

# THE PERSON WHO COMMITS IMPURITY SINS AGAINST HIS OWN BODY

## A HOMILY

### INTRODUCTION

This brief homily<sup>1</sup> which is prefaced by a rather lengthy title in the form of a declarative sentence clearly reveals the subject which Gregory of Nyssa intends to address, sexual impurity (*porneia*<sup>2</sup>) or the defilement of a person through lust. In his opinion, the perversion of our natural sexual impulse differs from other vices which also have a negative impact upon our consciences and interpersonal relationships. The basis for this distinction lies in the fact that *porneia* sows its seed of corruption in our very bodies, thereby causing personal moral disorder before affecting other persons. After exhorting his readers about the dangers of sexual impurity, Gregory distinguishes it from other sins as follows: "Furthermore, anyone who commits murder does not suffer death [that is, he does not share the same fate as the person whom he has victimized], whereas those who engage in impure activity are not immune to the defilement which they have brought upon themselves" [J.213.3-5].

As with virtually all his other treatises and homilies, Gregory is fond of using the Apostle Paul as his mouthpiece<sup>3</sup>. In fact, he begins his homily with Paul's "terrible trumpet of apostolic proclamation" and immediately sets the theme by quoting 1Cor 6.18: "Flee immorality. Every sin a man commits is outside the body" (*extos tou somatos*). Verse nineteen puts this warning from Paul in perspective by referring to our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit: "Do you not know that your body [*soma*] is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you which you have from God?"<sup>4</sup> Gregory does not fully develop the theme that our bodies and souls are made in God's image and likeness which is definitely implied in Paul's warning about sexual impurity. However, given the fact that we are dealing with a homily which by its very nature is limited, Gregory prefers to focus upon the negative aspect of sexual impurity since it indeed corrupts our participation in the divine life. Note the distinction Paul makes in these two verses of First Corinthians. First he calls sins unrelated to unchastity as "being outside [*extos*] the body" while in verse nineteen he refers to the Holy Spirit's

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Danielou situates this homily as occurring during the Lenten season of 38: "Ce sermon comprend quelques indications qui nous permettent de le dater du Careme de 381. Il releve du meme genre que le **Sermon Contre les Usuriers**, qui est du Careme de 379...Il presente en effet une certaine aprete de ton, que justifie l'immoralite de la population du lieu, dont Gregoire se plaint souvent." *La Chronologie des Sermons de Gregoire de Nysse, Revue des Sciences Religieuses* (Strasbourg, Paris, 1955), p.356.

<sup>2</sup>For further references to the vice of impurity as perceived by other Fathers of the Church, refer to **A Patristic Greek Lexicon** edited by G.W.H. Lampe (Oxford, 1963), p.1121-22.

<sup>3</sup>Mariette Canevet gives a detailed outline of all the Pauline epistles as related to the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, **Gregoire de Nysse et L'Hermeneutique Biblique** (Paris, 1983), pp. 183-226.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. J.217.12-13 which quotes 1Cor 3.17: "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him."

dwelling "within [*en*] you." In other words, there is an implicit correlation between the Spirit residing within us who makes our bodies temples of God and the sin of *porneipa* which, as implied in verse eighteen, we have inserted within (*en*) our corporal existence. The latter is a direct violation of our Christian vocation as God's abode in this mortal life. Thus sins other than unchastity do not, in Gregory's view, have the same profound personal impact upon our lives. Offenses of a sexual nature are a direct violation of the Holy Spirit's "in-ness" (*en*) as related to our corporeal existence. Gregory offers a support against temptation to commit this sin with another quote from Paul, Eph 6.14: "Stand with your loins girded with truth," (J.211.15-16), that is, he juxtaposes a bodily member with a non-corporeal reality, truth. In this fashion Gregory considers two distinct existences, the corporeal and spiritual, and sees them as participating in one and the same reality.

Gregory uses the phrase *morphe pornike*, "a form of immorality or impurity" (J.212.1-2) and applies it within the general military context of the homily's opening paragraph, that is, the Christian's need to ward off temptations under the guise of sexual impurity. We are counseled here to flee immorality which appears to be the best tactic when confronted with so strong an attack. Note the use of the term *morphe*. It indicates that we are subject to powerful images...forms...which feed upon our sexual impulses and direct them in subtle ways often beyond the control of reason <sup>5</sup>. These forms are not external (*extos*) to us; rather, they influence our relationships with other persons once they have had a negative affect upon ourselves: "A person who performs an unjust deed reaps the gain of his unjust actions and experiences injury, whereas impurity does not know such division, nor is the person who performs this deed separate from it; rather, the execution of an impure act causes thorough defilement" (J.212.14-19). Although the limited nature of this homily does not fully delineate the mode of Christian life as mentioned in Gregory's other works, we can safely assume that he is implying the so-called "angelic life" (*ho bios aggelikos*) <sup>6</sup>. As the passage from the **Song Commentary** cited in the above footnote indicates, the angelic life is characterized by freedom from passion, *apatheia*. The bishop of Nyssa is directly influenced by Plotinos here as Jean Danielou has disclosed <sup>7</sup>, especially where *apatheia* is intimately related to two other concepts, virtue (*arete*) and

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<sup>5</sup>6 In two instances Gregory places responsibility upon the devil for tempting us with sexual impurity: "Having severed his body from the true religion, he is corrupted daily; he is cast aside to be trampled upon by demons as a useless rag of sin. The devil thus stamps him with his own corruption" (J.214.4-7). And, "The devil assumes the disguise of a groomsman, puts on a harlot's clothing and closely identifies himself with it. At the same time he does not know that he is fighting with an athlete experienced in chastity who strips him of his clothing" (J.215.18-22).

<sup>6</sup>7 Refer to Gregory's **Commentary on the Song of Songs**: "The Song's text readily employs words whose obvious meaning indicates the enjoyment of carnal passion. Yet it does not fall into any improper meaning but leads us to the philosophy of divine things by means of chaste concepts. It shows that we are no longer to be men with a nature of flesh and blood; rather, it points to the life we hope for at the resurrection of the saints, an angelic life [*isaggelos*] free from all passion" (J.30).

<sup>7</sup>8 **Platonisme et Theologie Mystique** (Paris, 1943), pp. 99-110. "Ainsi, nous allons le voir, *l'apatheia* est le mot qui chez Gregoire designe la vie surnaturelle, la grace 'habituelle,' c'est-a-dire, la participation de l'ame a la vie divine. Elle a un caractere eminentement positif et ne consiste aucunement dans l'elimination des passions au sens

purification (*katharsis*). After speaking of the intimate relationship between sexual impurity and the person who commits it, Gregory details the nature of other vices even though they do not have such a close affinity with the person who commits them.

Midway through his homily Gregory mentions a prime exemplar of correct moral behavior, Joseph, who was enticed to engage in illicit sexual activity with his master's wife but resisted her entreaties<sup>8</sup>. However, the Egyptian mistress grabbed his cloak which she later used as false evidence against him. It is interesting to keep in mind that Genesis concludes with the rather lengthy narrative of Joseph; in fact, Joseph's death occurs towards the end of this book which introduces us to the drama of Israel's exodus under the leadership of Moses from Egypt into the promised land. Anyone familiar with the writings of Gregory of Nyssa knows that the book of Genesis contains important material both for his philosophy and theology of creation and mankind<sup>9</sup>. It is therefore appropriate that his homily on fornication regards the patriarch Joseph as a model for our imitation which he expresses through "the dignity of his temperance" or *sophrosune*. At this point we have reference to the distinction between soul and body, the latter represented by Joseph's cloak which the Egyptian mistress had snatched from him: "The arrow of fornication is indeed fiery, but when the soul's essence is burned, it is not found because [Joseph's] clothing is dissolved while that part bound to impurity cries out unashamedly, 'Lie with me'" (J.215.5-8). Gregory now draws an interesting parallel between the Egyptian mistress' entreaty, "Lie with me" (*Koimetheti me't'emou*) and Christ's words uttered in the Garden of Gethsemani, "Watch with me" (*Gregoreson me't'emou*). This attentiveness or "watchfulness of restraint" (*tes sophrosunes he nepsis*, J.215.14) plays an important role in Gregory's theology of the Christian's mystical union with Jesus Christ. It acts as a two-edged sword: on one hand watchfulness is used in a military sense as being on guard against various assaults of sinful behavior; on the other hand, it can indicate attentiveness to God's presence which is possible once we have achieved a certain degree of moral rectitude.

Shortly after this exhortation Gregory describes the garment of Joseph which his father

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physique du mot. Elle cooincide, par contre, avec la disparition des passions vicieuses" (p.101).

With regard to man being in God's image and likeness, Hubert Merki remarks, "Wie die *apatheia* ist auch die *katharotes* in erster Linie der Charakter des göttlichen Lebens. Der Begriff besagt zwar an sich bloß Reinheit; in dieser Reinheit leuchtet aber sofort wiederum das göttliche Leben auf, das der Mensch eben als *eikon theou* besitzt und ihm in der *homoiosis pros ton theion* als ursprünglichem Zustand gegeben war." **Homoiosis Theo** (Freiburg, 1952), p.100.

<sup>8</sup>9 For another passage pertaining to Joseph and the Egyptian mistress, refer to a text by Nestorios which corresponds to one by Pseudo-Basil of Seleucia in an article entitled *Drei weitere Nestorius-Predigten* by P. Chrysostomos Baur, *osb*, **Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie**, vol. 58 (Innsbruck, 1914), p.100. Baur also parallels Pseudo-Basil's text with Pseudo-Chrysostom, **De Joseph et Castitate** (p.101) which refers to Susanna's threatened virginity.

<sup>9</sup>10 For example, refer to the **Hexaemeron** and **De Hominis Opificio**.

Jacob had given him (Gen 37.3) <sup>10</sup>. The bishop of Nyssa draws an interesting parallel between this robe and the one which the Egyptian mistress had snatched from Joseph. "First [Joseph's] brothers took his garment which falsely accused him as if a wild beast had devoured him. Now a garment has charged him with fornication" (J.216.6-9). With this comparison in mind, Gregory speaks of Christ's robe which the soldiers took from him at the crucifixion: "The Lord's voice concurs with Joseph here: "They parted my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots"" (J.216.-10.11) <sup>11</sup>. Here Gregory identifies Christ as "the mouth of temperance (I.12)," *sophrosune*, and uses the noble example of Joseph as a precursor of the Lord with regard to appropriate Christian behavior. Towards the end of this same paragraph Gregory asks a question, "How does this [that is, Joseph's rule over Egypt] manifest virtue? For what purpose did he exercise virtue [*arete*]?" It was precisely to discredit persons with little or no moral sense. As David Balas has shown, virtue for Gregory has a distinct religious connotation in addition to correct moral conduct <sup>12</sup> which transcends yet includes it. A passage from Gregory's **Song Commentary** underscores this important point:

If a person should gather the aroma of every sweet flower from the various meadows of virtue [*arete*] and make his life fragrant through the good odor of his conduct and thus become perfect in every way, such a person would not have it in his nature to look steadily upon the Word of God as upon the sun; rather, he sees it

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<sup>10</sup>11 Keep in mind that Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers out of jealousy since he could predict the future through dreams (Gen 37.27-8).

<sup>11</sup>12 Note that Joseph was stripped of his garment before being sent to prison. Soldiers cast lots for Christ's garment at his crucifixion, an event followed by his resurrection. Thus Joseph may be said to prefigure Christ's resurrection. Referring to the two men in prison with Joseph, Marguerite Harl observes, "Pharon fait sortir de prison deux prisonniers, l'echanson et le panetier, tous deux pour etre juges; l'un sera recompense et retabli dans sa charge, l'autre sera condamne. Cette scene de 'sortie de prison' evoque la resurrection des morts hors des tombeaux pour le jugement final. Malgre la menace de chatiment, c'est au sens propre une liberation: la sortie de la corruption (*phthora*) pour la reconstitution du corps integre. La liberation est accordee en grace au jour de la naissance du Christ (sa resurrection), qui est aussi le jour de sa victoire...L'amnistie terrestre doit prefigurer l'amnistie eschatologique." *L'Eloge de la Fete de Paques dans le Prologue du Sermon in Sanctum Pascha de Gregoire de Nysse*, an article in **The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa** (Cambridge, 1981), p.92.

<sup>12</sup>13 "Goodness, in turn, has in Gregory a very wide meaning, and may include everything which can be considered as a 'perfection' in the sense of a positive quality. Nevertheless, its primary connotation is moral and religious goodness, 'virtue' (*arete*), also in the sense of sanctity. Thus, e.g., in the **De Hominis Opificio** Gregory affirms that the Divine Beauty does not consist in figure or form but in beatitude according to virtue" **Metousia Theou** (Rome, 1966), p.68. With this in mind, recall the "form [*morphe*] of immorality which is cast" in J. 212.1-2. (Refer also to J. 217.4, 'the spears of that unchaste form'). *Morphe* is therefore an entity which can be grasped or manipulated, whereas *arete* is not subject to such control.

within himself as in a mirror. For the rays of that true, divine virtue shine forth in a pure life by the out-flow of detachment [*apatheia*] and make the invisible visible to us and the inaccessible comprehensible by depicting the sun in the mirror of our souls. (J.90)<sup>13</sup>

In this passage from one of his mature works, Gregory of Nyssa draws a parallel between virtue and detachment, *apatheia*, or freedom from passion of which the patriarch Joseph is a principal model. By comparing the soul to a mirror reflecting the Word of God (Christ) within ourselves, Gregory describes to the best of his ability the ineffable union between the Word and a person. *Apatheia* manifests this union in human relationships which issues forth into correct moral behavior. In the words of the **Song Commentary**, such *apatheia* "makes the invisible visible." This phrase bears a close resemblance to a sentence taken from the homily on fornication, "Let us...illumine our deeds with rays of light, allow our lives to become radiant" (J.217.8-9). Our participation in God's life thus makes us temples of the Holy Spirit (1.9-10), and any attempt to interfere with it carries the dire warning contained in 1Cor 3.17, "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him."

Gregory concludes his homily with reference to the same word with which he opened it, *eusebeia* (J.217.16). This term alludes to that Christian devotion to God and its practical expression through religious observance. Once again the bishop of Nyssa situates *eusebeia* within a military context<sup>14</sup> and counsels us to overcome temptations through long suffering (*makrothumia*) with the Church's prayerful assistance. The function of the Church as a powerful ally in our struggle against temptation plays a prominent role for Gregory because it serves to unite individuals with Christ. As Reinhard Hubner remarks in reference to 1Cor 5.6-7, one of the most important roles of the Church is intercessory prayer for sinners<sup>15</sup>. Any type of moral transgression is clearly a rupture of her unity and must be restored if at all possible. Gregory describes a person who has severed himself from this ecclesiastical unity in Christ: "Having severed his body from the true religion [*eusebeia*], he is cast aside to be trampled upon by demons as a useless rag of sin" (J.214.5-6). Hubner cites a passage from Gregory's **Commentary on Ecclesiastes** with an illuminating reference to the sentence just quoted from the homily on fornication:

A small amount of the leaven of evil which a condemned person commits can render useless the entire lump of the Church's prayer (cf. 1Cor 5.6). However, the person rejected by sin can again join the Church through repentance "in order that

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<sup>13</sup>14 Referring to this passage, Jean Danielou says of virtue (*arete*): "C'est parce que la 'vertu' est une participation a la vie meme de Dieu, qu'elle nous permet de la connaitre en nous" (p.106). And again with reference to the supernatural character of virtue: "'Le caractere esurnaturel de la 'vertu' chez Gregoire ressort encore, comme pour l'*apatheia*, de la signification paradisiaque du mot. 'Vertu' ici represente les biens primitifs, perdues par le peche, rendus par le Christ" (p.107). Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>15 J.211.5: "the [Christian] army of the true religion" (*eusebeia*).

<sup>15</sup>16 "Es ist erstaunlich, mit welcher Konstanz das Schema von der gegenseitigen Verbundenheit der Teile eines Breies von Gregor auf allen Ebenen der Okonomie angewendet wird, hier, in enger Anlehnung an Paulus (1Kor 5.6-7), auf die Gefahrung der Einheit 'des kirchlichen Gebets' durch den Sunder." **Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa** (Leiden, 1974), p.180.

he might not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow" (2Cor 2.7). Thus Paul knows the opportune time for cutting off the soiled part of the Church's garment and for sewing bit back on again, that is, when we wash it from defilement through our repentance. Realize from what we are cut off and that we are always sewn back on. Having been severed from heresy, we are sewn on the true religion [*eusebeia*], for the robe of the Church, as we observe, is still whole even when it has broken off any fellowship with heretics. (J.408-9)

This "lump of the Church's prayer" refers to the presence of Christ as yeast within the Church which, like dough, makes it rise. The Church is also comparable to Christ's garment which remained undivided at his crucifixion. As we have pointed out, the homily on fornication sees this garment foreshadowed by the one belonging to Joseph. Both his garment and that of the Church are removed in similar ways: the former by temptation to commit sexual impurity and the latter by defilement (although Gregory does not specify this defilement). In both passages the marvelous correlation between the garment of each individual person and the one belonging to the Church represent two different yet corresponding "temples of the indwelling Spirit" (**On Fornication**, J.217.10). Hubner observes that the unity between each member of the Church and its head, Christ, consists in virtue (*arete*) which we have mentioned in a passage from the **Song Commentary** above<sup>16</sup>. Another example of the unifying power of virtue may be found in Gregory's treatise **On Perfection**. Here he uses as an analogy the harmony existing between our bodily members:

He [Paul] who teaches Christ as the head of the Church holds this above everything else: the entire head has the same nature and substance as the body under subjection, and the individual members as a whole partake of a single unity effecting a cooperation among the limbs with one accord in every activity. If anything is external to the body, it indeed does not belong to the head. Therefore we have taught that the head has the same nature as each member in order that each one may be properly conformed to the head. But we are the limbs which contribute to Christ's body. If anyone who has become a limb of Christ does evil by taking up the sword of unbridled rage, he indeed has severed the limb from its head by this wicked passion. J.197-8)

In this instance Christ and his bodily members are perceived as being united in virtue, yet the bond can be dissolved through sin which is "external to the body." We have seen this same phrase (*somatos estin ektos*) from 1Cor 6.18 inserted at the beginning of Gregory's homily on fornication (J.211.8). But now the bishop of Nyssa is more clearly differentiating the sin of sexual impurity from other sins as in J.213.8: "Any sin committed outside [*ektos*] the body does not corrupt the body's nature, does not bring ignominy upon its members, nor does it completely defile the flesh."

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<sup>16</sup>17 "Nicht in ihrem physischen Kontakt liegt die Einheit der konsubstantialen Glieder des Leibes der Kirche, sondern in ihrer einem *Arete*...Die Einheit der Menschennatur ist nicht mehr die Basis der so verstandenen Einheit des Leibes," that is, grace, not human nature, forms the basis for unity. Ibid, pp.181-2. For example, refer to a passage from Gregory's **On Perfection**: "There is one pure nature in Christ, and it is the same in the person participating in it. However, one springs up while the other being a part of it, is drawn from the fountain and brings beauty to his life in his thoughts" (J.212).

Gregory means that the sin of sexual impurity is present, as it were, "within the body," thereby causing a more thorough defilement than those sins "external" to our bodies.

For Gregory, the most important means of fortifying ourselves against the onslaughts of temptation is by having access to the Church. It should "exhort your charity [*agape*]" and once we have been so encouraged, our task now consists in "guarding its discipline [*eutaxia*]," J.217.18-19. Such discipline implies the good order of things, that is, the moral and religious precepts belonging to the Church which channel grace and enable us to conquer any fascination with evil. These temptations affect us within the unstable context of our current earthly condition, for Gregory says "pray for us who are pilgrims [*sunodoiporoi*, 1.22]" or companions on a journey. Such a conclusion is fitting because the patriarch Joseph realized that his rule over Egypt was temporary and intended for God as means to prepare Israel's exodus from that land of exile. In fact, Joseph exhorted his brothers to take his dead body from Egypt<sup>17</sup>. Within the context of the New Testament, this request is a fitting response to Paul's command quoted at the beginning of the homily, "Flee fornication." The cloak of temptation (the body) is left behind in Egypt while Joseph is removed...resurrected...from that place.

This homily may be found in **Gregorii Nysseni Opera**, vol. ix (Leiden, 1967), pps. 211-17, edited by Ernest Gebhart. The edition of J.P. Migne may be found in **Patrologia Graeca** (Paris, 1858), cols. 489-496.

## THE TEXT

[J.211 & M.489] The terrible trumpet of the apostolic proclamation bears witness to many things which pertain to the [Christian] army of the true religion [*eusebeia*]. Not only does it save [M.492] us from sinking into the pit of ruin, it adds the following precept [from the Apostle Paul], "Flee immorality [*porneia*]. Every sin a man commits is outside the body" [1Cor 6.18]. On certain occasions persons expert in war and in drawing up a line of battle consider it best to engage in battle while at another time they deem it more convenient to flee. The example of warfare can pertain to souls, that is, to the prudent [choice between] combat and retreat. Paul is aware of this fact; he both tactically and skillfully leads his army through each of these maneuvers. He exhorts his soldiers to remain steadfast in the fight saying, "Stand with your loins girded with truth" [Eph 6.14]. He next wisely counsels us to flee battle: "Flee immorality" [1Cor 6.18]. Should the war of disbelief erupt, we ought resist it, and if the line of battle threatens us, it is better to ambush these assaults. Should the bow of calumny be drawn [against us], we ought [J. 212] to oppose such falsehood. Whenever a form of immorality is cast against us, it is wise to turn our backs and flee. Impurity successfully assails our eyes which is reason enough to recall the precept, "Flee immorality."

Another type of impurity exists which we should fear even more. Furthermore, there are other forms of sin which seem to have an existence all their own apart from persons who commit them, yet they are only realized when we execute them. For example, anyone guilty of rape alone suffers the consequences [of this act]. Jealous persons suffer the depravity of their inclinations; those who engage in slanderous talk with naive persons alone are in danger of falling prey to such

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<sup>17</sup>18 Refer to Gen 50.25: "Then Joseph took an oath of the sons of Israel, saying, 'God will visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.'"

behavior, and similar fashion, anyone who commits the heinous act of murder suffers the same outcome. A person who performs an unjust deed reaps the gain of his unjust actions and experiences injury, whereas impurity does not know such division [between agent and effect], nor can the person who performs this deed separate himself from it; rather, the execution of an impure act causes total defilement. When greedy persons afflict someone with injury [J.213] they themselves do not suffer harm; that is, their bodies do not experience shame nor are they bothered by it. Furthermore, anyone who commits murder does not suffer death, whereas those who engage in impure activity are not immune to the defilement which they have brought upon themselves.

Consider with me the shrewd remarks of Paul: "Flee impurity." Why does he say this? "Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body" (That is, any sin committed outside the body does not corrupt the body's nature, does not bring ignominy upon its members, nor does it completely defile the flesh). The person who engages in impure activity sins against his own body yet remains unharmed, an act far different from murder [M.493]. In this case the impurity is his alone since he has brought shame upon himself. To feed himself the thief steals while the fornicator disgraces his own body. Thought of gain moves one to plunder while impurity damages the body's majesty. Another passion, envy, causes harm while the unchaste person is solely responsible for his self-induced disgrace. What is this more shameful, weighty burden of impurity? All servility is unbecoming (for shameful deeds affect the soul's health), and the impure slave of sin is even more offensive. The fornicator brings a heap of filth upon [J.214] himself and is responsible for his unclean actions. Is it not frightening to see how he wallows in mud, becomes deformed, and to observe how his body resembles rags? How, then, do these rags differ from impurity? Having severed his body from the true religion, he is corrupted his body from the true religion, he is corrupted daily; he is cast aside to be trampled upon by demons as a useless rag of sin. The devil thus stamps him with his own corruption.

The wicked character of an impure person can be traced to the mind and for this reason it is not exposed to view. However, the following examples reveal its nature: escaping within houses, performance of offensive deeds, showing arrogance towards one's neighbors, ignominy before enemies, shameless behavior towards relatives, being cursed in the eyes of one's family members, having a lack of courage towards one's parents, making one's household a public display, and exposing oneself for ridicule before neighbors. Such impurity also consists in rejection by one's wife, being suspect by a spouse, a father hated by his children, having one's counsel scorned, showing an ungrateful and contemptible attitude, being an ungrateful petitioner, perceived immediately as an offensive person, experiencing more desolation than a sick person, and remaining disgraced in death. Paul sees impurity as the mother of a multitude of such evils and exhorts us to a more victorious flight. He thus rightly counsels us flee saying, "Flee immorality."

We are now reminded of the youth [Joseph] who soberly rejected the impurity of the Egyptian woman when he demonstrated valor by shunning her. This youth was subject to many temptations such as pleasure so characteristic of his age, the yoke of slavery, the erotic flattery of his mistress, the temptation to have a licentious relationship and to expose himself to entreaties for illicit behavior. "One day when Joseph went into the house [J.215] to do his work and none of the men of the house were present, the mistress caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me'" [Gen 39.11-12]. The dignity of temperance is indeed great because the mistress of the household made herself the slave of a slave. While [Joseph] made supplication, [the mistress] entreated him, "Lie

with me." The arrow of fornication is indeed fiery, but when the soul's essence is burned, it is not found because [Joseph's] clothing is dissolved while that part bound to impurity cries out unashamedly, "Lie with me." The hunger to commit fornication bellows out, however, the ears of modesty obstruct it. This voice cries out, "Lie with me." Nevertheless, the youth's temperance retorts, "Watch with me" [Mt 26.38], a statement which manifests vigilance through deeds. Such attentiveness does not yield to blandishments nor does the mind acquiesce to such supplications; the watchfulness of restraint does not doze off, is not sapped by such importunate pleas, does not become captive to the adornments of form, and is not broken by amorous flattery. Instead, the mistress' [M.496] voice flatters with even sharper persuasions, "Lie with me."

The devil assumes the disguise of a groomsman, puts on a harlot's clothing and closely identifies himself with it. At the same time he does not know that he is fighting with an athlete experienced in chastity who strips him of his clothing." He [Joseph] left his garment in her hand and fled and left the house" [Gn 39.12]. How much holier for him to be without these garments! What, then, is this rage of the licentious Egyptian woman? She vented her wrath against Joseph [J.216] and running to her husband she exclaimed, "He has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us. He said to me, your wife, who now chastely guarded your bed, 'I will lie with you.' After I cried out with a loud voice, he left his garment with me and fled and left the house" [Gn 39.14-15]. Once again Joseph was wrongly accused by a garment. First [Joseph's] brothers took his garment which falsely accused him as if a wild beast had devoured him [Gn 37.31-32]. Now a garment has charged him with fornication. The Lord's voice concurs with Joseph here: "They parted my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots" [Ps 22.18, Jn 19.24]. Such words are sweet for persons trained in chastity as uttered by the mouth of temperance [Christ] but are difficult for the flesh in its weakness. How just is God's favor towards Joseph! God did not regard his earlier trials but revealed the future through dreams, a means by which he taught that long ago he had prepared glory for his just ones. God allowed the youth to undergo temptations and shut the voices of cowardly persons. If he did not allow Joseph to undergo temptation, these cowards would have attributed such trials as coming from a blind man. Joseph ruled over the Egyptians, that is, an adolescent governed barbarians. How does this manifest virtue? For what purpose did he exercise virtue? In order that no one might claim that these experiences happened to a just man, God [J.217] allowed him to be tempted. In this fashion [Joseph] bore witness as a just man and shut the mouth of cowards.

Let us therefore turn our attention from the spears of that unchaste form, close our eyes to licentiousness, allow the disorders of pleasantries mock us, let temperance guard our flesh, and have purity dwell within our bodily members. Let us crush any thoughts fond of evil, illumine our deeds with rays of light, allow our lives to become radiant, guard our bodies as temples of the indwelling Spirit, and inscribe it with the fearful inscription as a warning for intemperate persons which cries out, "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him" [1Cor 3.17].

None of you wishes to be yoked to trivial affairs. What is sweeter for a father than to be lovingly united with his sons? But since the Word [Christ] summons us to the struggle of piety [*ensebeia*], we should run to the arena belonging to the Church and heed its prayerful assistance. But let the Church exhort your charity, guard its discipline, and if any difficulties arise, we should conquer them by long suffering. The restraint of disturbances is not far off. Do not be disturbed by rumors nor moved by nonsense; rather, pray with us who are pilgrims in order that you may be

strengthened and that we might say at all times fortified with God's power, "I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me" [Phil 4.13], to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.