committed.

Suppose somebody waits in a mountain gorge to ambush wayfarers, while the traveler has perhaps done some evil thing sometime in the past; almighty God decides to avenge the evil he has done in the present life, so he delivers the traveler into the hands of the one who set the ambush, either to be robbed of possessions or even to be killed. So that which the robber unjustly desires, that most impartial Judge justly allowed to happen, so that the former might receive recompense for his unjust act and the latter might someday be punished more severely, because it was through his thoroughly wicked will that almighty God justly punished the guilt of the first one. The one wronged is purified. The wrongdoer's guilt is increased, so that he might someday either return to repentance from his deep wantonness or, because he did not return, be thrown down as deeply in eternal damnation as he was long put up with in his wickedness.

So God dealt mercifully with the former that he might stop sinning, but with the latter in strict justice, so that his guilt might increase unless he returned to repentance. In the former the evil is purified when he

is treated with violence; in the latter the evil is multiplied by what he does. It is just, therefore, that almighty God allows that to happen that he forbade anyone to do, so that where he now waits for those who do not convert and long puts up with them, he may someday strike them more severely. So it is well said, *The tents of robbers spread out; they insolently provoke God, even though it was he who gave them everything they have.* That which wicked people take, God himself gives them, he who could have opposed their robbery if he had wished to show mercy.

4. The above description can also be understood spiritually. Some people, you see, often receive the gift of teaching, but they grow proud concerning these gifts, and they want to seem important in the eyes of others. So when they wax proud in front of their neighbors concerning God's gifts, they provoke God. Nor is it without merit to call them robbers, because they do not practice what they say, and they steal the words of the just and use them in their speeches. Because, however, it is grace that has given them these very heavenly words, grace that, on the other hand, has left their lives with bad habits, they are robbers in themselves, although whatever good they have, they have received from God. The next verse:

III. 5. *Question the beasts, and they will certainly tell you. Ask the birds of the air, and they will show you. Speak to the earth, and it will answer you. Even the fish of the sea will teach you.*\* What should we understand

\*Job 12:7-8

by beasts if not those of slow perception? What by birds of the air if not wise people who think high and heavenly thoughts? Concerning beasts, furthermore, that is, those of slow perception, it is written, *Your animals will dwell there.*\* That the wise think lofty thoughts and fly among the words of our Redeemer, it is also written,

\*Ps 67:11

*So that the birds of heaven may come and dwell in its branches.\** What should we understand by earth, but those with earthly thoughts? That is why the first man who deserted heaven was told, *You are dust, and to dust you shall return.\** What should we take the fish of the sea to mean, if not the curious ones in this world? Of them the psalmist speaks: *The fish of the sea that travel the ocean paths.\** They busy themselves in important investigations about the world, as though sniffing around hidden waves. What all this information teaches us he adds, saying,

\*Matt 13:32

\*see Phil 3:19

\*Gen 3:19

\*Ps 8:9

IV. 6. *Who is unaware of the fact that God's hand has created all this?\** It is as if he said, "Either among those of slow perception, or among those whose wisdom searches the heights, or among those given over to worldly actions, or among those occupied with earthly affairs direct the inquiry of your search; they will all admit that God is the Creator of all this, and they unanimously recognize his power, even if they do not all unanimously live accordingly." That which each one of the just says and even lives, you see, that same message the unjust are often forced to admit concerning God, even if it be only with their voice. It happens that evil people do homage to the Creator of the world by their words of confirmation, even if their acts oppose that same Creator. Their brazen behavior assails him, but they cannot deny that he is Creator of all.

\*Job 12:9

The text, however, can also be understood profitably according to the bare literal sense, because each creature considered in itself lends its own voice of witness, as it were, which is the very form that it has. We question beasts, birds, earth, or fish when we look at them, and they unanimously answer us that God created everything. When we take in their forms with our eyes, they testify that they did not make themselves. By the very

fact that they were created, by the form that they present, they, as it were, give forth a voice of confession to their Creator. He, because he created everything, arranges the way in which they ought to be governed. The text continues,

\*Job 12:10 V. 7. *In his hand is the soul of every living creature and the spirit of all human flesh.*\* The word *hand* denotes power. Accordingly, the soul of every living thing and the spirit of all human flesh are in his power who made them, that he might himself dispose of their actions, who guaranteed that to be that did not exist before. The words *soul*, however, and *of every living creature*, may represent the lives of beasts. Almighty God gives life to the souls of beasts all the way to the formation of the senses of the body, but to the spirits of humans all the way to spiritual understanding. In his hand, therefore, is the soul of every living creature and the spirit of all human flesh, since he grants the former the ability of the soul to give life to the flesh, and in the latter he enlivens the soul, that it might reach the understanding of eternity.

\*John 19:20 We must remember, nonetheless, that the spirit of humankind in the Bible is usually presented in two ways. Sometimes, you see, spirit equals soul, and sometimes it renders spiritual agency. Spirit equals soul, then, when it is written about our very own Head, *Bowing his head, he gave up his spirit.*\* If, you see, the evangelist meant to say that spirit was something else than soul, when the spirit left him, the soul would surely have remained. Spirit also renders spiritual agency, as when it is said, *He makes his angels spirits, and his ministers burning fire.*\* Actually, preachers are sometimes called angels in the Bible, and angels are equivalent to messengers. The prophet says, *The lips of the priest hold knowledge; men should seek the law from his mouth.*

\*Ps 103:4

*He is the angel of the Lord of Hosts.*\* Accordingly, almighty God makes his angels spirits, because he makes his preachers spiritual. In this passage, if the soul of every living thing represents the very life of the body, by the spirit of all human flesh is meant the spiritual agency of intelligence.

\*Mal 2:7

VI. 8. *Does not the ear judge words, and the eater's jaw the taste?*\* Virtually no one is unaware that our body's five senses, namely, sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch, sense and discern everything, and they draw the power of sense and discernment from the brain. The brain senses internally, and it is the only judge presiding over perception. Through its own procedures it distinguishes the five senses, while God performs the miracle that consists in the fact that the eye does not hear, nor does the ear see, nor does the mouth smell, nor do the nostrils taste, nor do the hands smell. Since our sense perception in the brain governs all the senses, not one of these senses can do anything else except the task it has received from the Creator's disposition.

\*Job 12:11

From these exterior bodily organs, therefore, the interior spiritual faculties must be derived, so that through what concerns our external relations we might connect with what is hidden in us and escapes our perception. We must unquestionably notice that, although wisdom is one, she dwells less in one, more in another. One person excels in this way, another in that. Wisdom, like the brain, uses us as if we were bodily senses; although she is herself never unlike herself, through us she does works that are always diverse and unlike one another. This is true to the extent that one person receives the gift of knowledge, another the gift of wisdom; one person might have diverse tongues, another the gift of healing.

9. In the words that blessed Job uses when he says, *Does not the ear judge words and the eater's jaw the*

*taste?* he seems to include as well something about the elect and the reprobate sinners. The words of wisdom, you see, that the reprobate sinners hear, the elect not only hear but also taste, that their hearts may taste that which is not heard by the reprobates' minds but only by their ears. What we only hear with our ears is something different from that which we taste as well. We call that which we taste *food*. The elect accordingly hear the food of wisdom in such a way as to taste it. They savor through love that which they hear and savor it to the very marrow. The knowledge of the reprobates, on the other hand, does indeed reach as far as the knowing mind insofar as its sound is conceived, so that they hear of virtues, but their heart is cold, and they know not how those virtues taste.

By the words quoted, blessed Job reproved his friends' naiveté, as well as the arrogance of those who boast of wise teaching. It is one thing to know something about God and another thing entirely to taste intellectually what one knows. So he is right to say, *Does not the ear judge words, and the eater's jaw the taste?* It is as if he openly told the arrogant ones, "The words of doctrine that reach your ears also touch my intelligent jaws through their interior taste." Nevertheless, those of tender age, even if their understanding is correct, should not carelessly leap into the preaching office, so he adds,

VII. 10. *There is wisdom in age, and in many years there is prudence.\** Those words that are rooted in wisdom and are strengthened by life experience and activity, you see, are set firm. Yet long life is granted to many whom the grace of wisdom does not adorn, so it is rightly shown next on whose judgment these gifts depend:

VIII. 11. *With him is wisdom and fortitude, and he has counsel and understanding.\** It is not improper that we take these words to refer to the only-begotten Son of

the eternal Father, that we might understand him to be the wisdom and fortitude of God. Paul testifies the same reality to our understanding when he says, *Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.*\* He is always with him, because *In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.*\* God has counsel and intelligence, counsel in that he distributes what is his own, intelligence in that he knows what is ours. The word *counsel* may also refer to that very delay of hidden judgment, namely, that he sometime later strikes sinners, not because he does not see their sin, but so that their sentence of condemnation is deferred for the sake of their doing penance, and his counsel seems to hand it down late. Accordingly, that which an open sentence sometimes indicates externally lay hidden before time in the counsel of almighty God.

\*1 Cor 1:24

\*John 1:1

IX. 12. *If he should destroy, there is no one who would build; if he should shut a man in, there is none who would open.*\* Almighty God destroys the human heart when he abandons it, but he builds it up when he fills it. Nor does he destroy a human mind by attacking it, but by leaving it alone, since it is enough for its ruin that it be dismissed. It often happens therefore that, if the hearers' hearts are not filled with almighty God's grace, because their guilt requires that absence, it is in vain that a preacher warns them externally. Every mouth that speaks is mute, unless God cries out within the heart, since it is he who inspires the words that are heard. That is why the prophet says, *If the Lord does not build the house, they labor in vain who build it.*\* That is also why Solomon says, *Consider the works of God, that no man can set him right, whom God has rejected.*\*

\*Job 12:14

\*Ps 126:1

\*Eccl 7:14  
Vulg

It is no wonder that a preacher is not heard in the heart of a sinner, when the Lord himself is sometimes opposed by the misbehavior of his foes when he speaks. That is

\*see  
Gen 4:6-7

why Cain could be warned by God's voice and still could not change.\* Because of his malicious guilt God had already deserted his heart internally, when he was talking to him externally to prove his guilt. So Job was right to continue, *If he should shut a man in, there is none who would open*. All people who do wrong, what else do they do but build a prison for themselves in their conscience, so that guilt might corner their soul, even if no one should accuse them externally? It is God's judgment that people should be left alone in their blindness and malice; they are then closed up inside themselves, so that they may not find a way to escape, since they by no means merit escape.

It often happens, you see, that some people desire to have their evil actions behind them, but they are burdened with the weight of these same acts, and they are locked up in a prison of evil habits and cannot get away from themselves. Others desire to punish their own sins, and what they think they are doing right gets them into worse trouble, so it happens in a lamentable fashion that what they think is an escape they find to be a blockade. So it was with the renegade Judas when he caused his own death in reaction to his sin and received the penalty of eternal death, so that his sorrow for sin was worse than the sin itself.\*

\*see  
Matt 27:5;  
Acts 1:19

13. Let him say it then: *If he should shut a man in, there is none who would open*. Just as no one resists the free call of God, so no one questions the justice of God when he abandons. For God to shut in, accordingly, means that he does not open the door for those who are already shut in. That is why he tells Moses about Pharaoh, *I will harden his heart*.\* When he says *harden*, he is of course talking about his own justice, since he does not soften the unrepentant heart through grace. He shuts a man in, consequently, when he abandons him in the darkness of his own actions.

\*Exod 4:21

It is as though Isaac wanted to open the shut door for his firstborn son when he tried to prefer him to his brother by blessing him. The Lord, however, found that son unacceptable whom the father preferred, and the one the Lord preferred the father albeit unwillingly blessed; this happened in order that he who had already sold his birthright to his brother for a meal might not receive the blessing that belongs to the firstborn son, which he had forfeited out of the belly's longing for food. He who keeps following the earth, pursuing the wind, and desiring to inherit a blessing is unacceptable. He found no path of repentance, even though he sought it with tears,\* because, you see, lamentation bears no fruit; it eagerly desires perishable things with groans. Accordingly, Isaac could not open for his son, whom almighty God, judging justly, locked up in the prison of his own evil intent. The next verse:

X. 14. *If he holds back the waters, all the land will dry up; if he releases them, the land will be overturned.\** If water is taken to mean the knowledge of preaching, it is as it is written: *Words out of a man's mouth are deep water, and the fountain of wisdom is like an overflowing waterfall.\** When the water is withheld, everything dries up, because when the knowledge of preaching is taken away, the hearts of those who could have flourished in eternal hope straightway wither, so that they might remain barren and without hope, since they love what keeps moving away and know not how to hope for that which will last. If, on the other hand, the word *water* is taken to mean the grace of the Holy Spirit, then, as Truth tells us in the gospel, *As for him who believes in me, as Scripture says, "Rivers of living water will flow out of his belly."\**

The evangelist forthwith adds, *He said this about the Spirit which those who believed in him were to*

\*see  
Heb 12:17

\*Job 12:15

\*Prov 18:4

\*John 7:38

\*John 7:39 *receive.*\* The plain perception in these words spoken by Job, to wit, *If he holds back the waters, all the land will dry up*, is appropriate, because if the grace of the Holy Spirit is taken away from the hearer's mind, the intellect immediately dries up, which seemed already to grow vigorous through hope in the hearer. The fact that he specified waters, not water, indicates by the use of the plural the sevenfold grace of the gifts of the Holy Spirit; it is as if, you see, each one were doused with as many waters as he was filled with the different gifts. In this regard, he properly adds: *If he releases them the land will be overturned.*

15. What else but the sinner is meant by earth? To him the sentence is pronounced, *You are dust, and to dust you shall return.*\* Accordingly, the sinner remains unchangeably earth when he disdains obedience to the Lord's commands. He stiffens his neck by pride, and he closes the eyes of his mind to the light of truth. We find it written, *His feet stood still, and the earth moved.*\* That is, when truth is embedded in the heart, the mind's constancy is shaken, and if the grace of the Holy Spirit is by God's favor poured out with the preacher's voice, the earth is immediately overturned; that is, the obdurate sinful mind is shaken out of its determined obstinacy, that henceforth it might submit itself tearfully to the Lord's commands in the same degree as it formerly stiffened the neck of its heart by pride against the Lord.

\*Hab 3:5-6  
LXX

As you may see, then, when the waters bestowed by God flood the earth of the human heart, it accepts injuries freely. We on the other hand are used to inflicting violent injuries on others; we who bestow possessions on others are the same ones who formerly took away the possessions of others by force. We now discipline the flesh by abstinence, but we formerly stooped to overindulgence of the flesh by the fatal pleasures of

disgraceful living; if we now love our persecutors, we previously refused to love even those who loved us. When, therefore, the human mind is inundated by the gift of God, we begin to act against our former habits; so the earth is overturned, because we who were formerly preeminent are forced down to the ground, and the face that was formerly pressed down to the lower regions is now raised up on high.

16. We may, as an example of this truth, call one witness out of many: Paul. He took letters he had received against Christ to Damascus, but on the road there he was filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and he was forthwith converted from his cruel purpose.\* He later received the lashes for Christ's sake that he had himself gone to inflict on the Christians.\* Whereas he had formerly lived according to the flesh and tried to put God's saints to death, he was glad later on to give up the life of his own flesh for the lives of the saints. Those cold thoughts of his cruelty were turned into warm and affectionate thoughts, and he who was previously a blasphemer and persecutor became in time a humble and dedicated preacher.\* He who formerly saw his highest gain in the killing of Christ in his disciples now esteemed Christ as his very life and death as a gain.\* The earth therefore was overturned when the water was poured out, because as soon as Paul's mind received the grace of the Holy Spirit, it changed the condition of his inflexible cruelty.

Concerning that condition, the Lord intones this lament against Ephraim through the prophet: *Ephraim has become a loaf under the ashes, which is not turned.*\* A loaf under the ashes naturally has ashes on top of it, while its cleaner half is against the ground; the upper half is as much dirtier as it holds ashes on top of it. Accordingly, what else does the mind that thinks worldly

\*see  
Acts 9:1-3

\*see 2 Cor  
11:23-25

\*see  
1 Tim 1:13

\*see Phil 1:21

\*Hos 7:8

thoughts cover itself with but a pile of ashes? But if we wanted to turn around, we could present the clean face we had pressed to the ground and shake off the ashes from our head.

If, then, we rid our mind of the ashes of earthly thoughts, we as it were turn the loaf that is under the ashes, so that our very intention should now be put aside, which the ashes of base thought formerly pressed upon us. Our clean face can then be turned up so that our good intention may no longer be pressed to the earth by the pile of worldly desires. We can in no way bring this about, unless we are inundated by the grace of the Holy Spirit, because if almighty God sends out the waters, they certainly overturn the earth. The next verse:

\*Job 12:16

\*Job 12:13

XI. 17. *With him are fortitude and wisdom.*\* He had said a little earlier, *With him are wisdom and fortitude.*\* Yet now he says, *With him are fortitude and wisdom.* Remember, almighty God became man by the mystery of his fatherly love, so he first revealed the doctrine of meekness, and he later showed the greatness of his fortitude in judgment. So Job is right to mention wisdom before fortitude, since it is said of the only-begotten Son of the Father, *With him is wisdom and fortitude.* On the other hand, he is coming as Judge, and he will appear in his dreadful power; when the unrepentant sinners have been banished, he will show his chosen ones in the eternal Kingdom that he is the Wisdom of the Father. So it is rightly said in the later sentence that fortitude is with him first and then wisdom. Consequently, in the words that he spoke formerly, *With him are wisdom and fortitude,* he clearly indicates that having taught us in his meek character how to believe, he shows subsequently the dreadful power of Judgment. The later words, *With him are fortitude and wisdom,* demonstrate more lucidly that he first overthrows the prostrate sinners in

Judgment by his power and then shines out in the minds of his chosen ones with the perfect light of the eternal Kingdom. Before that day of Final Judgment, however, he does not stop judging the acts of mortals every day with secret arrangements. So he now turns to events of the present time and continues,

XII. 18. *He knows both the deceiver and him who is deceived; the counselor he brings to a fool's end, and the judges to folly.*\* If everyone who tries to deceive his neighbor is an evil person, and the Truth tells evil people, *I never knew you. Out of my sight, you evildoers,*\* how is it that we are told in this passage that the Lord knows the deceiver? God's knowing, however, is sometimes called *intelligence* and sometimes called *approbation*. He knows the wicked in the sense that he judges them by insight—for he would not have judged any wicked people, if he had not seen through them—yet on the other hand he does not know the wicked, because he does not approve of their doings. Accordingly, he both knows the wicked, because he is wise to them, and does not know, because he does not find them in their own brand of wisdom.

\*Job 12:16-17

\*Matt 7:23

In the same way we say that honest people know no falsehood, not because they do not know how to censure lies they hear told by others, but because they both know that very deception by scrutiny and do not know it by affection. In other words, they do not do that themselves that they reprove when others do it. It often happens that people hide in ambush and set traps in their depravity against the lives of strangers, and when somebody unwittingly falls into these traps, others wonder if God sees these things happen and why he allows them to happen, but *He knows both the deceiver and him who is deceived*.

He knows the deceiver, because he often sees the evil he has already done, and he allows him to fall into

other sins by his just judgment. He knows the deceiver, because he lets him fall into the hands of his own acts and abandons him, that he may rush on to worse crimes, as it is written, *Let the evildoer still do evil and the filthy still be filthy.*\* He also knows the one who is deceived, because people often do evil things that they know about, so God allows them to be deceived, precisely in order that they may also fall into evils that they do not know. This consequence tends to become for some deceived ones the beginning of purification and for others of punishment.

\*Rev 22:11

\*Job 12:17

19. *The counselor he brings to a fool's end.*\* When they even do anything good without a good intention but act for the sake of reward by way of worldly benefit, that half verse is shown true. If the only-begotten Son of the Father on high, through his becoming man himself, announced eternal life, he is called the Angel of great counsel; we correctly take the counselors to mean the preachers, then, because they offer their listeners the counsel of life. On the other hand, if any preacher preaches eternal life in order that he may reap temporal benefits, he is certainly brought to a fool's end, because his labor tends to that end that his integrity of mind ought to avoid.

\*Job 12:17

20. So he rightly adds, *And the judges to folly.*\* All those who preside over the examination of other people's behavior are rightly called judges. But if those who preside do not inquire about the life of their subjects with care and do not know whom they should correct or how, the judges are led to folly, because they who should judge evil acts have not learned what should be judged. The next verse:

\*Job 12:18

XIII. 21. *He loosens the belts of kings and girds their loins with rope.*\* Those who know how to control the motion of their own limbs are rightly called kings. When, however, the mind is touched by pride at this

self-control, almighty God often deserts such proud ones and allows them to fall into impure acts. Accordingly he loosens the belts of kings when he undoes the restraint of chastity because of the sin of pride in those who seemed to have control over their own members. What do we take rope to mean if not sin? Solomon says, *His evil deeds take hold of the wicked man, and he is tied up with the rope of his sins.*\* The pleasure of the flesh rules in the loins, you see, so the strict judge of consciences, who loosens the belts of kings, ties up their loins with rope insofar as the girdle of chastity has been untied, in other words insofar as the pleasure of sin is dominant in their members, in order that those whom pride secretly defiles he might also publicly expose in all their offensiveness. The next verse:

\*Prov 5:22

XIV. 22. *He brings forth undistinguished priests and deposes aristocratic ones.*\* The uprightness of subjects is a high source of pride for priests. That is why an illustrious preacher rightly asks his disciples, *What is our hope, our joy, and our crown of glory in the Lord's sight if not you?*\* When priests neglect the lives of disciples, however, and bring forth no fruit in God's sight from their advancement, what else do we call them but undistinguished? They earn absolutely no distinction hereafter before the inflexible Judge, because they never took pride in the present behavior of their disciples by insistent preaching. On the other hand, he is right to say, *and deposes aristocratic ones.* If, you see, in his just judgment he abandons the minds of rulers, those minds will not seek the reward of internal recompense, and they will be deposed, because deceived, and instead of eternal glory they will exult over temporary rule. So the aristocrats are deposed, because when they neglect the true reward of the heavenly kingdom, they fall into their own pleasures here below.

\*Job 12:19

\*1 Thess 2:19

XV. 23. *He stops the lips of truthful men and takes away the old man's knowledge.*\* When the priest does not do the good that he talks about, the gift of speech is also taken from him, in order that he may not presume to speak that which he does not practice. That is what the prophet says: *God tells the sinner, "Why do you proclaim my justice and adopt my covenant with your mouth?"*\*\* So the psalmist himself prays as follows: *Never take away the word of truth from my mouth.*\* Accordingly he is considering the fact that almighty God confers the word of Truth upon those who do the truth and that he takes it away from those who do not do it. Those therefore who have petitioned God not to take away this word from their mouths, what are they after but the grace of good works? It is as though they said openly, "Do not let me go astray from good works, lest while I lose the way of living well, I lose as well the gift of speaking the righteous word."

It often happens, you see, that teachers who brazenly teach what they neglect to do end up desisting from speaking about the good they disdain to do, and they start teaching their pupils the evil that they really do. So by the just judgment of almighty God, those who refuse to live a good life no longer involve their tongue in goodness. Inasmuch as their minds have been gripped by the love of earthly things, they always speak about those same worldly pursuits. That is why Truth says in the gospel, *Out of the abundant heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings forth good things out of his good treasure, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil.*\* John says for his part, *They belong to the world, so their speech belongs to the world.*\*

\*Matt  
12:34-35

\*1 John 4:5

So Job was right to say, *He stops the lips of truthful men and takes away the old man's knowledge.* At first, you see, they truthfully preached about heaven, but then worldly objects attracted them, and they sank

to lower pursuits; in this way the lips of truthful men were stopped and the old men's knowledge taken away, because when they were attracted by worldly objects, they no longer followed the precepts of their forebears, so that they might hold the chair of authority merely for the enjoyment of pleasure, as it were, not for the purpose of industriousness.

24. It makes more sense to understand these lips in relation to the Jews, who spoke the truth before the Lord's incarnation, since they believed and proclaimed that he was coming. Yet after he appeared in human flesh, they denied that he was the one. Accordingly, the lips of truthful men were stopped, because the one who they had said was coming they denied when he was here. The knowledge of the old men was taken away, because they by no means followed what they remembered that their fathers foretold by believing it. Thus they promised that Elijah at his coming would turn back the hearts of sons to their fathers, so that the knowledge of old men, which is now taken away from the hearts of the Jews, might by the Lord's mercy return at the time when the sons should begin to understand what the fathers proclaimed in relation to the Lord.

If, on the other hand, we take the old men to mean those same Jews who, persuaded by unbelief, tried to contradict the word of Truth, the knowledge of the old men was taken away later, when the Gentile church, which was then very young, took it. The psalmist spoke of this: *I understand better than the elders.*\* Because the church held that knowledge by practicing it, the psalmist demonstrates that she understood more than the elders when he forthwith adds, *Because I sought out your commands.* Because she zealously put into practice what she learned, she received the understanding of what she should teach. So he again rightly adds,

\*Ps 118:100

XVI. 25. *He pours contempt upon princes and lifts up the oppressed.\** As long as the Jewish people remained obedient to the law and none of the Gentiles knew God's commandments, the former seemed to be the masters of faith, and the latter lay oppressed in the depths through unbelief. When, however, the Jews denied the mystery of the Lord's incarnation, the Gentiles believed it, and the princes\* fell into contempt. Then those who had been oppressed with the guilt of unbelief were raised up in the liberty of true faith. Jeremiah saw this fall of the Israelites long before and said, *The Lord became like an enemy; Israel fell headlong; all his palaces collapsed; his ramparts were thrown down.\**

\*Job 12:21

\*the Jews

\*Lam 2:5

Palaces in cities are for ornaments, ramparts for defense. The gifts that defend us are one thing, and those that adorn us are something else. Of course prophecy, teaching, different kinds of tongues, and the power to heal are all, as it were, like palaces to the mind. Even if not everyone has these palaces, nevertheless all are able to stand defended by faith and justice, even if they do not seem at all ornamented with high virtues. As for us, faith, hope, and charity\* are not our palaces but our ramparts, and if we neglect them, we lie open to the ambush of the enemy. As for Judea, because God hid prophecy and teaching, as well as signs and miracles, Judea's palaces collapsed. On the other hand, since God allowed faith, hope, and charity to be taken away because of Judea's hardness of heart, he was intent on doing away with her ramparts. Jeremiah followed the correct order, then, in speaking first of her palaces and later of her ruined ramparts.

\*1 Cor 3:13

When, you see, the sinful soul is abandoned, first the gifts of the virtues, bestowed for the sake of manifestation of the spirit, are pulled down, and later the foundation of faith, hope, and charity is destroyed. The Lord bestowed on the Gentiles all these gifts taken away

from the faithless people, and to adorn the minds of the faithful, he used what he hid from the unfaithful. That is why it is written, *The beautiful homes divide the spoil.*\* He hid the spoil of the virtues from the Jews, you see, but the homes of the Gentiles' hearts are those that he deigned to dwell in, and he gave them the beauty of the gifts. This happened when the Jewish people received the word of God only according to the letter that kills, and the converted Gentiles penetrated it through the spirit that gives life.\* So Job soon adds,

\*Ps 67:13  
LXX

XVII. 26. *He unveils the deep darkness, and he brings out into the light the shadow of death.*\* Whenever, you see, the believers understand mysterious elements in the dark sayings of the prophets, what else does that indicate than an unveiling of deep darkness? That is why Truth himself spoke to his disciples in parables and said, *What I tell you in darkness speak out in daylight.*\* When we clear up mysterious enigmas concerning allegories by explaining them, we say in daylight what we hear in darkness. As for the shadow of death, that was the harshness of the law, which restored the balance by punishing all sinners with bodily death.

\*2 Cor 3:6

\*Job 12:22

\*Matt 10:27

Our Redeemer, however, softened the harshness of the legal penalty through his gentle disposition, and after that he determined that bodily death should no longer be required as a penalty for sin; rather he made known how dreadful a thing spiritual death is, and in so doing, without any doubt, he brought out into the light the shadow of death. Indeed this death in which the body is separated from the soul is a shadow of that death in which the soul is separated from God. Into the light accordingly the shadow of death is brought forth when spiritual death is understood, and bodily death is consequently no longer feared.

The matter, however, can be understood in yet another way. They in truth are not wrongly called princes

who are always the masters of their own thoughts with great discernment and consideration, and who suppress all foolish emotions by the power of wisdom. Yet it often happens that the soul is secretly lifted up in the exaltation of pride on account of its very own wisdom and falls under the spell of those vices that it boasted of having overcome. So he is right to say, *He pours contempt upon princes*. Then again, those who seem to wallow in vices sometimes have recourse to the tears of repentance and rise up against the sins in which they previously lay. So he again rightly adds, *and lifts up the oppressed*. Some of them, you see, are enlightened by God's bounty, and they see the base shame of the sins in which they lie; they wash the stains of their deeds with tears and suppress their bodily emotions beneath them, those emotions under which they were previously themselves oppressed.

27. This turn of events is naturally brought about by a superb arrangement of almighty God, in order that all the events of this life might be regarded as uncertain, and so that none might wax proud on account of his chaste way of life, because *he pours contempt upon princes*. Nor should any despair because of the oppression of their own vices, since *he lifts up the oppressed*. When these things happen on account of God's secret counsels, the obvious sentence is passed upon each person, so he is again right to add, *He unveils the deep darkness*.

28. The Lord does unveil the deep darkness when he indicates the obvious sentence passed by his own secret counsels, in order that he might show forth what he thinks of each person. Because, you see, the Creator now sees everything while remaining unseen himself in his counsels, the psalmist rightly says of him, *He has made darkness his covering*.<sup>\*</sup> But it is as if light shone forth from this darkness when he shows what he thinks about any of these acts that he sees. Since anyone who is

\*Ps 17:12

oppressed by the burden of his own sins and is brought forth to the status of righteousness sees death itself for the first time, in which he had been accustomed to sink but which he had been unable to look at, he rightly adds, *He brings out into the light the shadow of death.*

The shadow of death is the doing of evil by imitating the ancient enemy, as if it were outlined with the very form of the body. Of such action it is said, in order to signify a certain person, *His name is death.*\* The evil thought of such action often escapes the notice of people's minds, and because of the fact that it is unknown, it prevails further. Accordingly, the shadow of death is brought out into the light when the doing of evil by the ancient enemy is exposed to the minds of the saints, so that it might be stopped. The next verse:

\*Rev 6:8

XVIII. 29. *He multiplies the nations and destroys them, and once they are overthrown, he again completely restores them.*\* Perhaps this verse could be understood in the sense that the Lord multiplies the nations and destroys them in this way: people are daily born only to die; once they are overthrown, the Lord again completely restores them, in the sense that they who were dead will rise again. But we take a better sense from the words if we think of the nations as regards what happens in their souls. He multiplies the nations and destroys them, then, when he increases their progeny with fertility yet abandons them in their faithlessness. Once they are overthrown, he again completely restores them, because those he had abandoned in the misfortune of unfaithfulness he sometimes leads back to the state of faith. When, however, these are reinstated in spiritual wholeness, that ancient people who seemed to be faithful to God became reprobate in heart and were cast off. They were deceived by their own faithlessness and rose up against him whom they previously foretold. The next verse:

\*Job 12:23

XIX. 30. *He transforms the hearts of the princes of the people of the land and deceives them, letting them travel aimlessly through a pathless wasteland. They will grope about as in the darkness, not in the light, and he*

\*Job 12:24-25

*will make them stagger like drunken men.\** The hearts of the princes of the land were transformed when the chief priests and leaders of the people in Judea by their own counsel set themselves to block the path of him whose coming they had formerly announced. When they tried to blot out his name by persecution, they were deceived by their own malice, and they endeavored to make their way aimlessly through pathless deserts, because no way could be open to them in their hard-heartedness against the Creator of the universe. They saw miracles, they feared his power, but they refused belief. Still they demanded signs, saying, *What sign do you work, that we may see and believe you? What do you do?\** So Job is right to say, *They will grope about as in the darkness, not in the light.*

\*John 6:30

Anybody, you see, who hesitates among so many clear miracles is like someone who gropes about in darkness, because he does not see what he feels. But anyone who wanders is led now here and now there. Yet it was shown that they were once believers who said, *If he were not from God, he could do nothing.\**

\*John 9:33

Now, however, they denied that he was from God and contemptuously said, *Isn't he the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother named Mary? Aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Jude? Aren't all his sisters here with us?\** So Job rightly adds, *He will make them stagger like*

\*Matt  
13:55-56

*drunken men.* Surely they saw him raise the dead, and they knew he was mortal. Who then would not believe him to be God, when they saw him raise the dead? Still, because they saw that he was a mortal man, they felt it to be beneath them to believe him to be the immortal God.

Accordingly, for the very reason that almighty God displayed himself before them in such a guise, he who could both display divine acts and suffer human nature, he made them stagger like drunken men in such a manner that their pride, which preferred contempt of the mystery of his incarnation to discipleship thereof, might both vaunt itself against his humanity and internally wonder at the luminous power of his divinity. All of this was made present to the eyes of blessed Job through the spirit of prophecy, so he rightly adds,

XX. 31. *This is all.*\* In God, you see, he beheld all that was to follow as present, him to whom neither the future comes nor the past leaves, but before his eyes everything is present at once. Furthermore he saw these very future events enacted in one way and spoken in another. So he adds, *My eye sees them, and my ear hears them.*\* Words are useless, however, if they lack meaning. So he again adds, *I understood them all.*\* Whenever something is seen or heard, if no understanding is had, it is certainly no prophecy. For example, Pharaoh saw in a dream what was going to happen to Egypt,\* but he could not understand what he saw. So he was obviously no prophet. King Belshazzar saw the fingers of a hand, writing on the wall, but he was no prophet either, since he had no understanding of what he had seen.\* So in order that blessed Job may declare himself as someone having the spirit of prophecy, he asserts that he has not only seen and heard but also understood everything. Moreover, his next words bear him witness that he is not arrogant concerning what he has understood:

XXI. 32. *If you have knowledge, so do I. I am in no way inferior to you.*\* Note well that by these words Job revealed the depth of his humility in that he denied that he was the inferior of those whose lives his own holy way of living far surpassed. As far as their knowledge

\*Job 13:1

\*Job 13:1

\*Job 13:1

\*see Gen  
41:1-8

\*see Dan 5:5

\*Job 13:2

was concerned, he affirmed his own their equal; by his knowledge of heaven he far surpassed their thoughts of earth, and he had the spirit of prophecy as well.

\*Job 13:3 XXII. 33. *Nevertheless I will speak to the almighty One; I want to argue with God.\** We speak to the almighty One when we implore his mercy, but we argue with him when we appeal to his justice and discuss our actions with careful inquiry. Well, at least Job argues with God, he who obeyed his commands here below and as a judge comes with him later to judge the peoples, just as the Lord told those preachers who left all things, *You who have followed me, in the new world, when the Son of Man sits on his majestic throne, will also sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel.\**

\*Matt 19:28 The Lord also spoke through Isaiah: *Help the man who is oppressed. Give judgment for the orphan. Defend the widow. Then come and argue with me.\**

\*Isa 1:17-18

It is surely right that they should argue with God about their wards in judgment, those who abandon the present world completely for the word of God. Accordingly, speaking belongs to prayer, arguing to judgment. Job then speaks to almighty God now, so that he may later argue with almighty God, because he later comes with God as judge, he who associated with God here and now in familiar prayer. Holy Church, however, whose role blessed Job plays, as we have already frequently said, not only judges evildoers later, when the day of Final Judgment arrives, but also even now unceasingly judges all those who act wickedly and who think foolish thoughts. The next verse:

\*Job 13:4 XXIII. 34. *I will first show you up as liars and followers of crooked teaching.\** By these words we are obviously shown directly that Job's friends oppose the holy man's judgment, in similarity to the heretics. Obviously, you see, they cannot be representing catholics

when they are called followers of crooked teaching. In such a statement of the case the fact that they are called those who make up lies must also be included. Just as a building is made up of stones, you see, so lies are made up of words. Where there is guileless speech and a sense of truth, it is as if a fortified construction rose, not out of anything that is made up, but out of nature. The next verse:

XXIV. 35. *If only you would be silent, that you might be considered wise.\** Just as behind a closed door we do not know what is hidden inside a house, so also when a fool remains silent, it is often unknown whether he is wise or foolish, provided, of course, that nothing else that he does exposes the quality of his mind, even if he is silent. So the holy man, seeing his friends wishing to look like something they were not, warned them to be silent lest they should look like that which they really were. That is why Solomon says, *If the fool should be silent, he would be considered wise.\** Of course when the fool does speak, because he blurts out his own words, he is unable to weigh wise words; after Job has imposed silence, he rightly adds,

\*Job 13:5

\*Prov 17:28

XXV. 36. *Hear now my reproof, and pay attention to the judgment of my lips.\** He is right to tender his reproof first and mention judgment afterward, for unless the fool's swelling pride is first lanced by a reproof, the fool will never understand the just man's judgment. The next verse:

\*Job 13:6

XXVI. 37. *Does God stand in need of your lie, that you should utter deception for his sake?\** God does not need a lie, because truth requires no support from the medium of falsehood. The heretics, however, because they understand God in a twisted way, find no security in truth. It would be as if they needed a false shadow to confirm a ray of light. So they speak deceptively on his

\*Job 13:7

behalf and beguile weak minds on how to think about God by foolish seduction. The next verse:

\*Job 13:8 XXVII. 38. *Are you taking his place, and are you trying to judge for God's sake?\** When fools see what prudent people do, all such deeds seem to them blame-worthy. They forget their own inexperience and weakness, and the more rigorously they judge them, the more completely they forget their own weakness. Righteous people, on the other hand, when they find fault with the actions of the wayward, are always aware of their own shortcomings, so even if they scold them verbally, yet they do so with a compassionate attitude, because it is for the one alone who because of his almighty nature cannot sin to deal without compassion with the sins of men and women. Accordingly, since blessed Job's friends had reproved his actions in such a way that it was as if they had done nothing reprehensible themselves, Job rightly says now, *Are you taking his place, and are you trying to judge for God's sake?* To take his place is surely to assume his authority in judgment, and those who blame all the weaknesses of the other person while having no weakness of compassion inside themselves attempt to judge for God's sake, as it were. The next verse:

\*Job 13:9 XXVIII. 39. *Will it please him from whom nothing can be hidden, or will he be fooled like a man by your deceit?\** The heretics display their deceit before God, because they keep saying things that never please him for whose sake they speak; rather, they offend him even as they pretend to defend him, and they fall to the ground while opposing him whom they seemed to serve by their preaching. That is why the psalmist says, *That you might destroy the enemy and the defender.\** All the heretics are certainly almighty God's enemies and defenders, because whenever they pretend to

\*Ps 8:3

defend him, they then oppose his truth. Since however nothing can escape God, he judges their interior attitude, not their apparent external service. Accordingly, since God is not fooled like a person by their deceit, Job is right to add,

XXIX. 40. *He will accuse you, because you surreptitiously assume his place. As soon as he stirs forth, he will frighten you, and his dread will fall upon you.\**

\*Job 13:10-11

This matter, namely, that he says God's place is surreptitiously assumed, can be understood in two ways. There are some people, you see, who really understand truth in their hearts and who nevertheless speak falsely about God externally. They do not want their double-dealing to be exposed, in that they both know the truth internally and oppose it externally. So it is well said at this point, *He will accuse you, because you surreptitiously assume his place*. It is as though he said plainly, "You are as guilty in his sight of falsehood as you see within yourselves what is true."

There are indeed some people who, when they return to their own mind's eye, contemplate God's justice and righteousness and are shaken with prayers and tears; yet when the time for contemplation is over, they boldly return to their evildoing ways so that they might seem to be unseen by the light of justice, as though their evildoing took place behind God's back. These people, accordingly, themselves surreptitiously assume the place of God while he, as it were, sees them, because while they are in his presence, they flatter him with tears, and when they seem to leave his presence, their behavior becomes base. The more worthy they are of blows because of their evil acts, the more they think of God's just judgment in the secret place of their thought. So he adds,

41. *As soon as he stirs forth, he will frighten you, and his dread will fall upon you.* The nature of almighty

God is unshakable, so he cannot be moved to anger in judgment. Nevertheless, the very severity of his jurisdiction is referred to in human words as God's being moved, since by it human depravity is struck with blows. Righteous people fear God before his wrath can be moved against them, and they fear a serene God, lest they should encounter him moved. Base people, on the other hand, only fear blows when they are already receiving them; dread of him awakens them from the slumber of sluggishness only then when vengeance throws them into confusion. That is why the prophet says, *Nothing but harsh treatment will make them hear and understand.*\* When, you see, they start to feel the flogging for their contempt and scorn of God's commandments through his vengeance, then they will understand what they have heard. The psalmist says for his part, *When he slew them, then they sought him.*\* So it is well said here, *As soon as he stirs forth, he will frighten you, and his dread will fall upon you.* In the hearts of reprobate sinners, fear does not give birth to rest, but the penalty brings forth fear.

\*Isa 28:19

\*Ps 77:34

\*Job 13:12

XXX. 42. *Your memory is compared to ashes.*\* All those who are conformed to this world by thinking thoughts of earth try to leave their memory in this world through all their actions. Some by war inscriptions, others by the high walls of their houses, others by eloquent teachings in books urgently strive to build themselves monuments for their names to be remembered. But when their life is itself hastening toward a speedy end, what is there that will remain fixed in it, when it is swiftly moving and has indeed passed? The wind in fact picks up the ashes, just as it is written: *Not so are the wicked, not so; they are like dust driven by the wind from the face of the earth.*\* Rightly therefore is the memory of fools compared to ashes, because it is

\*Ps 1:4

placed there where the wind takes it. However much, then, each person strives for the fabricated glory of his name, he makes his memorial like ashes, because the wind of mortality picks it up without delay. Of the just man contrariwise it is written, *The just man's memory is eternal.*\* By the very fact, you see, that he prints his acts in God's sight alone, he fixes the memorial of his name in eternity.

\*Ps 111:7

XXXI. 43. *Your necks are brought down to the ground.*\* Just as the eye often means the sense of sight, so the neck customarily signifies pride. The neck accordingly is brought down to the ground when each proud person is humbled by death, and proud flesh decays and rots. Let us consider the different carcasses of the rich that lie buried in tombs and what form of death might lie in dead flesh, as well as the decay of corruption. They were certainly the ones who were distinguished by special honors, grew proud concerning their possessions, despised others, and boasted as if they were the only ones that mattered. But they did not weigh carefully what they were headed for, nor did they know what in fact they were. Their neck has been brought down to the ground, because they lie scorned in rotten decay, those who grew proud in vanity. Their neck is brought down to the ground, because the decay of corruption proves how much the power of the flesh is worth.

\*Job 13:12

XXXII. 44. *Be silent a little while, that I may speak whatever my mind suggests to me.*\* He indicates to those who have spoken in the carnal sense, on whom on that account he imposes silence, that he may speak those words that the mind suggests to him. It is as if he said frankly, "I do not speak according to the flesh, but according to the spirit, because I hear through the spiritual sense what I declare through the exercise of my bodily

\*Job 13:13

faculties.” So he immediately ascends to the heights and lifts himself up mystically. Then he transforms the verbal attack he had launched into words of mystery and says,

XXXIII. 45. *Why do I tear my own flesh with my teeth and carry my soul in my hands?*\* In Holy Scripture teeth are sometimes taken to mean holy preachers, and at other times internal senses. For example, the bride is told concerning the holy preachers, *Your teeth are like flocks of shorn sheep coming up out of the water.*\* Hence one of them was told, after the Gentiles had been figuratively portrayed, *Slaughter and eat.*\* In other words, obliterate their past and change them into the church, into your own members.

On the other hand, the prophet Jeremiah bears witness that *teeth* may be taken as internal senses; he says, *He has broken my teeth one by one.*\* The teeth break up food so that it may be swallowed. So we are not wrong in taking teeth to mean internal senses, since they take each single thought and, as it were, chew it and break it into small pieces, after which they transmit it to the stomach of the memory. The prophet says they are broken one by one, because according to the size of any sin a blindness of the intelligence is generated in the senses, and, according to what people have done externally, their ability to understand internally and invisibly is blunted.

So the prophet rightly says elsewhere, *Any man who eats sour grapes will have his teeth blunted.*\* What else is a sour grape but sin? A sour grape is certainly one that is unripe. Whoever desires the satisfaction of the pleasures of the present life, as it were, hastily eats unripe fruit. Accordingly, those who eat a sour grape have their teeth blunted, because those who are fed by the pleasures of the present life have their internal senses bound

so that they cannot chew, that is, understand spiritual realities anymore, because insofar as they take pleasure in external things, they are blunted as far as internal reality is concerned. As long as the soul feeds on sin, it cannot eat the bread of justice, because its teeth are bound because of a habit of sin, so they cannot eat the justice that is relished internally.

So since we have said that the *teeth* in this passage mean the internal senses, it is very much incumbent upon us to consider what the just people are wont to do. If they find any carnal thoughts in themselves, however small, they often disown them in their internal senses, and they attack them violently in themselves; they turn against and afflict themselves, and they accuse themselves of even the slightest misdeed, torturing themselves grievously, and they punish themselves by repentance. They act in this way in order that they may themselves be found irreprehensible in the sight of the eternal Judge as far as possible, and so that those who see them judge themselves in this way may be incited to amend their own more serious faults.

That is indeed what blessed Job had done in front of his friends, who were clutching at worldly fame and boasting of transient wealth. Nevertheless, he was unable to induce them to apply their minds to understand the usefulness of his own trials, so that they could really distinguish the fact that almighty God not only grants prosperity but sometimes graciously inflicts adversity as well. That is why he says in this passage, *Why do I tear my own flesh with my teeth?* He could have said openly, “Why do I shatter with my internal senses whatever carnal thoughts may be in me, if I cannot influence those who watch me?” So he is right to add, *I carry my soul in my hands.*

46. To carry one's soul in one's hands means to display the intention of the heart in one's actions. It is a characteristic of righteous people, you see, that in all their words and all their actions they have in view not only their own intent but also their neighbor's edification. Sometimes, in fact, they are their own judges, so that they might, on occasion, lead back halfhearted listeners to consider their own case. Sometimes they display good works, so that those who witness them might be embarrassed for not imitating the goodness they see. It is written, *Let them see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*\* Accordingly, those who realize their intentions in action carry their souls in their hands.

\*Matt 5:16

On the other hand, when righteous people fail to render aid to their neighbors, either by judging themselves or by displaying good works in whatever they do, they fall back on words of pain. So Job now says rightly, *Why do I tear my own flesh with my teeth and carry my soul in my hands?* In other words, "Why do I either judge myself harshly in front of others or display my intention in my actions, if I do not forward the advantage of my neighbors by punishing evil or by displaying what is good?" Even so, righteous people never cease, even while speaking in this way, to offer a good example to their neighbors. Accordingly blessed Job is still offering and displaying to his friends the virtue of patience, as he says,

XXXIV. 47. *Even if he should kill me, I will still hope in him.*\* You will never find the virtue of hope in prosperity. He is really a patient man who although worn out by adversity is not turned away from the object of his hope. As for the attitude of the reprobate sinner, we find it written, *He will praise you as long as it profits him.*\* This is how the righteous mind differs from the

\*Job 13:15

\*Ps 48:19

unrighteous, namely, that it proclaims the praise of almighty God even in the midst of adversity, that it is not discouraged by the loss of possessions or crestfallen by the loss of external fame. Rather such men and women show what kind of people they were when they owned property precisely in this circumstance: that even without possessions they are still steadfast. The next verse:

XXXV. 48. *Nevertheless I will declare my ways before him, and he will be my Helper.\** The apostle Paul says, *If we judged ourselves, we would surely not be judged.\** Accordingly the Lord is then found to be our helper when we now in the fear of God confess our sin. That is why the elect can never go easy on their own faults, so that they might find the Judge lenient toward them. They certainly hope to find him their helper afterward, him whom they now fear as a strict Judge. Those who take their sin lightly now, you see, will not be spared the penalty afterward. Let Job say then, *Nevertheless I will declare my ways before him.* Let him then add the purpose of this declaration: *He will be my Helper.* The next verse:

XXXVI. 49. *No hypocrite will appear in his presence.\** Since it is decreed that when the Judge comes he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats on his left, why is it said here that no hypocrite will appear in his sight? \* If there is a hypocrite among the goats, will he not appear at the Judge's left hand? We must realize, however, that there are two ways in which we come into the Lord's presence. By one of them we carefully scrutinize our sins here below, place ourselves in God's presence, and tearfully judge ourselves. Every time, you see, that we bring our Creator's power to mind, we stand in his presence. So Elijah, the man of God, correctly said, *As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, in whose presence I stand.\**

\*Job 13:15-16

\*1 Cor 13:31

\*Job 13:16

\*see  
Matt 25:33

\*1 Kgs 17:1

The other way we enter God's presence is at the Last Judgment, when we stand before his tribunal. Hypocrites accordingly will enter the Judge's presence at the Last Judgment. For the time being, however, they neglect the consideration and lamentation of their sins and refuse to enter the Lord's presence. While righteous people contemplate the intransigence of the Judge who is coming, they bring their sins to mind and weep over the things they have done; they judge themselves lest they be judged.

The hypocrites, on the other hand, insofar as they please people externally, neglect the internal examination of themselves and are wholly guided by the word of their neighbors; they esteem themselves saints, because that is what they think others hold them to be. When they scatter the seed of self-praise in their minds, they never bring themselves to knowledge of their guilt, and they never consider how they have offended the internal Judge. They never fear his intransigence, because they trust human praise and think they have pleased God. If they were to bring his dread before their minds, the very fact that their motive is impure while they please people would make them fear him more. So Job is right to say, *No hypocrite will appear in his presence*. They do not place God's intransigence before their eyes as long as they want to appear attractive in the eyes of humans. On the other hand, if they change their attitude and put themselves in God's presence, they will assuredly no longer be hypocrites. The next verse:

XXXVII. 50. *Listen to my words, and let your ears take in the riddle.\** Since he uses the word *riddle*, he lets us know that he is using figurative language. So he fittingly follows up on the role of the faithful people:

XXXVIII. 51. *If I should be judged, I know that I will be found innocent.\** These words are not inconsis-

tent with what we know about blessed Job, since he is himself speaking publicly about himself what Truth had said secretly to his enemy about him, namely, *Have you noticed my servant Job? There is none on earth like him.*\* Certainly what this man says of himself is less important than what God says about him. It is one thing, you see, for him to be just, and something else for there not to be anyone like him. Accordingly he thinks humbly about himself, he who, while being incomparably just, only says that he can be found just in some way, not that he is more just than others.

\*Job 1:8

Nevertheless there is a question it seems we might ask about his words. He said earlier, *I will declare my ways before him,*\* and later he will say, *You will have me swamped by the sins of my youth.*\* Furthermore, when he is considering his sins carefully, he adds still later, *You have sealed my sins as if in a bag.*\* But here he says, *If I should be judged, I know that I will be found innocent.* Sinfulness and innocence cannot be found together, but the holy man attributes a guilty state to himself and his purification to almighty God; he knows himself for a sinner, nor does he forget his justification by God's favor. But while he was performing good works, he deserved the abundant grace of undergoing trials. At this moment he is glad to be found innocent by the Judge, he who was buffeted by trials before Judgment. That is why, when he will say long afterward, *You have sealed my sins as if in a bag,* he will immediately add, *but you have healed my guilt.*\* So he who says he is found innocent in Judgment certainly does not deny that he is justly buffeted, even if the Lord's object in buffeting him was not to wipe away his sins but rather to increase his merit. The next verse:

\*Job 13:15

\*Job 13:26

\*Job 14:17

\*Job 14:17

XXXIX. 52. *Where is the one who will enter into judgment with me? Let him come forward.*\* The saints

\*Job 13:19

conduct themselves in their works in such a way with God as their guide that absolutely nothing can be found externally by which they may be accused. In their thoughts, they are so circumspect and apply such extreme caution that if possible they always stand without blame in the internal Judge's sight. But however much they may succeed in their external behavior in avoiding base actions, they are by no means able to do equally well internally so as never to fall short in their thoughts. Human consciousness, you see, to the extent that it fails internally, is always in motion. That is why even the saints often fail in their hearts. So let blessed Job, as much with his own voice as with that of all the chosen ones, speak out and say, *Where is the one who will enter into judgment with me? Let him come forward.* He has no external actions, you see, for which he can be blamed, so he boldly looks around for an accuser. But since even the hearts of righteous people sometimes reprove themselves for foolish thinking, for that very reason perhaps he adds,

\*Job 13:19

XL. 53. *Why am I consumed in my silence?*\* He is consumed in his silence, he who reproaches himself for foolish thinking and is stung internally by the pang of conscience. It is as if he said frankly, "Just as I have lived in such a way that I may fear no external accuser, would that I had lived in such a way that I might have within myself no conscience to accuse me." He who finds within himself something to make him burn is consumed in his silence. The next verse:

\*Job 13:20

54. *There are two things I do not want done to me; then I will not hide from your face.\** In this passage how should we take the word *face* of God, unless it be his censure, whereby he sees our sins and punishes them? No one hides from his face, not even a just person, if the two things he asks about are not withdrawn. Concerning these, Job goes on to say,

XLI. 55. *Let your hand be far from me, and may dread of you not frighten me.*\* What else but the time of grace and redemption is petitioned through the voice of prophecy by these two things? The law, you see, held the people bound under the threat of punishment, so that whoever should sin under the law would be punished by death. Nor did the people of Israel serve the Lord out of love, but out of fear. Justice, however, can never be fulfilled through fear, because, as John says, *Perfect love casts out fear.*\* Paul, on the other hand, encourages the adopted sons, saying, *You have not received a spirit of servitude, that you should still live in fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father."*\*

\*Job 13:21

\*1 John 4:18

\*Rom 8:15

Blessed Job accordingly speaks with the voice of the human race, desiring to get beyond the harsh penalties of the law and wishing to leave fear behind and reach love; so he prevails upon almighty God and tells him what two things he would have him remove far away from him. He says, *Let your hand be far from me, and may dread of you not frighten me.* That is, "Take away the harsh penalty, relieve the weight of fear, but infuse in me a spirit of safety by means of the radiant grace of love. For if I do not get away from the penalty and from fear, I know I will not escape your intransigent judgment, because no one can be found just in your sight who serves you not by love, but by fear." In this way he seeks the very presence of his Creator, as it were familiarly and bodily, in order that he may hear what he does not know, and by what he knows he may be heard in that presence. So he forthwith adds,

56. *Call me, and I will answer you. Or at least I would speak, and you answer me.*\* When God appeared to human eyes through the flesh he had assumed, he showed men and women the sins they had committed without knowing it. So he adds,

\*Job 13:22

\*Job 13:23 XLII. 57. *How many crimes and sins I have committed! Show me my wickedness and my misdeeds.*\* Nevertheless we can understand the verbs *call* and *answer* in another way. For God to call means that he cares for us by loving us and choosing us. As for us, to answer means to obey his love by good works. So he appropriately adds, *Or at least I would speak, and you answer me.* We speak by seeking his face through desire. God, on the other hand, answers those who speak when he appears to us who love him. But those who eagerly desire eternity carefully reprove themselves and scrutinize their own actions; they try to make sure that there is nothing in themselves that might offend their Creator's intimate presence. So he adds, *How many crimes and sins I have committed! Show me my wickedness and my misdeeds.*

\*1 John 3:4 What the righteous people have to do in this life is find themselves, and once they have found themselves, they must start living a better way of life by weeping over themselves and correcting themselves. Although there is no difference between crime and sin according to the apostle John, who said, *Wrongdoing is sin,*\* in everyday usage crime seems worse than sin; most people will freely admit they are sinners, but to call oneself a criminal is sometimes embarrassing. There is, however, a difference between crime and fault, in that a crime surpasses the penalty for sin, whereas a fault does not surpass that penalty. We are ordered, you see, by the law to offer a sacrifice, and this injunction certainly includes sin as well as fault.

\*Ps 18:13 Furthermore crime is sometimes an act, whereas fault is often only a thought. That is why the psalmist says, *Who knows his faults?\** Sins of act, of course, we know all the more easily to the extent that they are external to us. As for sins of thought, however, they are

hard to know, because they are committed in the invisible realm. Accordingly, whoever is driven by desire for eternity eagerly wants to appear pure in the sight of the coming Judge; such people examine themselves in the present time all the more carefully and consider diligently how they may stand openly hereafter before the Judge's dreadful appearance; they implore him that he would show them how they have displeased him, so that they may punish themselves for it by repentance and render themselves unjudgable here by judging themselves.

58. In this matter, however, it is necessary to realize how devastated we are by the penalty of our exile, since we have become so blinded that we no longer know ourselves. We commit evil acts, but we do not realize that they are evil until after they are committed. Of course the mind driven away from the light of truth finds nothing in itself but darkness, and it often steps into the pit of sin without knowing it. This fact is certainly clear about the blindness of exile alone, since the mind is excluded from the enlightenment of the Lord, and it has lost sight of itself because it did not love its Maker's face. So he adds,

XLIII. 59. *Why do you hide your face and consider me your enemy?*\* The human race had contemplation of intimate light in Paradise, but by pleasing itself it abandoned itself and lost the Creator's light and face. Humans fled to the trees of Paradise because after sin they dreaded the sight of the Creator, whom they were accustomed to love. But see how after sin they receive the penalty, and after the penalty they return to love, because they discover the consequence of sin. They dreaded God's face in their sin, but upon being awakened to sin they seek that face in the penalty, that they might now flee the darkness in which they were blinded

\*Job 13:24

and might shudder bitterly at the very fact that they could not see their Maker. The holy man is now struck by such a desire that he cries out, *Why do you hide your face and consider me your enemy?* because, “If only you saw me as a friend, you would not deprive me of the light of your vision.” He then adds the changeability of the human heart:

\*Job 13:25 XLIV. 60. *Why do you show your power against a leaf blown by the wind and pursue dry straw?\** What indeed are humans but a leaf that, as you can see, fell from a tree in Paradise? What are they but a leaf blown away by the wind of temptation and lifted up by gusts of desires? The human mind surely suffers as many temptations as the gusts of wind move through the air. Anger often disturbs the mind, and when anger cools, silly, inept joy takes its place. The mind is driven by pinpricks of lust, and the fever of avarice causes it to move far and wide to encompass the things that belong to the earth. Sometimes pride lifts up the mind; sometimes, on the other hand, irrational fear causes it to fall to the ground.

\*Isa 64:6 Since therefore the mind is lifted up and carried by so many gusts of temptations, people are rightly compared to leaves. So Isaiah is right when he says, *We have all fallen away like leaves, and our evil deeds have carried us away like the wind.\** Our evil deeds have unquestionably carried us off like the wind, us who are stabilized by no weight of virtue; yes, our evil deeds have given rise to empty pride. After leaves, humans are again called straw, and rightly. At their creation they were a tree; in temptation they became leaves of themselves; after that they looked like straw in exile. Because they fell from a high place, they are leaves; because they were near the earth through their flesh, even if they seemed to stand, they are called straw. But

it was because they lost the green freshness of interior love that they are now dry straw.

Let the holy man then reflect on the low meanness of humankind and the supreme inflexibility of God and say, *Why do you show your power against a leaf blown by the wind and pursue dry straw?* It is as if he bitterly wept over himself and said, “Why do you with such impeccable righteousness attack the one whom you know very well to be a weakling in temptation?” The next verse:

XLV. 61. *You are writing bitterness against me.\** \*Job 13:26  
 Everything we speak passes away, but our written words remain, so he says not that God speaks but that he writes bitterness when his trials keep buffeting us for a long time. Humankind the sinner was once told, *You are dust, and to dust you shall return.\** Angels often appeared to men and women to give them precepts. Moses was the lawgiver who strictly restrained sin. The only-begotten Son of the heavenly Father himself came to redeem us and by dying destroyed death.\* He announced to us that eternal life that he demonstrated in himself. That sentence of death that was handed down in Paradise concerning our flesh, however, was not changed from the very beginning of the human race until the end of the world: *Who is the man who lives and will not see death?\** This point the psalmist supports with insight: *You are dreadful; who can resist you? Your wrath is from of old.\** \*Ps 88:49  
 \*Heb 2:14  
 \*Ps 75:8 Vulg  
 It is he, you see, whose anger was once roused against humans who sinned in Paradise and who passed sentence on us concerning mortal flesh, which neither now nor ever until the end can be lifted. Let him therefore say, *You are writing bitterness against me.* So he again adds,

XLVI. 62. *You will my destruction for the sins of my youth.\** Here is a righteous man who has not discovered \*Job 13:26

that he sinned in his youth but is afraid of his youthful actions. But what we must realize is this: just as age increases in the body, so also in the mind. The first stage of people's life is certainly infancy, when even if their life is innocence, they do not know how to say that they live in innocence.<sup>1</sup> To that stage succeeds the next, that of childhood, in which they can now say what they want. Then comes adolescence, which is obviously the first stage when they are free to act. After that, young adulthood follows, which, as you know, is connected with physical strength; after that comes old age, which, thanks to the passing of time, corresponds with maturity.

Accordingly, since we have said that adolescence is the first stage fit to perform good works, it is of righteous people that we speak: when they enter the stage of high mental maturity, they sometimes bring to mind the memory of their first actions, and they engage in self-reproach concerning their first stages of life to the extent that they have grown wise in mental gravity. They find that they have been indiscreet, because they have later reached the pinnacle of discretion. So Holy Job now rightly dreads the sins of adolescence. If, however, we are to take these words in the literal sense, we must consequently ask ourselves how much greater are the sins of old age than those of youth, since the righteous so intensely dread those sins that they committed at a more immature stage. The next verse:

XLVII. 63. *You have put my feet in irons; you have kept watch over all my paths; you have kept guard over my footsteps.*\* God has placed our feet in irons, because he has bound our sinfulness by the unrelenting sentence

\*Job 13:27

<sup>1</sup>This is a pun on the Latin *infancia*, which the English *infancy* transliterates. It alludes to the obvious fact that the newborn child cannot speak, so he or she cannot say that he or she is innocent.

of his strict justice. He watches all our paths, because he carefully judges everything whatsoever about us. Paths, you see, are normally narrower than roads. If we are not wrong in taking roads to mean actions, then we are surely right in taking paths to mean the very thoughts of actions. God accordingly keeps watch over all our paths, because he even weighs the thoughts in each and every one of our acts. Furthermore, he keeps guard over our footsteps, because he scrutinizes the intentions behind our actions to see how correctly they are made, lest any good work should be undertaken without a correct desire.

Footsteps could also signify evil acts. The foot in the body is the step on the road, and when we do something bad, we often give a bad example to those who see it; in so doing, as it were, we leave a distorted print for those who follow us by turning our foot off the road, since we incite the hearts of other people to scandal through our actions. It is exceedingly difficult, however, to keep watch over ourselves, not boldly to perform evil acts, not to falter in our intention to do good works, and to keep our evil thoughts from mocking us in the midst of righteous acts. Almighty God, however, takes good care to sift all these circumstances, and he weighs everything in judgment. But when are people who are confined by the weakness of their flesh able to rise up with assurance against all that hinders them and maintain righteousness with their thoughts unimpaired? So he shrewdly adds,

XLVIII. 64. *I am wasting away like a rotten thing; I am like clothes eaten by moths.*\* Just as the moth that emerges from a garment eats it up, so humans have rottenness in themselves, and they are consumed by it. That is the thing by which they are consumed to the point that they no longer are. It can be understood in another way, however, if it should be said in the voice of

\*Job 13:28

the one who is tempted, *I am wasting away like a rotten thing; I am like clothes eaten by moths*. We waste away like a rotten thing, because our corruptible flesh wears us out. Since an impure temptation arises from nowhere else but us ourselves, that temptation consumes our flesh like a moth, as though we were a garment from which it emerged. In ourselves we assuredly have that by which we can be tempted. It is just like the moth consuming the garment, the very garment from which it emerged.

We should know, moreover, that the moth bores its way through the garment without a sound. And a thought often pierces the mind in such a way that the mind is itself unaware of it until afterward, when it feels the sting. It is well said therefore that we are eaten up like a garment by a moth, because we sometimes do not know that we are wounded by our temptations, unless they should afterward stab us in the mind. This weakness of ours the holy man now obviously considers when he again shrewdly adds,

XLIX. 65. *Man, born of woman, living but a short time, is full of abundant misery.*\* In Holy Scripture the word *woman* is used either to indicate her sex or her weakness. It is certainly used for the sex in the words, *God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law.*\* It is used to indicate weakness as in these words by a certain wise man: *A man's wicked deeds are better than a woman's kind services.*\* A man, whoever he may be, is called strong and discreet, but a woman is taken to mean a weak or indiscreet mind. Furthermore, it often happens that even a discreet man quickly falls into sin, and another who is indiscreet and weak displays good works. He who is indiscreet and weak, however, is sometimes given grounds for pride by the fact that he did well, and he then falls into a graver sin. Every discreet person, however, when he realizes that he has

\*Job 14:1

\*Gal 4:4

\*Sir 42:14

done something bad, forces himself back to a more exact following of a strict rule of conduct, and in this way he grows stronger in justice, on the same path from which he seemed to have temporarily fallen away from justice.

Concerning this matter it is well said, *A man's wicked deeds are better than a woman's kind services.*\* Even the sin of a strong man sometimes becomes an occasion of virtue, and the virtue of the weak an occasion of sin. In this passage of Job, therefore, what does the word *woman* signify but weakness, where it is said, *Man, born of woman?* He might as well say plainly, "What physical strength will he have who was born of weakness?"

\*Sir 42:14

66. *Living but a short time, he is full of abundant misery.* See how Holy Job's words briefly describe the penalty of humankind, how our life is restricted and our misery multiplied. If, you see, we carefully consider all that is done here on earth, it is penalty and misery. When we have to minister to the corruption of the flesh for the necessary and granted continuation of life, it is misery: clothing to combat the cold, food to combat hunger, and coolness against the heat are needed. Health of the body is preserved only with a great deal of caution; even when preserved it is lost; once lost it is only restored with much labor, and even when it is restored, it is always in doubt.

What is all this but miserable mortal life? We love our friends, fearful lest they might be offended; we fear enemies, and we are insecure concerning them, especially the ones we fear. We often speak with confidence to our enemies as though they were friends; sometimes we take the harmless words of our neighbors, who perhaps love us very much, as though they were hostile words; we who never wish to be deceived or to deceive err seriously by caution. What indeed is all this but

miserable human life? That having lost the heavenly fatherland we enjoy our exile and are loaded with cares, and yet we pretend not to notice their weight with our many thoughts, that we are deprived of the inner light and yet desire to endure our blindness for a long life—what else is all this but our innate penalty of misery? But even if we wish to remain in this life for a long time, the very course of mortal life presses forward to make us leave it. So the holy man rightly adds,

L. 67. *Man is like a flower which falls and withers; he flits like a shadow; he never remains in the same state.\** Like a flower we fall, because our flesh is conspicuous, but then it withers and returns to decay. What are we who are born in the world but flowers of the field? Let us cast the eyes of our heart over this vast present world and see how it is as full of flowers as of people. The life of the flesh is accordingly like the flower in the grass. So the psalmist says well, *As for man, his days are like grass, and he grows like the flower of the field.\** Isaiah for his part says, *All flesh is grass, and its boasting is like the flower of the field.\** Like the flower, therefore, we emerge from concealment, suddenly appear in public, and just as quickly leave the public, only to return to concealment in death. The greenness of flesh displays us, but the aridity of dust carries us away from view. Like a flower we appeared where we were not before; like a flower we withered after appearing but a short time.

68. Each day and moment by moment we are impelled further toward death, so Job rightly adds, *He flits like a shadow; he never remains in the same state.* But since the sun also never stops pursuing its course, nor fixes itself in one place, why is the course of a person's life compared to a shadow instead of to the sun, unless it is because we have lost the Creator's love and equally

\*Job 14:2

\*Ps 102:15

\*Isa 40:6

the warmth of his heart, and we are therefore left with our cold wickedness alone? In the words of Truth, *Wickedness will spread, and the love of many will grow cold.*\* Those then who do not have their heart warmed by the love of God or keep the life that they love certainly flit like a shadow. In that case it is also correctly written about them, *He followed a shadow.*\*

\*Matt 14:12

\*Sir 34:2

So it is well said, *He never remains in the same state.* Infancy, you see, passes into childhood, childhood into adolescence, adolescence into young adulthood, young adulthood into old age, and old age into death. So the course of the present life, by means of its very phases, is impelled forward to the loss of itself. In fact, it always sustains a loss precisely there where it thinks it is making progress in its walk of life. Accordingly we cannot have a fixed state here below where we have come in order to pass through, and our life here itself means to pass out of life every day. Such movement the first humans obviously could not have before sinning, because time passed while they stood still.

After they sinned, however, they placed themselves in a kind of slippery state of temporary being. When they ate the forbidden fruit, they forthwith discovered a defect in their status, and that changeability we suffer, not only externally but also internally, whenever we attempt to rise up to better actions. The mind, you see, by the weight of its changeability, is forever impelled to be something other than what it is, and unless it is held fast in its present position by the stringent discipline of self-control, it forever lapses into worse behavior. That mind that abandoned the one who always remains lost the status that it could have kept. So now when it tries to be better, it has, as it were, to strive against the current of a stream. But when its intention of ascending is deflected, it is led to the lowest point without struggle.

\*Luke 13:24 Since ascent requires struggle and descent allows rest, the Lord warns those who are to enter the narrow gate, *Strive to enter the narrow gate.*\* When he was about to speak of the entrance of the narrow gate, he prefaced it with the verb *strive*, because unless the striving of the mind is engaged, it does not overcome the world's water, by which the soul is always borne down to the lowest point. Accordingly, since the soul falls and withers like a flower, and since it flits like a shadow and never remains in its own state, let us listen to what follows that consideration:

\*Job 14:3 LI. 69. *Do you judge it worth your while to open your eyes on a being of this sort and to enter into judgment with him?\** Job undoubtedly considered both the power of almighty God and his own weakness before he set both God and himself before his eyes. He considered who would enter into judgment with whom. He saw humankind in this corner and the Creator in the other, that is, dust and God, and he rightly said, *Do you judge it worth your while to open your eyes on a being of this sort?* For almighty God to open his eyes means to exercise justice, and to see him whom he would strike. It is as though he closes his eyes when he does not wish to see him whom he does not wish to strike. So Job straightway adds concerning Judgment itself, *To enter into judgment with him.* Since, however, he has contemplated God's coming for Judgment, he again considers his own weakness. He sees that he could not be pure of his own accord, he who came out of impurity in order to exist, so he adds,

\*Job 14:4 LII. 70. *Who can make pure him who is conceived of impure seed? Is it not you alone who are?\** He who alone is pure of himself is able to purify the impure. Humans, you see, live in corruptible flesh, and they have the impure seeds of temptation implanted in themselves, be-

cause they have certainly brought them along from their origin. Even their conception is undoubtedly impure because of the pleasure of the flesh. That is why the psalmist says, *Behold, I have been conceived in iniquity, and my mother brought me forth in sin.*\* That is why we are often tempted, even against our will. That is why we suffer from the impurity in our own mind, even if we fight against it by the use of reason, because although we were conceived impure, we tend toward purity, and we try to overcome that which we are.

\*Ps 50:7

Any who win the victory over the impulse of hidden temptation and impure thoughts, however, should never attribute their purity to themselves, because no one can make pure the one who is conceived of impure seed except him who alone is pure of himself. Therefore, those who finally arrive at the goal of purity of soul should look back at the road they have traveled from their conception, and they should gather from that road the knowledge that they do not have purity of life by their own virtue, they whose impurity brought about the beginning of their life.

This passage, however, may be understood in the sense that blessed Job had an insight into the incarnation of the Redeemer and saw him as the only man in the world who was not conceived of impure seed; rather, he entered the world through the Virgin in such a way that he should have no impure conception. He did not come forth from the union of a man and a woman, but he proceeded from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. He alone accordingly was really pure in his flesh, he who could not be touched by pleasure of the flesh, for he also did not come here through pleasure of the flesh.