

THE SEVENTH HOMILY

The Song of Songs, 3.9-4.7

- 3.9. King Solomon made himself a litter
of the woods of Lebanon.
10. He made its pillars silver,
its back gold, its step purple,
Its interior lovingly laid with stones
by the daughters of Jerusalem.
11. Go forth daughters of Sion, and behold king Solomon,
with the crown with which his mother crowned him,
in the day of his espousals,
and in the day of the gladness of his heart.
- 4.1. Behold, you are fair, my companion,
behold, you are fair.
Your eyes are (as) doves apart from your being silent.
Your hair is as flocks of goats
which have appeared from Galaad.
2. Your teeth are as flocks of shorn sheep
which have come up from the washing;
all of them bearing twins, and
there is not a barren one among them.
3. Your lips are like a thread of scarlet,
and your speech is lovely.
Like the skin of a pomegranate
is your cheek apart from your being silent.
4. Your neck is as the tower of David
that was built for an armory (Thalpiath);
a thousand shields hang upon it, and all spears of mighty men.
5. Your two breasts are as two twin fawns of an antelope
that feed among the lilies.
6. Until the day breathes and the shadows depart
I will go to the mountain of myrrh
and to the hill of frankincense.
7. You are all fair, my companion,
and there is no spot in you.

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J.201 & M.908 In many ways king Solomon is taken as the pattern of the true king; in many ways, I say, scripture speaks about Solomon with reference to better things. For Solomon

is called peaceful; he built the temple, had wisdom without measure, ruled over Israel, judged the people in justice and was born from the seed of David; even the queen of Ethiopia came to visit him. All these and similar examples are symbolically spoken of Solomon and depict in advance the Gospel's power. Who, then, is peaceful, has destroyed the enemy and nailed it to the cross, we who were his enemy? Rather, he reconciled the entire world to himself and tore down the partition wall which acted as a hedge in order that he might create two persons into one new man in himself; he proclaimed peace to those far off and to those nearby by announcing good tidings [Eph 2.14-15].

J.202 Who is this builder of the temple, who laid its foundations on the holy mountains, that is, on the prophets and apostles? He built it, as the Apostle says [Eph 2.20], upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, who are living, animated stones. Such stones are rounded with a view to the harmony of the walls themselves, according to the prophet [Zach 9.16, Septuagint], so that fitted together into the unity of faith and growing in the bond of peace, they might become a holy temple, a dwelling of God in the Spirit. Because Solomon in his wisdom signifies true wisdom, no one may contradict this fact while considering history and the truth. History testifies that Solomon transcended the bounds of human wisdom, having held the knowledge of all things in the breadth of his heart; he surpassed those before him and was unable to be matched by those after him. However, the Lord who is truth, wisdom **J.203** and power, is their essence. Therefore, David says "He made all things in his wisdom" [Ps 103.24]. The divine Apostle interprets the prophet by saying that all things were created in him [Col 1.16], namely, through wisdom.

The enemies of the Lord testify that he is the king of Israel by writing on the cross an admission of his reign: "This is the king of the Jews" [Mt 27.37]. We accept this testimony even if it is understood as weakening the vastness of his power and limiting his lordship over the Israelites. The title over the cross bears witness not only to Christ's sovereignty over the Jews but over all peoples.

He is king of the entire earth and rules over all its parts. **J.204 & M.909** Solomon's zeal for righteous judgment signifies true judgment of all the earth: "The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to his Son." [Jn 5.22]. And, "I am able to do nothing of myself, but I judge as I hear, and my judgment is righteous" [Jn 5.30]. This is the most accurate definition of judgment: not to yield to one's own whims or contenders, but to first hear those on trial and then pass sentence. Otherwise, the power of God could not be effective, for truth cannot unjustly pervert judgement. But he who is from David's seed is the Lord according to the flesh; he was foretold by the one [Solomon] born from David as we learn from Scripture [Rom 9.5].

J.205 The mystery about the Ethiopian Queen who left her domain, traveled to meet Solomon because of the report of his wisdom and honored him with precious stones, gold and sweet smelling perfumes [3Kg or 1Kg 10.1-3], is evident to whoever understands the marvels of the Gospel. Who does not know that at the beginning the assembly from among the nations was dark from idolatry before it became the Church? It lived far from knowledge of the true God and was separated by a great gulf of ignorance. But when God's grace and wisdom shone, and the true light sent rays to those in darkness and sitting in death's shadow, Israel then closed her eyes to the light and refused any participation in the good. The Ethiopians, however, hastened to the faith from among the nations, and those far off drew near, having washed off their darkness by a mystical mashing. They were led to God and offered gifts to the king: the spices of piety, the gold of the knowledge of God, the precious stones of the commandments and works of virtue.

J.206 I will now offer for consideration the Song's words as follows: "King Solomon

made himself a litter of the woods of Lebanon. He made its pillars silver, its back gold, its step purple, its interior is lovingly laid with stones by the daughters of Jerusalem” [3.9- 10]. As Solomon anticipated the mystery of the Lord, God's care for us is similarly indicated for us by the chariot's construction. In many ways God is in his saints according to each one's capacity and worthiness. A certain locality can be attributed to God: in one person he is a house; in another, a throne and yet in another, a footstool. Let anyone becoming a chariot or a well-tempered horse receive this rider (God), even while completing his course while **M.912** being directed by God to what lies ahead.

J.207 We now learn something about this chariot which in Solomon's wisdom is not only fashioned from the wood of Lebanon but is fittingly decorated in each part with gold, silver, purple and stones with love as the maker. Everyone does not attain the capacity for love unless he is recognized through his life as a daughter of the Jerusalem above which is free. It is clear by our earlier words that the person thus bearing God in himself is a litter where God sits. According to the holy Paul, no longer does such a person live for himself but he has Christ living in him and gives proof of Christ speaking in himself [2Cor 13.3]. This person is rightly called a litter who is borne about by Christ and carried by him.

But this is not the object of our investigation, rather, our task is to consider diligently the diverse material before us and to see how wood is combined with gold, silver, purple **J.208** and stones to construct a chariot. Even Paul the wise architect judges wood, along with grass and reeds, as worthless for constructing a house [1Cor 3.12] because it is consumed by fire's destructive power which proves the material. We know that wood does not endure but changes into gold, silver or anything else of value. The Apostle says [2Tim 2.20] that in the great house of God are vessels of gold and silver, hinting through these things at an incorporeal, spiritual creation. Wood and earthenware may signify for us what disobedience created and made into earthenware vessels; through wood, sin made us wooden vessels instead of golden ones. The use of vessels is determined by the material's worthiness, for while more worthy material is ordained for honorable purposes, the unworthy is cast aside for common use. But what does Paul say of these matters? By its own free choice, the vessel has the capacity to become either gold from wood or silver from clay. "For if anyone purifies himself, he will be a worthy **J.209** vessel for the Lord, a vessel prepared for every good deed. [2 Tim 2.21]." These words thus help us to gain a better understanding of scripture.

In many places of holy scripture Mount Lebanon designates a hostile force as when the prophet says, "The Lord will break the cedars of Lebanon, and he will beat them small, even Lebanon itself like a calf" [Ps 28.5]. In the desert Moses broke (the golden calf) into small pieces, and the water became potable for the Israelites by this calf having been broken into small pieces [Ex 32.20]. It is clear, as the prophet says, that not only are evils produced by the enemy's power but the primary root of evil, Mount Lebanon, which nourishes the wood of these cedars, is reduced to nothing. At one **M.913** time we were all these trees of Lebanon while rooted in them by an evil life and the deception of idolatry. But since we were cut off by a spiritual axe and were in the artisan's hands, God made us into a litter. He transformed our wood by a rebirth into silver, gold, rich purple and gleaming stones. Thus the **J.210** Apostle says "God has assigned to each respectively the gifts of the Holy Spirit" [Rom 12.3], and to each person the Spirit gives prophecy according to the proportion of his faith. To another person is bestowed a different function according to his nature and his ability to receive grace, whether as the eye of the Church's body, as a hand or as a prop instead of a foot. Thus in the chariot's construction one person is a column, another a step; still another is a rest for the head while others are designated for the litter's interior.

The architect does not intend all the elements used in decoration for one purpose but all parts are tastefully adorned, and the beauty of each part is intended to be different yet harmonious. Thus the litter's pillars are silver with a purple steep; the head support is made of gold on which the bridegroom reclines his head while the litter's interior is embellished with precious stones. The pillars may be understood as belonging to the Church to which the Song's text carefully applies pure, fire-tried gold: they have ascended to the loftiness of the kingdom. (The special characteristic of **J.211** this kingdom is purple.) The most important component, that is, where he who constructed the litter reclines his head, is the gold of pure teachings. What lies hidden and unapparent is adorned by a pure conscience of precious stones which the daughters of Jerusalem put together. Applying this litter to the universal Church, its arts may be divided among persons according to their different functions. As we said earlier, the chariot's parts can be adapted to each order within the Church. (The Apostle says, "God has placed in the Church first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers" [1Cor 12.28] then every person for the perfection of the saints). The names of these parts contributing to the litter's construction are priests, teachers and the venerable state of virginity gleaming with the rays of stones inside the litter by the purity of virtues.

So much for the litter's description. The text which follows contains an exhortation from the bride to the daughters of **J.212 & M.916** Jerusalem. The great Paul offers himself to be condemned if he fails to share all his goods. (He says to his congregation, "Be as I am" for I was once like you, and "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ" [1Cor 11.1]). Thus the lovely bride was made worthy of her bridegroom's divine mysteries. When she saw the bed, that is, the king's litter, she cries out to her young companions (who may represent the souls that have been saved), "How long will you remain shut up in the cave of this life? Go beyond the veil of human nature and see this marvelous sight. As daughters of Sion, see the crown on the king's head which his own mother placed on him according to the prophet, 'He has placed on his head a crown of precious stone'" [Ps 20.4].

No one can adequately grasp the terms pertaining to God. For example, "mother" is mentioned (in the Song) in place **J.213** of "father." Both terms have the same meaning because there is neither male nor female in God (for how can anything transitory like this be attributed to God? But when we are one in Christ, we are divested of the signs of this difference along with the old man). Every name equally indicates God's ineffable nature; neither can "male" nor "female" defile God's pure nature. Because of this, the father mentioned in the Gospel parable [Mt 22.21 prepares a wedding. The prophet says of God, "You have placed on his head a crown of precious stones" [Ps 20.4]. Hence the Song says that a crown is placed upon the bridegroom by his mother. Since the nuptials and bride are one, one mother places the crown upon the bridegroom's head. Neither does it make much difference whether one calls the Son of God the only begotten God, or **J.214** the Son of his love. According to Paul, each name has the capacity to be a bridal escort which leads the bridegroom to dwell in us. "Go then," the bride says to her companions, "and become daughters of Sion, that from a high peak (for this is what Sion signifies) you will be able to see that marvelous sight, the bridegroom adorned with his crown." His crown is the Church encompassing his head by living stones; love is the plait of this crown, for whether anyone calls it "mother" or "love," does not err: God is love, as St. John says [1Jn 4.8].

The bride says that her spouse rejoices and delights in his crown of nuptial adornment, for the bridegroom rejoices when he takes the Church as his own dwelling crowned with the virtues of distinguished members. Perhaps it would be better to apply these divine words to the following: "Go forth daughters of Sion, and behold king Solomon, with the crown with which his mother crowned him, in the day of his **M.917** espousals and in the day of the gladness of his

heart" [3.11]. **J.215** The Word receives his bride's love because in imitation of the Lord, she wishes all men to be saved and come to the recognition of truth [1 Tim 2.4]. The proclamation of her beauty is made more solemn and is clearly depicted in the Song, for the praise of the bride's beauty does not simply pertain to her loveliness but to each member. The Song thus says, "Behold, you are fair, my companion, behold, you are fair" [4.1]. The bride has imitated the Lord's love for mankind, and a young maiden is summoned to go out like Abraham--each maiden from her respective land and family with regard to the senses--that she may see the chaste bride. groom crowned with the Church. Truly the bride becomes a companion of the Lord's goodness since she drew near to God through love. The text says of her that "you are beautiful by having drawn near to beauty by your own noble choice." Here the repetition of praise demonstrates the truth of the bridegroom's testimony because according to the divine law, the **J.216** testimony of two persons confirms the truth. Therefore the Song says, "Behold, you fair, my companion, behold, you are fair."

Although the universal Church is the one body of Christ [1Cor 12.12-27], there are many members in this one body. All do not have the same function, but God created one person to be the body's eyes, while he implanted another as the ears. Some perform the function of hands, and others which bear loads are the feet. The faculty of taste, smell and other senses constituting the body may be found in the common body of the Church: lips, teeth, tongue, breasts, stomach, and throat. As Paul says, "All these parts of the body are not presentable" [1Cor 12.23]. The discerning observer of beauty attributes a fitting praise to the members of the entire body which are attractive to him.

We must now consider the praise bestowed upon the more honorable limbs. What is more honorable among our bodily members than the eyes? Through our eyes we perceive light. By them we recognize friends and enemies, discern between **J.217** what is our own and what belongs to other persons. Eyes are instructors and teachers for every purpose and are congenial, indispensable guides for a safe journey through life. Their location above the other sense organs shows a more honorable use in our life. It is indeed clear to my listeners to which limb of the Church this praise of eyes refers. The eye of Samuel was **M.920** watchful (for thus he was called); the eye of Ezekiel was ordained by God for guarding the safety of those entrusted to him; the watchful eye of Micah and the gazing eye of Moses which was called "God" were ordained for the people's guidance: for this reason they are called men who see. They are correctly named "eyes" fulfilling that function in that Church's body if they look directly at the sun of justice [Mal 4.2] and are never blinded by the works of darkness. If they discern between what is their own and foreign elements, they know that everything alien to our nature is apparent and transitory **J.218** while what is offered as our own through hope abides forever.

The function of our eyes is to discern friend and enemy, that we may love the true friend with our whole heart, soul and strength [Dt 6.5] and may show perfect hatred to our enemies. But the eye is also a guide for our activity, a teacher of correct deeds and a leader on our journey to God. The function of a purified, healthy (spiritual) eye, like bodily eyes, is clearly manifested to the other members by its exalted manner of life. Because of this the text (the Song) begins to praise the bride's beauty by saying "Your eyes are as doves" [4.1]. Seeing those persons before him in the eyes' position as purified from evil, the bridegroom acknowledged their simplicity and purity of life. He names them "doves," for purity is proper to doves while the Song praises their eyes.

Images of visible reality striking the purity of the eye's pupil effect the act of seeing, that is, a form impresses itself **J.219** upon the eye like a mirror. When a person has this power of sight in the Church, he never looks to what is material and corporeal; a spiritual and immaterial

life is effected in him, and his life is formed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the best praise is attributed to the eyes when they conform their way of life to the Holy Spirit's grace, for the Holy Spirit is the dove. Both eyes are praised so that the entire person may share this praise, both his visible and spiritual aspects. The bridegroom adds another excellent praise: "apart from your being silent" [4.1]. A good life is evident to every one, while what is hidden and secret belongs only to God. The person who looks to the uncreated and gazes into what is hidden testifies that silence is more praiseworthy than any thing external. As the text says, "Your eyes are doves apart from your being silent." The bride's exterior beauty has already been praised by silently marveling at it.

M.921 Praise of the bride's beauty follows next: "Your hair is **J.220** as flocks of goats which have appeared from Galaad" [4.1]. It is appropriate first to consider the nature of hair that we may understand the praise bestowed upon the bride. Paul calls the glory of a woman's head her hair [1Cor 11.15] and says that it is given to her instead of a veil that respect and modesty may act as a fitting veil. Paul says, "As it befits women who profess to worship God, they should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly" [1 Tim 2.9]. Respect and modesty (that is, "hair") pertain to reverence of God. If the soul lacks hair, its head is subject to shame, as the Apostle says.

If Paul teaches these things about hair, his thoughts may **J.221** apply to praise of the Church. The Song says, "Your hair is as flocks of goats which have appeared from Galaad." The text presents an excellent way of living here, but adds that hair is completely devoid of a living sensation. In no small way does this text enhance the bride's praise, for hair lacks the sensation of pain and pleasure. Hair growing from the body feels pain if plucked out but lacks feeling if cut, scorched or groomed by fastidious care. To lack sense perception is a sign of being dead. Therefore, the person without feeling for this world's values is neither swollen up from glory and honor, nor sad on account of injury or disgrace, but he guards himself when confronted with any of these adversaries. Such is the noble praise of the bride's hair: it shows itself completely dead and unmoved by things of this world in every circumstance.

J.222 The excessive amount of hair is compared to the goat herds which have appeared from Galaad, an obscure point we should not leave unconsidered. We surmise that just as the king made a litter for himself by changing the trees of Lebanon into gold, silver, purple and precious stones, the good **M.924** shepherd of the flocks of goats knows how to change the herds on Mount Galaad. The name of this mountain revealing such a marvel pertains to the nations. Those following the good shepherd from out of the nations share in the beauty of the bride's hair which, as we said earlier, signifies chastity, modesty, abstinence and bodily mortification. Perhaps Elijah corresponds to our consideration of the goats when he practiced the ascetical life for a long time on Mount Galaad.¹ In an outstanding way, Elijah led a life of abstinence and wore a thick cloak of goat hair instead of a soft garment of goat's skin. Thus persons following the prophet's example become **J.223** an adornment of the Church; holding fast to a philosophic way of life, they gather in herds to perform virtue among themselves. The revelation of these herds from Galaad intensifies their praise because our conversion brought us from a Gentile way of life to one of philosophy with regard to God. Holy Mount Sion did not prescribe this kind of life but the Gentiles, though being devoted to idols, adapted it in order to adorn the bride's head with its superior virtue.

¹This reference is not found in scripture. 1Kg 17.1 has Elijah called "the Tishbite, of Tishbite in Gilead." 2Kg reads "(the captain) went up to Elijah who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, 'O man of God, come down.'" This refers to a request from King Ahaziah who wanted Elijah to cure him from injuries suffered in a fall.

The Song next sets before us the bride's teeth while omitting praise of her mouth and lips, a fact worth examining. Why are her teeth praised before her lips? Perhaps it is because a person wishing to show a more subtle kind of beauty indicates a smile on the mouth by a slight outline of teeth. However, I look at it in another way: beauty pertaining to teeth should be praised for a different reason than that of the mouth. The bride's lips by no means lack praise when the bridegroom says they are as a "thread of scarlet" and her "speech is lovely."

What can I gather from this? The best procedure is to **J.224** first be taught and then speak. He [Plato]² when says that teachings are food for the soul does not swerve from the truth. Just as material food is reduced into small pieces for our stomach, there is a certain capacity in the soul which reduces teachings into small pieces, enabling it to comprehend them. The Song symbolically names "teeth" discerning and perceptive teachers who enable us to learn and profit from such teachings. For this reason, praise bestows loveliness upon teeth only if the praise of lips is joined to them: the lips cannot blossom in spiritual praise unless the teeth, by diligent care, bestow grace upon these lips when they speak. We will examine the teeth's beauty by the praises which follow.

Now is the time to examine the beauty attributed to the **M.925** teeth of shorn sheep: "Your teeth are as flocks of shorn **J.225** sheep which have come up from the washing: all of them bearing twins, and there is not a barren one among them" [4.2]. If we look at the literal meaning of this verse, I do not see how teeth can be compared to prolific sheep. Praise of teeth applies to their firm, well ordered position which is rooted in the gums. The flocks had been scattered in the valleys and now come up from the washing. They describe the beauty of the bride's teeth, but we cannot easily comprehend what this means. Her teeth are set beside each other in rows while these flocks are scattered from each other and have become lost in their need for pasture. But a wool-bearing animal does not compare well with sheep having their teeth bared. It is indeed worth investigating how the beauty of teeth can be harmonized with flocks hearing twins whose wool is shorn off and whose bodies are cleansed from dirt.

What can we gather from these words? Persons reducing the divine mysteries into small fragments for a clearer interpretation of the text make spiritual food more easily acceptable for the body of the Church. They perform the function of teeth by receiving the thick, dense bread of the text **J.226** into their mouths; by a more subtle contemplation, they make the food delectable (It is better to give the sense of these words by some examples). Such food the blessed Paul simply and without elaboration now offers us as an unworked-over morsel of the Law's precepts: "Do not muzzle the ox when treading out the grain" [1Cor 9.9]. Again, Paul softens the Law's meaning by an explanation of the text to make it acceptable: "It is for oxen that God is concerned; are not all things written for our sake?" And again, "Abraham had two sons, one from a slave girl and one from a freed woman" [Gal 4.22]. This bread is not worked over for us. But how does he reduce it to small pieces for eating? He transfers the story into two Testaments, "one born into slavery, the other free from bondage." Thus Paul reduces the dense body of the Law (let us not dwell on each example) into fine pieces and makes it spiritual **J.227** through contemplation: "We know the Law is spiritual" [Rom 7.14]. What we understand from Paul is the need for teeth in the Church to clarify its teachings by breaking them into small pieces. We say this in imitation of Paul who clarifies for us the mysteries (of Scripture). The teeth of the Church thus make the unworked-over grass of the divine words light and small for us. In the same **M.928** way the divine Apostle describes the life of those desiring the noble office of the episcopate [1Tim 3.1-7]. He speaks of the qualifications pertaining to one who

²Cf. Plato's dialogue, **Protagoras** 313c.

accepts the office of priesthood and includes the grace for teaching with all the other gifts. Thus the Song first wishes those ordained for the ministry of teeth in the Church to be shorn, from every material burden. Then with their conscience cleaned in a bath from every defilement both of body and of spirit, they constantly rise by progressing and never slip back into the depths from which they came. They are heralded as pregnant with a two-fold offspring of the good, that is, every kind of virtue and **J.228** are fruitful in good actions. This double conception is a symbol of our good repute that we may be these teeth hearing twins which beget freedom from passion and dignity in our life.

The text next adds a fitting praise to the bride's lips by comparing their beauty to a "scarlet thread," the interpretation of which further adorns her lovely speech. This point was already considered where the lip's beauty is adorned with the ministry of teeth, for by the teeth (that is, the teeth are first shorn, washed, are not sterile and hear twins; then the bride's lips are adorned with a scarlet form when the entire Church has one lip and one voice in harmony with the good. The bride's beauty has two aspects. Not only do her lips form a thread, but they have the lovely color of a flower. Both thread and scarlet retain their own loveliness and functions as they adorn the Church's mouth. The thread's example teaches us to be of one mind, that is, one cord formed **J.229** from different threads. The scarlet color reminds us to be attentive to the blood by which we are delivered and to always have a confession on our mouths by the blood which redeemed us. The comeliness of lips fills out those of the Church when the faith of our confession shines forth and when love is entwined with faith.

To understand this analogy better, we offer the following remarks. Faith is the scarlet thread made through love, for scarlet is signified by faith, and the thread is interpreted by love. Truth bears witness that the lips of the bride are adorned by these two elements. Her beautiful lips do not need more detailed explanation, for the Apostle clarified their symbolism saying that this speech is the word of faith we proclaim: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and **M.929** believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Faith in the heart leads to righteousness and confession in the mouth to salvation" [Rom 10.9-10]. This is the lovely speech adorning the Church's lips with that scarlet thread.

The bridegroom is pleased with the beauty of his bride's mouth and redness of her cheeks. That part of the face is customarily called an apple because of its characteristics. For this reason the bridegroom compares the apple of his spouse's **J.230** cheeks to a pomegranate's skin as follows: "Like the skin of a pomegranate is your cheek apart from your being silent" [4.3]. The fact that the bride's modesty is praised can be easily understood from the sequence of the text. The Word who fashions the Church into an image of a bride and who appropriately distributes virtues to each member by a description of her face's loveliness now praises temperance by the flushed ruddiness of the bride's cheeks which adorn her like a pomegranate. This fruit is tart and its skin lacks nourishment. Therefore the exercise of temperance rightly partakes of contemplation, for just as the pomegranate's tart skin is nourishing and guards the fruit's sweetness by completely surrounding it, so is a harsh, austere life of self-control a guardian for the benefits of temperance. Hence, this virtue's praise has two aspects: the external appearances of a well-ordered life and correct actions of a soul free from passion "Whose **J.231** praise is not from men, but from God" [Rom 2.29], as the Apostle says. Modesty illumines these persons and has its own praise in external conduct, while "apart from your being silent" [4.1] and hidden wonders are seen by that eye alone which beholds hidden things.

By the following examples we learn that everything done by the divinely inspired saints becomes a type and lesson for persons who act virtuously. Marriage, migrations, wars, and tools for building all prefigure the life to come. "These scriptures are written for your understanding

to which the end of ages reaches" [1Cor 10.11]. War against enemies counsels us to be strong against foreigners, and earnestness in opposing matrimony mysteriously suggests dwelling with a life of virtue. Just as migrations suggest the foundation of a virtuous life, care in the construction of buildings exhorts us to show concern for our house built through the virtues. Therefore it seems to me that the tower viewed from all around and to which David fixed the choicest booty, looked for the coming **J.232** of the Church and prefigured those striving in virtue. Once the **M.932** alien tribes were reduced to servitude, the king acquired this height with the rest of the tribes' possessions. The king showed through his wisdom the good of human life which David foresaw through the tower's construction, that is, a symbol of our future life. The beauty of the entire Church's body will, in the future, be glorified in each member through some kind of comparison and likeness. Consequently, the text describes those having the place of neck among the people by mentioning the tower of David which is recognized by its parapets. The parapets are called "Thalpiath."

"Your neck is as the tower of David that was built for an armory (*thalpiath*); a thousand shields hang upon it and **J.233** all the spears of mighty men" [4.4]. The tower's physical construction and conspicuous position seen from all sides is the work of King David. The number one thousand shows the great number of shields and spears. Our aim, however, is to consider the value of this divinely inspired text. Why is the neck, a member of the Church, compared to this tower? First it is worthwhile to examine that part of our body, the neck and then apply, the name of this bodily member to the Church. What is rooted between one's shoulders upholds the head, acts as a base, and is called a neck. It is supported by bones located in our back while at the same time it is free from the encompassing structure of bones. However, this type of bone is not like the forearm or leg bone, unbroken and not separated, but it is divided into vertebrae which form nerves, marrow and ligaments. Their unity is formed by each of these elements, and by means of the pipe-like structure of marrow in the neck's center there is space for membranes whose wrappings contribute to make up the head. The neck **J.234** has a windpipe situated in front. It is a receptacle for the outside breath to be inhaled by which the heart's fire is fanned. The neck also has passages for food in the throat; all food enters the stomach through the gullet. The neck has another important role, namely, speech, which originates from our vocal chords. Sound is generated here by a breath whirling around inside the windpipe. Thus it is easier to understand **M.933** the neck of the Church's body after having examined the anatomy of a human neck which the Song compares to a tower of David.

If anyone bears the true head of all creation (Christ, from whom the entire body is put in harmony and brought together [Eph 4.16]), he rightly desires to be called a neck. If our heart is capable of understanding these things, the Spirit warms it **J.235** like fire, provided that it complies to his word through the sound of his voice. God does not fashion the human voice for any reason except to be an instrument of his word whose movements pass through the heart. The neck has the function of nourishing, I mean teaching, which gives strength to the entire body of the Church. The intake of food constantly maintains the body in existence without which it weakens and wastes away.

Let a person imitate the harmonious setting of vertebrae which taken singularly are persons joined in a bond of peace to form one member which binds and keeps itself erect and can easily move from side to side. Paul was such a neck. If anyone follows the example of Paul, a chosen vessel for the Lord [Acts 9.15] and bearer of the Lord's name, and whose head has brought all the limbs fully into harmony, whatever this person speaks, it is no longer him but the head, Christ, speaking and talking as Paul showed the Corinthians [2Cor 13.3]. **J.236** Thus the windpipe articulates the word of truth with a sweet and pleasant sound from the Holy Spirit. The upper part of the throat always sweetens the windpipe with divine words and nourishes the

entire body by these life-giving teachings. The vertebrae effect harmony in the body by the bond of peace and love. Who teaches the neck to bend down in humility, turn all around, raise itself up again to perceive those things on high, look sideways, to turn away gracefully and beware of the devil's various deceits? David constructed such a neck.

The king sprung from David his father prepared man to be the tower secure from falling. By grace David built it up with many shields so that the enemy could not easily approach it. The shields are suspended, not lying on the ground, and are viewed held in the air; with them are the javelins which strike fear into the enemy so that they may not attempt to assault the tower. I think that this tower with a multitude of shields and **J.237** spears signify the angelic guard. The text does not simply **M.936** mention spears but shows by the addition of mighty men fighting on our behalf that the Song concurs with the Psalm's words: "The angel of the Lord will surround those who fear him and will rescue them" [Ps 33.8]. The number "one thousand" does not accurately represent to me the number ten times one hundred but shows a multitude. Scripture usually shows a multitude by this number [one thousand]. As David says, "Ten thousand-fold of rejoicing ones" [Ps 67.18], and "better than thousands of gold and silver" [Ps 118.72].

We have just considered the neck rooted upon the shoulders. We understand these shoulders on which the neck is set as strong, effective means by which our arms bring about salvation. He who carefully pays attention to the sequence of the Song's words understands the growth of the exalted soul in the good with respect to God. He knows that when the bride was first loved, she was compared to a horse which fought the Egyptian tyrant and had a lovely neck adorned **J.238** with chains. Now the text hears witness to the greatness of the bride's perfection because her neck's beauty is not compared to chains and necklaces but is said to be a tower due to its greatness. The tower is viewed from round about and looked at from afar because of its magnificent structure rising on high and its location above the neighboring area. When this tower, the work of the king, attains the lofty commonwealth of heaven, it shows the truth of the Lord's words, "A city situated upon a mountain cannot be hidden" [Mt. 5.14]. I ask you to understand the tower as this city.

Let us now consider the "two fawns of the antelope" which live near the bride's heart and are called "breasts." **J.239** "Your two breasts are as two twin fawns of an antelope that feed among the lilies" [4.5]. The heart situated between these two breasts does not have grass and thorns for pasture but lilies whose blossom endures during the entire time of pasturing. The lilies do not flower nor fade away at certain times but provide food for the fawns that the shadows of error may no longer dominate this life; rather, the light now brightening every place, illumines all things by the day, breathing light wherever it wishes. For the Song says, "Until the day breathes and the shadows depart" [4.6]. You know from the Gospel that the Spirit is holy: it blows where it wishes and illumines those who know from where he comes and to where he goes [Jn 3.8]. The Song says, "Your two breasts are as two twin fawns of an antelope that feed **M.937** among the lilies. Until the day breathes and the shadows depart" [4.5-6]. But the "day" is called the Holy Spirit who **J.240** breathes light into whomever he begets. I do not think we should doubt the meaning of these words. If the Holy Spirit begets sons of light and day, should we not understand the Holy Spirit as light and day whose breath expels the vanity of shadows? Shadows must not remain but depart and withdraw once the sun appears. It would be opportune to add to our examination of the text the mystery of the antelope's two fawns which bear twins; they have lilies for food and a good, fertile land for pasture. The place of pasture is the heart according to the Lord's parable [Mt 13.3]; those pasturing and gathering pure thoughts from it are fattened. The lily's blossom has two benefits: their fragrance, combined with color, makes them desirable for plucking either for their scent or for the loveliness of their beauty which delights the eyes. However, their scent is filled with the good odor of Christ while purity and

undefilement appear through their form.

Perhaps the obscurity of the Song's text can now be **J.241** clarified for us. When two people separately consider the text, the literal and spiritual meaning, these two persons going through life together have a birth with two aspects: neither does the soul come before the body, nor is the body created before the soul but both are simultaneously brought into life. Their nourishment is purity, a good scent and whatever else the virtues bring forth abundantly. There is, however, something more eager to destroy than to nourish, whose blossoms are not nourished by the virtues but delight in thorns and burrs. We have heard the Gospel's parable [Mt 7.16] naming sins what the serpent's curse made into an evil shoot. Since a critical eye is needed to discern carefully between the lily and thorn, to choose what is salvific and to reject what is corruptible, **J.242** the person with such an eye becomes a breast for infants like the great Paul [1Cor 3.1-6], and he nourishes the newly born of the Church with milk. The Song named the two breasts twins born together which are compared to an antelope's fawns, testifying to the excellency of this bodily member for the Church. Because a person is led to the pasture of pure lilies by each breast through accurate discernment and distinguishes the thorn from that which is nourishing, he is guided by the governing principle symbolized by the heart which nourishes the breasts. A breast does not shut grace up in itself but gives the teat of the Word to those in need, thereby **M.940** providing nourishing food to its children [cf. 1Th 2.7].

Up to this point the bodily members of the Church are praised, and in the words which follow, praise is bestowed upon the entire body when through death, Christ destroys death's power [Heb 2.14] and when he ascends to his own glorious divinity which he had before the world's creation. **J.243** For when the bridegroom says, "I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense" [4.6] through the sufferings of myrrh and frankincense, the Song adds the glory of divinity indicated by the words, "You are all fair, my companion, and there is no spot in you" [4.7]. These words teach us that no one takes his own life from himself: Christ, however, has power to lay it down and take it up again [1Jn 10.18]. He goes to the "mountain of myrrh" not by his own power in order that he may boast but by his own grace after he had submitted to death for sinners [Rom 5.8]. Human nature cannot be purged from the stain (of sin) unless the Lamb who takes the sin of the world destroys evil [Jn 1.29]. Therefore the Song says, "You are all fair, my companion, and there is no spot in you." And adding to this the mystery of the Passion by the symbol of myrrh, frankincense is then mentioned which manifests Christ's divinity. He who partakes of myrrh with Christ will indeed partake of frankincense, for he who suffers with him will be glorified with him [Rom 8.17]. Once in the divine glory, he will be completely beautiful, far removed from any offensive blemish. By Christ **J.244** and through Christ, we have been separated (from sin). He died and rose for us, to whom be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

THE EIGHTH HOMILY

The Song of Songs, 4.8-15

8. Come from Lebanon, my bride, come from Lebanon;
you will come and pass from the top of Faith,
from the top of Sanir and Hermon,
from the dens of lions,
from the mountains of the leopards.
9. Our sister, our spouse, you have given us heart
with one of your eyes, with one, with the chain of your neck.

10. Why have your breasts been made beautiful,
my sister, my spouse?
Why have your breasts been made more beautiful
than wine?
11. Your lips drop honeycomb, my spouse:
honey and milk are under your tongue,
and the scent of your garments is as the scent of
Lebanon.
12. My sister, my spouse is a garden enclosed,
a fountain sealed.
13. Your shoots are a garden of pomegranates
with the fruit of choice berries:
henna with nard,
14. nard and saffron,
calamus and cinnamon,
with all the woods of Lebanon,
myrrh, aloes, with all the chief spices;
15. a fountain of a garden, a well of living water,
springing from Lebanon.

* * *

J.245 When the great Apostle Paul gave an account to the **M.940** Corinthians of his lofty vision, he doubted his human nature, that is, whether he was in the body or in the spirit. He testifies, "I consider myself not to have reached [the goal], but I stretch forward to what lies in front of me, forgetting what went before me" [Phil 3.13]. It is clear that Paul alone knew what laid beyond that third heaven (for Moses himself did not speak of it in his cosmogony). After hearing the unutterable mysteries of paradise, Paul still continued to move higher and did not cease to ascend. He never allowed the good already attained to limit his desire. Paul teaches us here, I believe, that the blessed nature of the good is eternally much better **J.246 & M.941** than what we have received while what lies beyond our comprehension is always boundless. Something similar will occur to those who partake of the good; they will always have a greater participation in God throughout eternity. According to the true words of the Lord [Mt 5.8], the pure in heart will see God. They will receive as much as their minds can comprehend. However, the unbounded, incomprehensible divinity remains beyond all understanding. God's exceedingly great glory is endless as the prophet testifies [Ps 144.5]. God always remains the same as we contemplate Him in his loftiness. Similarly, the great David placed in his heart those wonderful ascents. He always proceeded from strength to strength [Ps 83.7] and exclaimed to God, "You are the Most High forever, Lord" [Ps 91.8]. To me this signifies that in all the endless ages of eternity the person running to you becomes greater and more highly exalted, always growing in proportion to his ascent through the good. You are the Most High forever, never appearing smaller to those who approach you; you are always higher and loftier than the capacity of **J.247** those who are rising.

We learn about the ineffable nature of the good from the Apostle. He says that the eye has not seen that good even though it sees it (for the eye does not completely see the good as it is but only as it receives the good). The ear as well does not completely hear the Word but according to its manifestation even though the ear always listens to it. Also, the Word does not enter the heart of man even if the pure in heart always see it. Although the stage attained is indeed greater than what a person had earlier, this stage does not limit his good; rather, the limit of his achievement becomes a beginning for the discovery of higher blessings. The person rising never stands still. He moves from one beginning to another, for the beginning of even greater blessings is never limited. The desire of a soul thus rising never remains in its knowledge, but by an ever greater desire, it moves onwards. The soul thus progresses through higher realms towards the unbounded.

Having explained these matters, we must now apply **J.248** ourselves to the contemplation [of the Song's] divine words: "Come from Lebanon, my bride, come from Lebanon. You will come and pass from the summit of faith, from the top of Sanir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of the leopards" [4.8]. What can these words teach us? The fountain of grace continually draws to itself those who are thirsty. As the Fountain himself says in the Gospel, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and let him drink" [Jn 7.37]. By these words [Christ] set no limit on our thirst, nor on our movement towards him nor on the **M.944** satisfaction of our drinking, but by extending his command indefinitely in time, he exhorts us to thirst, drink and to move towards him. To those, however, who have already tasted and have learned by experience that the Lord is good [Ps 33.9], the faculty of taste becomes a kind of incitement to further progress. Therefore, a person always moving towards God never lacks this incitement towards greater progress. Let us recall the often used exhortation of the Word to his bride in **J.249** the words already expressed: "Come, my companion," and again, "Come, my dove," and "Bring yourself to the cleft of the rock." The Word uses such exhortations and attractive words to excite the soul for higher things. He now testifies to the purity of the soul rising to him: "You are all fair, my companion, and there is no spot in you" [4.7]. That the soul may not become proud by this testimony and that her ascent on high might not be hindered, the bridegroom again exhorts her to stir up her desire for the transcendent: "Come, from Lebanon, my bride." That is, you have done well by following me up to this point. You have come with me to the mountain of myrrh (You were buried with me through baptism into death [Rom 6.4]) and went up with me to the hill of frankincense (For you have risen with me and ascended in the fellowship of my divinity signified by the term "frankincense"--*libanos*). Ascend with me from these peaks to others, advancing higher by effective knowledge (*dia tes energous gnoseos*). Therefore, the bridegroom says, "Come from Lebanon," no longer as one betrothed, but as a bride. No one is able to live with me unless he has been changed by the death of myrrh into the divinity of frankincense. Since **J.250** you have already attained this height, do not cease to rise as if you have already attained perfection. Frankincense is the beginning of faith which you have shared by the resurrection; it is but the beginning of progress to loftier goods. From this beginning which is faith, "you will go and pass on," that is, you will arrive while not always ceasing to pass on continuing to rise.

The Song now says, "You will come and pass from the summit of faith, from the top of Sanir and Hermon" [4.81]. These words imply the mystery of our birth from above. It is from here, they claim, that the springs of the Jordan River gush forth, and the mountain situated above is divided into two crests named Sanir and Herman. The river from these springs has become the beginning of our transformation into what is divine. For this reason the bride hears her spouse calling to her, "Come from Lebanon and from the beginning of faith, and from the summit" of those mountains from which have risen those mystical springs. The text rightly mentions "lions" and "leopards." By adding these destructive beasts, the bride makes the enjoyment of pleasant

things even **J.251** sweeter. Although man was once made in God's image, he **M.945** was transformed into an irrational animal, having become a leopard and lion through evil habits. (For the person drawn by a lion lying in wait within its den is snared in its trap, as the prophet says [Ps 10.9]. He is changed into that beast after having been overpowered. "Let those who make them become like them, and all who trust in them" [Ps 115.8]. Similarly, a person becomes a leopard by staining his soul with this life's defilements.) At the time when human nature had these (defilements), it was led astray through idolatry, the Jew's error, and various evils of sin. Human nature afterwards passed through the Jordan, myrrh and frankincense and rose to such a height that it now walks with God. For this reason the Word intensifies the gladness of his bride's present happiness by making present former distressing elements which she had before Lebanon, the beginning of faith, and before the mysteries at the Jordan which we have considered. A life of peace is sweeter after war and is made enjoyable by recounting sad times. The boon of health sweetens our body's senses whose nature has been restored after a painful illness. Thus the **J.252** bridegroom imparts to the soul ascending to him an intensity in her enjoyment of goodness. Not only does he manifest his own beauty to the bride, but he reminds her of her horrible, beastly forms that she may delight in her present enjoyment by comparing them with her former state.

The bridegroom prepares another grace for his spouse by his foresight. The Word desires us who are changeable by nature not to fall into evil but by constant progress in perfection, we are to use our mutability as an ally in our ascent towards higher things, and by the mutability of our nature we are to establish it immovably in the good. Therefore the **J.253** Song, like a teacher or protector from evil, mentions beasts that have been conquered. By turning away from evil, we are to strengthen our immutability in the good. While not ceasing our progress towards the good, we do not fall into evil. Thus the bridegroom summons his spouse to come from Lebanon and reminds her of the "lions' dens" where she passed her time in association with these beasts.

The Word's voice is always one of power. As light shone at the creation by his command, and as the firmament was constituted at his bidding [Gen 1.2-24], the rest of creation appeared by his creative Word. In the same way, when the **M.948** Word bids the soul that has advanced to approach him, it is immediately strengthened at his command and becomes what he wishes, that is, changed into something divine; and from the glory which the soul had, it is transformed into a loftier glory by a wonderful alteration. The angelic choir around the bridegroom marvels at the bride and exclaims with **J.254** admiration, "You have given us heart, our sister, our spouse" [4.9]. For a state free from passion illumines the bride as well as the angels; it gives her kinship and sisterhood with the spiritual powers. Therefore they say to her, "You have given us heart, our sister, our spouse."

The bride is rightly honored by the other term "sister." She is our sister because she lacks passion and a bride because she is united with the Word. We understand the words "You have given us heart" as "you have given us life;" it is as though the angels said to her, "You have given us heart." We shall leave it to the divine Apostle to explain these mysteries. He says somewhere in writing to the Ephesians when he explains God's great concern for us by his manifestation in the flesh, that not only was human nature instructed by grace in the divine mysteries, but that God's manifold wisdom was also made known to principalities and powers in the heavens by his concern for mankind in Christ. The text runs: "in order **J.255** that the manifold wisdom of God might now be known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places through the Church according to the eternal purpose which God made in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have freedom of speech and access in confidence through faith in him" [Eph 3.10-12].

Through the Church, God's manifold wisdom was made known to the transcendent powers since it effects great wonders by means of contrary elements. How can life come through death, justification through sin, blessing through a curse, glory through disgrace and strength through weakness? In previous ages the transcendent powers knew only the simple, uniform working of God's wisdom which effected wonders (There was no vanity in what they beheld; by its own power the divine nature made all creation, bringing created beings into existence by one impulse of the will; it made all things exceedingly beautiful as they welled up from the fountain of divine beauty). On the other hand, the manifold quality of wisdom which arose from a union of opposites is now clearly manifested through the Church: the Word becomes flesh, life is mixed with death, by his own bruises Christ **M.949** heals our wound, brings down the adversary's power by the **J.256** weakness of the cross, the invisible is manifested in flesh and Christ redeems captives. He himself is the One who purchases and has become the price itself (for he gave himself as a ransom for us into death). Christ is in death; life does not depart from him, and he becomes a slave yet remains a king. All these and similar examples are manifold works of wisdom. The bridegroom's friends learn through the Church and are "given heart" to understand another aspect of the divine wisdom in mystery. If I may put it more boldly, by contemplating the bridegroom's beauty in his spouse, they are marveling at his invisible, incomprehensible presence in all creatures. "No one has ever seen God," as John says [1Jn 4.12], nor as Paul testifies, can anyone see him [1Tim 6.16]. He has made the Church his own body and by those who have been saved, God builds it up in love until we all reach the perfect man in the "measure of the age of the fullness of Christ" [Eph 4.13]. If the Church is Christ's body with Christ as its head, he forms its countenance with his own features. Possibly the bridegroom's friends saw this and were "given heart" because they looked more closely at that which is invisible. **J.257** In the same way, one cannot look at the sun but must behold its brightness in water. Thus persons looking into the Church's face as if it were a clean mirror see the Sun of Righteousness [Mal 4.2] who is comprehended by that which is visible.

Not only do the bride's friends say to her once "You have given us heart" (that is, you put in us a soul and mind to comprehend the light in you), but they repeat this a second time and add credibility to their words: "You have given us heart with one of your eyes." This especially filled the bride's friends with admiration, for the soul has two faculties of vision: one sees the truth while the other is deceived by vain things. Since the bride's purified eye is opened only for the **J.258** good, her other faculty does not function. Because of this, the bride's friends attribute praise to one of her eyes, the one by which she sees him alone. By the term "alone" I mean he who is comprehended in his immutable and eternal nature, the true Father, the only-begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is truly alone, contemplated in one nature, with no separation or division according to the difference of persons. Persons whose eyes are at variance have very poor vision regarding non-existent things; they divide the One nature into many disparate natures by appearances arising from their own distorted vision. They are said to see much, and by seeing **M.952** so much, they see nothing. Some now look upon God and are deceived by material phantasms lacking substance; they are unworthy of the angels' praise because they are idly occupied with insubstantial fantasies. On the other hand, the person who beholds God alone is blind with respect to everything else. Because of this, the bride makes her friends marvel at one of her eyes. The person with many eyes is blind, using all of them to look at vain things; while he who looks only to the good by the soul's eye has sharp, penetrating vision.

That "one" ornament around the bride's neck will not be **J.259** difficult to understand even if the context is obscure: "You have given us heart with one of your eyes, with one, with the chain of your neck" [4.9]. "With one" is similar to "with one of your eyes," assuming by this "with one soul." The uninstructed have many souls. Their strong passions usurp the soul's place,

and its character is changed to grief and pleasure, courage and fear, cowardice and boldness. On the other hand, the person looking towards the Word has one soul because of its uniformity in a virtuous life. We must make a distinction in the text, taking the words "with one" joined to what preceded it and now understand it to read "in one soul" or in one condition of life.

Another idea follows in the words, "with a chain of your neck." Changing this to obtain a clearer picture we **J.260** get, "You have one eye for looking at the One, and one soul because you are not divided according to different affections. And the position of your neck is perfect, for it hears the divine yoke [Mt 1 1.29]. We see the yoke of Christ upon your neck, and the one eye and one soul are your disposition for the true good." Because of this we confess that "you have given us heart" with these wonders, showing one eye, one soul and the chain of your neck. (The bride's yoke is the chain as we have already stated.)

We have understood the bridegroom's friends as angels who praise the bride. To keep this praise from becoming either false or extravagant, the Word himself confirms the judgment of his friends by expressing his own sentiment. He testifies to his spouse's loveliness by adding greater wonders in the description of her beauty shining in her bodily members. We will return to this later if by God's help, I may receive some **J.261** assistance from on high to perceive these mysteries, understand the Church's beauty, and praise the glory of God's grace in Christ Jesus, to whom be all glory forever. Amen.

THE NINTH HOMILY

The Song of Songs, 4.10-15

10. How beautiful are your breasts, my sister, my spouse!
How much more beautiful are your breasts than wine,
and the scent of your ointments than all spices!
11. Your lips drop a honeycomb, my spouse;
honey and milk are under your tongue;
and the scent of your garments is as
the scent of frankincense.
12. My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed;
a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed.
13. Your shoots are a garden of pomegranates
with the fruit of choice berries;
henna with nard;
14. nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon;
with all the woods of Lebanon:
myrrh, aloes, with all the chief spices.
15. A fountain of gardens, and a well of living water
springing from Lebanon.

* * *

J.262 "If you have been raised up with Christ, set your mind **M.953** on things above, not what is upon the earth." Paul continues: "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you will also appear with him in glory" [Col 3.1-4]. If we have died to our lower nature, life according to the flesh becomes hidden after we have transferred our hope for life from earth to heaven. As Proverbs says, "The wise will hide perception" [Prov 10.14]. We await the true life, Christ, to be manifested in us so that we may appear in glory and be transformed into a divine state. Let us now listen to the Song's words as if we were dead according to the body and not attracted by words with a carnal meaning. For the person dead to both passion and desire transfers the outward meaning of the Song's words to that which is pure and undefiled. Being unmindful of lowly, earthly affairs, he sets his mind on things above where Christ, in whom there is no passion, is seated at the Father's right hand in glory [Col 3.1]. Let us now pay attention to the divine words describing the bride's immaculate beauty. Let us listen as if we had no share in the nature of flesh and blood and have been transferred into the spiritual realm.

J.263 "How beautiful are your breasts, my sister, my spouse! How much more beautiful are your breasts than wine, and the scent of your ointments than all spices! [4.10]. Every one who does God's will is his brother, sister and mother [Mk 3.35] and is a chaste virgin joined to the Lord. Such a person sharing the immaculate bridal chamber is rightly called bride. This is clear to anyone not ignorant of the divinely inspired words. In seeking to understand these divine words, I do not merely see praise attributed by the Word to the bride; the bridegroom explains her increase in beauty: she would not have been adorned by the fountains of good doctrines **M.956** signified by her breasts unless she had first made herself a sister of the Lord through good works, has renewed herself as wedded to virginity by a birth from above and has become the betrothed and bride of her groom. He who names her his "sister" and "spouse" says that her breasts change to something better and more perfect because they no longer **J.264** swell with milk, the nourishment of infants, but flow with pure wine to gladden the more perfect. Tavern keepers have not spoiled the goodness of this wine with water.

Like nuptial joy, these words contain the affection of two lovers who express to each other their mutual love. By similar words the bridegroom bestows upon his Church that which he had earlier praised in his introductory remarks. Right at the Song's beginning the bride expressed her desire that the Word proceeding from the divine mouth might come to her mouth as indicated by the symbol of a kiss. She pointed out the cause of such desire, namely, that his breasts are lovely. They surpass wine and transcend every good scent of ointments and perfumes: "Your breasts are better than wine, and the scent of your ointments is better than all spices" [1.2-3]. We learn this from divine philosophy in other sources, **J.265** namely, that God is always present to us inasmuch as we freely present ourselves before him (David prophetically testified that God is good to his good works [Ps 117.1-4]. Another prophet [Os 13.7-8] calls a person with a savage manner of life a bear and leopard. Such mysterious associations yield an evangelical teaching where the king's character [Mt 25. 34-46] is perceived by what lies on his left and right sides: on one side are the good and gentle sheep while on the other side are the fearsome, savage goats. The king adapts himself according to the choice of those being judged). Now the bride gives a fitting response when she sings of her Lord's beauty and bestows upon him praise by similar words. He accepts her breasts and changes them for the better. Having ceased to **J.266** yield milk, they now give wine which gladdens the hearts of the more perfect who are no longer tossed about by childish concerns. They are now capable of drawing good things from wisdom's cup by their own mouths [Prov 9.2-5].

Having lauded the bride's breasts because they yield wine, praise is added to this wine's good fragrance: " And the scent of your ointments is better than all spices" [4.10]. We must get a

better understanding of ointments from Holy Scripture Every good smelling spice is sweet to our sense of smell. Noah offered such a sacrifice to God, and "the Lord smelled a good **M.957** odor" [Gen 8.21]. Sacrifice is a good odor to God as were many propitiatory sacrifices--thanksgiving sacrifices, sacrifices for salvation, purification and sin. All these are spices, holocausts, whole burnt offerings and parts of votive offerings of things consecrated to God such as the victim's breast, liver's lobe and kidney fat. In addition we have **J.267** frankincense, wheaten flour soaked with oil, a variety of incense and many other examples associated with fire. All are listed as perfumes.

When hearing of the superiority of the bride's perfume, we learn that the mystery of truth presented by the Gospel is alone sweet smelling to God. It transcends every scent of the Law because no longer being hidden by symbol nor shadow, it openly yields the good scent of truth. If any of the former spices were sweet smelling to the Lord, it was due to their deeper meaning, not to their superficial or literal meaning. This is evident from the prophet saying, "I will not accept bullocks from your house, nor he-goats from your flocks; I do not eat the flesh of bulls nor drink the blood of goats" [Ps 49.9,13].

Animal sacrifices were many and frequent. If any lesson can be gained, it is enjoined upon you in mystery, that is, **J.268** the necessity of sacrificing your own passions. "A sacrifice to God is a contrite heart. A contrite and humble heart God will not spurn" [Ps 50.19]. Hence, our sacrifice of praise glorifies such a One who smells the fragrance. The soul spiritually inhales a good fragrance like Paul, a "good odor of Christ" [2Cor 2.15], and transcends every symbolic fragrance of the Law. The soul becomes fragrant in her life, breathing the myrrh of priesthood and the incense of conscience composed from the different virtues; her life is a sweet smelling odor to the bridegroom. When Solomon speaks of the "divine sense" (*he theia aisthesis*) in comparison with the material spices of the Law, he adds that immaterial, pure, good scent compounded by the virtues: " And the scent of your ointments is better than all spices."

The text that follows leads to a loftier praise, testifying to the abundance of gifts (bestowed upon the bride) from **J.269** attention and prayer. Since the book of Proverbs desires wisdom's disciple to go to the bee (mark well the difference between teacher and his disciples), wisdom says to her lovers, "Go to the bee and learn its work" [Prov 6.8]. The bee's work **M.960** in procuring honey is noble, for both kings and commoners use its labors for their health (Proverbs says that the bee is desirable and honored by everyone; although weak, it esteems wisdom and is given as an example of life for the virtuous. The bee is thus offered to us as honoring wisdom).

These words counsel us not to abstain from good teachings but by flying over the fields of divinely inspired words, we are to gather something from each one for the creation of wisdom. We mold within ourselves a honeycomb, so to speak, storing up in our hearts this labor of love as in a hive. The various doctrines create in our memory storehouses like the different cells in wax which are unable to be destroyed. By imitating that wise bee whose honeycomb is sweet and whose sting does not prick, we are always busy about the noble task of acquiring virtues. A bee engaged in this task has truly exchanged the works of this present life for the blessings of eternity. It metes out the fruit of its own labors for the health of both kings and commoners. **J.270** Similarly, the soul becomes desirable for her bridegroom; it is honored by angels and perfects its strength in infirmity by honoring wisdom.

The bee's wisdom instructs us to be diligent by following its example. The manifold divisions of spiritual graces are in proportion to the zeal of those who strive after them. Thus the bridegroom says to his bride, "Your heart has become a honeycomb full of every kind of

instruction. From your heart's treasure come your words. They are honeyed drops that the Word may be blended with milk and honey. 'Your lips drop a honeycomb, my spouse; honey and milk are under your tongue' " [4.11]. The text is so arranged that it offers not just one benefit but is fittingly adapted to all who listen to it, both the perfect and infants: honey is for the perfect, and milk is for infants. Paul thus addressed himself to those recently born. He nourished them with more tender words while to the perfect he spoke of wisdom hidden from all ages; neither this age nor its princes could accept it [1Cor 2.6-8]. **J.271** The Word says that the mixture of this honey and milk lies under the bride's tongue. Here it is stored up and kept ready. The person who must speak has this manifold power of the word under his tongue; it is ready for each listener at the right time.

After praising the bride's mouth and tongue, the bridegroom now moves onto ever greater praises: ". . .the scent of your garments is as the smell of frankincense" [4.11]. This statement shows a virtuous way of living for whoever considers it. **M.961** The end of a virtuous life is likeness to God. Because of this, purity of soul and freedom from the disturbance of passion is exercised by attention to the virtues so that a certain form of the transcendent nature might become present in them due to their more refined way of life. Since the life (*politeia*) of virtue is neither uniform nor the same, it is like the art of skillfully making a garment by weaving various threads: some threads are pulled straight and others drawn crossways against them. Therefore it is necessary to have many elements concur to create a virtuous life. The divine Apostle enumerates the various strands constituting the texture **J.272** of good works-love, joy, peace, long suffering, goodness and so forth. [Gal 5.22]. We are clothed with these characteristics when we exchange the clothing of this corruptible earthly existence for the incorruptible life of heaven. Thus the bridegroom receives his spouse's adorned garment and compares its fragrance to frankincense. However, he earlier said that the good odor of the bride's perfume exceeded all other spices. This seems to be a diminution in praise since the bride was placed above all other spices; now she is compared to just one of them. The Word says, "The scent of your garments is like the scent of frankincense." Frankincense is used strictly as incense in worship of God. It is better than all spices and is worthy as the one spice dedicated to God. Our understanding of this mystery is as follows: The garment of your virtues, my bride, imitates the divine blessedness and resembles the transcendent divine nature by your purity and freedom from passion. The scent of your divine garments may be compared with frankincense which honors God.

From the bridegroom's praises we learn what it means to **J.273** be a sister and spouse of the Lord. He says, "A garden enclosed is my spouse" [4.12]. If anyone claims to be a bride clinging to the Lord, this person is his sister because he does his will, as the Gospel says [Mk 3.35]. Let such a person become a garden in blossom with every kind of tree: the sweet fig, fruitful olive, lofty palm, prolific vine. He must have no thorn bush nor nettle but in place of these, the cypress and myrtle. The great David knew how to adorn this garden as well as the sublime Isaiah: "The just will flourish as a palm tree" [Ps 91.13]; and "I am as a fruitful olive tree" [Ps 51.10]; and "Your wife is as an abundant vine" [Ps 127.3] Isaiah says that a cypress will take the place of a hush; in place of nettles, the myrtle tree will rise [Is 55.13]. Still another prophet blesses the person reclining under his own fig tree [Mic 4.4].

M.964 Each of these trees is a mystery given by the prophets as an **J.274** example which is unnecessary to explain here. Everyone knows about the sweetness of the fig tree's fruit once it has been ripened from bitter juice. In the beginning the fig was sour and inedible but afterwards it becomes a delightful fruit to sweeten the senses of the soul. What benefit does the harvest of the olive bestow through its bitter taste and tart juice which it first had during autumn? Later the olive is changed into oil by proper maturation and cultivation; it becomes

material for light, soothes pain, relaxes suffering, exhilarates the head and helps those exercising themselves according to the law. How, too, does the palm tree make its fruit difficult to grasp by thieves? It keeps its treasures on high and does not bring them down to earth. And consider the vine's loveliness, the pleasant smelling cypress and sweet myrtle. Anyone who considers these examples in an allegorical fashion will see their significance in reference to a life of virtue. Thus the garden flourishes with such trees and is well cared for. **J.275** It is protected from all sides by the fence of the commandments so that no thief nor wild beasts can enter (It is surrounded by the commandments' circular defense and cannot be ravaged by the solitary boar or the boar from the forest [Ps 79.14]). If a person keeps his garden safe, he becomes a sister and spouse of him who says, "You are a garden enclosed, my sister, my spouse" [4.12].

Nevertheless, this garden needs a fountain so its grove may remain flourishing and unceasingly watered. The bridegroom adds a fountain to his bride's praises saying, "You are a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed" [4.12]. The book of Proverbs symbolically teaches us about this fountain: "Let your fountain of water be for you alone, and let no stranger partake of it" [Pr 5.17]. The Song testifies to this by saying "sealed," that is, guarded. In my opinion this clearly means that our soul's rational faculty swells up and always flows **J.276** over. Then when moving to what is agreeable, the impulse of our thoughts assists us in gaining possession of the good. When anyone turns the energy of his thoughts to evil, the flow of water is squandered on strangers. As long as we nourish the **M.965** thorn-strewn path of life watered with the help of evil thoughts, the better plants dry up and waste away; the root is unnourished by moisture from good thoughts.

Because a seal protects the inviolability of whatever it guards, it scares off thieves; everything not stolen remains unharmed for the master. Praise of the bride in the Song would then testify to her excellence in virtue because her mind remains safe from enemies and is guarded for her Lord in purity and tranquillity. Purity seals this fountain while the radiance and transparency of the bride's heart is unclouded by no mire of evil thoughts. Let us clarify this point. Certain things in us are truly our own such as the properties **J.277** of our soul. Others we appropriate such as external things belonging to the body (What does the spiritual nature of the soul have in common with the grossness of matter?). The book of Proverbs advises us not to let the fountain of our thoughts be squandered on things alien to us, that is, what pertains to the body; rather it should be turned to our own garden and water God's plant. We have learned that the virtues are God's plants which occupy our soul's intellectual faculty; by not flowing out, it will be sealed by the stamp of truth and formed with a disposition towards the good.

Let us turn our attention to the praises which follow: "Your shoots are a garden of pomegranates with the fruit of choice berries; henna with spikenard; spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all woods of Lebanon: myrrh, aloes, with all the chief spices. A fountain of gardens, and a well of living water from Lebanon" [4.13-15]. These remarkable words render praise to God on high. What do they **J.278** mean? The saintly Paul alone clearly knows how to express the divine mysteries in the Spirit [1Cor 14.2]. How is a garden of pomegranates sent out from the bride? How does the fruit of choice berries come from pomegranates? How do choice berries form a list of perfumes and spices? In the fruit of choice berries lies nard, saffron, calamus, cinnamon, and every kind of wood from Lebanon. There is no distinction with respect to the spices of Lebanon: to them is added myrrh, aloes and all the chief spices. The garden is praised and is now said to be a fountain of gardens, a well of living and flowing water from Lebanon. Should these matters which I spoke of earlier be true, they are capable of searching the depths of the richness, wisdom and knowledge of God **J.279 & M.968** [Rom 11.33]. In order that we may not pass by the good things of the garden, we will now proceed to the content of these words with the help of the divine Word as a guide. The entire

catalogue of praises spoken of earlier and now added by the Word does not simply attend to the bride's praises alone but gives power that her heart may ascend on high, that is, to the place symbolized by "sister" and "spouse" of the Word. Each of these terms joins the soul as bride to its bridegroom. According to Paul [Eph 5.23], the soul is one body when joined to her incorruptible bridegroom, while the Gospel attributes zeal for fraternal kinship to the will. Next the bride's breasts which offer wine instead of milk are praised, for it is clear that praise effects this work (for anything lacking substance is not praised).

The bride's perfume is then judged as superior to every kind of aroma. She should not be judged as having this perfume unless she truly hastens on high by advancing in the good. After this the honeycombs of the bride's words are admired. They drip from her mouth, and wisdom prepares the **J.280** mixture of milk and honey lying under her tongue. These are not simply words but power, for the bride is guided by the Word to reach higher states so that her mouth becomes a fountain of honey, and her tongue becomes a treasure house mingled with wisdom where she contemplates the promised land flowing with milk and honey [Dt 6.3]. When the Word raises his bride to such a point through her ascents, he leads her even further, saying that her garments have the scent of frankincense. Scripture testifies that Christ is clothed with this frankincense [cf. Gal 3.27; Rom 13.14]. The end of a virtuous life is participation in God (for frankincense manifests the divinity). The soul is not always led by the Word to what is higher by means of honey and milk but after having being compared to the scent of frankincense, the garden becomes an image of paradise. It is not loosely guarded as with our first parents, but protected from every side by recollection of the bridegroom's command.

Do you now see the bride's capacity to ascend on high? Show me again the step lying even beyond this stage. Not only was the garden which bore its own pleasant fruit enclosed, but it was good for drinking after having been transformed **J.281** into a sealed fountain. The bride does not consist of these elements; rather, she hastens onto something even greater, that is, a garden blossoming from her mouth (The person paying more careful attention to the Hebrew text reads instead, 'The shoots, *hai apostolai*, from your mouth are a garden of pomegranates.' The word 'sent,' *apostellomenos*, from your mouth 'is a garden of pomegranates.' Pomegranate **M.969** trees bear every type of fruit: cypress with nard, saffron, calamus, cinnamon and every kind of perfume from Lebanon, myrrh, aloes as well as the best perfumes). With God's help and according to the blessing in the psalm, the bride places these lovely ascents within her heart, always going from strength to strength [Ps 83.6, 8]. The issues (*apostolai*) from her mouth are correctly named a "garden of pomegranates" at a more perfect stage of her advancement. Rightly does the text adapt the term "issue" (*apostole*) to the underlying **J.282** intention: anything sent comes into the hands of the one who receives it. From *apostole* we learn that the disciples were sent to preach the truth, and were named Apostles (*apostolai*) by the Word [Lk 6.13]. What then issues from the bride's mouth? It is clear that the word of faith in those who receive it becomes a garden planted in their hearts. A grove planted with abundant trees is usually called a garden.

In order that we may know the plants which the Word cultivates in believers, the Song calls the trees he planted "pomegranates." These issue from the bride's mouth. The pomegranate is difficult for a thief to grasp because of its thorny branches, and its fruit is surrounded and protected by a rind bitter and harsh to the taste. Once the pomegranate ripens in its own good time and once the rind is peeled off and the inside revealed, it is sweet and appealing to the sight much like honey to the taste; its juice tastes like wine and affords pleasure to the palate. I think that the issues from the bride's mouth is a "garden of pomegranates" present in the souls of those listening to her. We must heed her words and not become **J.283** soft by indulgence and enjoyment of this present life. Rather, we should choose a life that has become toughened by continence. Thus virtue's fruit is inaccessible to thieves and is protected by the bitter covering of

self-control. Surrounded by a solemn, austere way of life, it wards off as though by spiny thorns those who approach the fruit with evil intent.

Once the time arrives to enjoy this pomegranate, we are offered other kinds of fruit for our delight from different trees: not plums, dates nor any other such fruit for enjoyment but various kinds of perfumes. Cypress is wonderfully mixed with nard: one is warm while the other is fragrant. Warmth is not praised when its heat yields an unpleasant odor. Purity, however, must assist warmth by testifying that we are on fire with the Spirit and are cleansed from every displeasing kind of warmth.

Among the bride's fruits are other perfumes such as nard and saffron, **M.972** but it now remains for us to speak about **J.284** the symbol of saffron. Those familiar with this flower claim that it likes neither cold nor heat. It avoids the excess of each while having the capacity of soothing pain. The Song seems to mysteriously teach about virtue by means of saffron. All virtue lies between two evils: a defect or an excess of the good. Courage and liberality may be observed as between timidity and audacity, whereas generosity lies between stinginess and profligacy. Timidity and stinginess, which are defective regarding the norm, are said to be evil. Profligacy and rashness follow excess and superabundance while the mean between both is considered virtue. Thus saffron as treated by the Song pertains to virtue because of its power of moderation, the avoidance of excess or defect in virtue.

While this explanation seems more popular, I would say that saffron's mystery more properly refers to our faith. This **J.285** cloudy-colored flower with an external leaf is actually three flowers. The exterior flower has a cloudy color and once the outside petals are peeled off, three flowers which have medicinal use are revealed. Each of these flowers hidden under the petals, are alike in size, beauty, scent and property. Together they have a good color, fragrance and medicinal quality. Alongside these are three other flowers which are yellow in color and not useful for medicinal purposes. Persons ignorant of the difference may pluck the counterfeit one instead of the real one. Similarly, persons stray with regard to the faith when they choose contrived errors instead of sound teachings. Let the hearer choose either one or both of these interpretations according to his judgement, for in a certain way both mean the same: one suggests perfection in virtue and the other, acquisition of the divinity. Indeed, virtue is not separate from the divinity.

Let us now consider the rest of the spices mentioned in the text: calamus, cinnamon and choice berries. Choice berries are the fruit of pomegranates belonging to the bride's garden. Calamus has the best scent of them all, for it is used **J.286** for priestly sacrifices under the Law [Ex 30.23]. Cinnamon has various uses due to its natural power, some of which seem beyond belief. Some people maintain that if a pinch of cinnamon is placed in a pot of boiling water, the water immediately turns cold. Also, when cinnamon is brought into a heated bathroom, the warmed air becomes chilly. Cinnamon **M.973** is claimed to have the power to destroy anything generated from corrupt matter. Other such examples told of cinnamon seem beyond belief. It is said that if cinnamon is put in the mouth of a sleeping person, he will not withhold his answer to a question but will remain asleep and give a sober, articulate answer. Such things cannot be affirmed unless one learns the truth from investigation; otherwise it would be rash to make such assertions. Anyway, cinnamon is included in the catalogue of choice berries because it has a certain mystical sense. Cinnamon does not grow on pomegranate trees (the bride's mouth does not bring forth any garden in **J.287** the physical sense; rather, it has a symbolic meaning). I do not think we should neglect the stories about cinnamon or anything else pertaining to this subject.

From what has been said, something gathered from each element symbolically demonstrates a life of perfection in accord with virtue. We may say by way of instruction that cinnamon is present in the soul. When a person teems with desire or burns with rage, he uses reason to quench the passions. It is the same with the sleep of this present life: if you place the sober cinnamon of reason in your mouth, you will clearly and accurately bring forth the meaning it contains. This resembles the angels who do not sleep but are watchful. You imitate by truth of speech the sleepless angels who do not shrink away from truth by any fantasies of the imagination. Thus you can say that cinnamon swells up from your mouth to **J.288** quench passion's fire and any seething rage in your heart; as a result, reason purifies the dream-like fantasy and confusion of this present life. Anyone who does not comprehend these facts about cinnamon should find fault with the Song's text because it sometimes attributes untrue words to the bride.

It is known that holy scripture often includes stories from other sources. It unashamedly mentions names from legends to make the sense of its contents more evident as in the case of Job's daughters who are praised beyond all telling. The excellence of their names shows something marvelous: one is called "Day," another "Cassia" and a third "Horn of Almatheia" [Job 42.14]. It is evident that Greek mythology has a story about Almatheia ³: her wild goats were fond of that Cretan whose horn fell and as a result, every kind of fruit **M.976** flowed out of it. Can we believe in scripture what is said **J.289** about Almatheia? Certainly not, but Job's daughters demonstrate the fruitfulness resulting from virtue as shown by their names. Scripture allows such mythical nonsense as "Cassia" and "Day." From these terms we do not learn about aromatic material nor about the sun's course over the earth: we claim that only a virtuous way of life gives meaning to these names. "Cassia" shows purity and fragrance for what is necessary in life, whereas "Day," as the Apostle says [Eph 5.8], is becoming to children of light living in purity who are named sons of day. The bride's praises are certainly valuable regarding cinnamon where a symbolic explanation serves as a means of praise. Once a person has accomplished this and has attained the summit of praises, he always shows the characteristics of the divine image in himself. The text says, "with all the woods of Lebanon." People of keen observation say that the wood **J.290** of Lebanon from which frankincense flows is not of one kind; rather, there is a certain variety of wood while the kind of spice varies with the wood's form. Therefore, the person showing the divinity in any of life's circumstances manifests the beauty of the woods of Lebanon which represent the divine image.

No one can share God's glory unless he has been first conformed to the likeness of Christ's death [Phil 3.10]. For this reason the spices' catalogue of praises mentions the choice berries of pomegranates. Along with them are myrrh, aloes and the chief spices. Myrrh and aloes have something in common with Christ's tomb (As the sublime Gospel says [Jn 19.39], he who was buried tasted death for us). The "chief spices" show us purity and a life free from any thoughtless, reckless behavior. Contrary to these Amos offers us the following: "Those who drink strained wine and anoint themselves with the best ointment" [Am 6.6]. A little before this he mentions, "those who **J.291** eat kids from the flocks and suckling calves from the stalls and excel in the sound of musical instruments" [vs. 4]. Wine from grapes is not muddied, nor is the purity of a fragrant perfume corrupted by being mixed with spice. However, the Israelites had to be rebuked by this prophecy because they bore the pure word of scripture strained from every sediment. They had the pure fragrance of spices and at all times enjoyed a spiritual banquet, yet they did not reject their preference for delighting in evil. They changed sparkling wine into a murky waste and the purity of "chief spices" into the harmful mixture of evil thoughts. However, the Song attributes to **M.977** the bride unadulterated, pure doctrines because she

3Cf. Ovid's poem, *Fasti* v.

yields "chief spices."

The bride does not remain here; she does not reach out to what is loftier, nor does the text tell about her ascent; rather, from the bride's own mouth are the emissions of pomegranates and gardens of spices; she now has become a fountain watering the gardens which flow out from her. We have not learned this as in the case of Paul and Apollo; one planted and the other watered [1Cor 3.6]; rather, both are **J.292** used together, the planting and watering of the bride's gardens. Perhaps the bride's praise contains something more sublime. The text says that the bride is a fountain which does not flow with streams but with gardens; not streams of any water but gardens that spring and swell up. Thus the divine Apostle made "living gardens" those among whom he lived and made the garden of the Church to swell up through his doctrine.

The Song then carries the bride to the highest summits of praise, calling her a spring of living water flowing from Lebanon. We have learned about God's life-giving nature from holy scripture as a prophecy in the person of God says, "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water" [Jer 2.13]. Again, the Lord says to the Samaritan woman, "If you knew the gift of God and who is speaking to you, 'Give me to drink' you would have asked of him, and he would have given you living water" [Jn 4.10]. And, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me as the scripture says, 'Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.' He said this of the Spirit which they who believed in him would receive" [Jn 7.37-39]. Each of these passages says **J.293** that living water is the divine nature; hence the Song can truly call the bride a well of living water flowing from Lebanon. This is indeed paradoxical. All wells contain still water; only the bride has running water with both a well's depth and a continuous flow of water. Who can worthily comprehend the wonders applied to the bride? It seems that she has no further to reach once she has been compared to beauty's archetype. She closely imitates her bridegroom's fountain by one of her own; his life by hers and his water by her water. God's Word is living, and the soul who has received it is living. That kind of water flows from God as the Fountain himself says, "from God I proceeded and I came" [Jn 8.42]. The bride contains his inflow of water within the well of her soul and becomes a treasure house of that living water flowing from Lebanon, rather, rushing, as the text says. We become partakers of God by possessing that well, in order that according to wisdom's precept [Prov 5.17-18], we may drink our own water and not that from another well. We do this in Christ **J.294** Jesus our Lord, to Whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE TENTH HOMILY

The Song of Songs, 4.16-5.2

4.16. Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind.

Blow through my garden, and let my spices
flow out.

Let my beloved come down into his garden
and eat the fruit of his choice berries.

5.1. I have come into my garden, my sister, my spouse;

I have gathered my myrrh with my spices;

I have eaten my bread with my honey;

I have drunk my wine with my milk.

Eat, my companions, drink, and be inebriated, my
brethren.

2. I sleep but my heart is awake.

* * *

J.294 & M.980 Because the Song's divine words contain some difficult, veiled ideas concealed in obscurity, we need to apply greater attention to the text; rather, we need greater help through **J.295** prayer and guidance from the Holy Spirit that we might not suffer the same fate as the sublime marvels we are accustomed to seeing among the stars. In admiring the stars' distant beauty, we are unable to know the means by which they were created, but we can enjoy their beauty and marvel at them. Certain stars of the divine eloquence are bright twinklings and radiances of the soul's eyes. As the prophet says, they are as high as the heavens above the earth [Ps 102.11]. If this is the case with regard to our soul, Elijah's example shows us how our mind is taken up in a fiery chariot [2Kgs 2.11] and raised on high to that heavenly beauty (We understand this fire chariot as the Holy Spirit which the Lord had come to cast upon the earth; in the likeness of tongues, it was divided among the disciples). We will not despair from drawing near to the stars, I mean from considering divine things which illumine our souls by heavenly, spiritual utterances.

J.296 Look up with the eye of your soul. I am speaking to you, listener, with the same voice of the Lord who addressed the patriarch Abraham [Gen 15.5]: look up to heaven and see these stars, if you can measure the loftiness of their minds. Look at the authority of the queen [i.e., the bride] and consider by power of her commands how absolute is her authority. It is not by prayers that the bride obtains her wishes but by the true voice of him who makes a promise; he calls "lord" the faithful and prudent dispenser whom the Master appoints over all his possessions [Lk 12.42]. Having accepted this authority, the queen rules the two winds in a regal fashion and dispenses them as it seems fit: she banishes the north wind by her command and gently calls the south wind, urging it to come to her.

The text thus reads: "Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind" [4.16]. Perhaps these words have something to **M.981** do with those of the centurion at whom God the Word experienced wonder. The evangelist records this by saying, "When Jesus heard the centurion, he marveled" [Mt 8.10] because the **J.297** centurion surpassed Israel's faith. It does not seem to me that we ought to compare the centurion to the Israelite people in the matter of faith but only to Israel himself. He contended with the adversary and barely escaped a fall because of God's help; Israel was by no means immune from the adversary's harm [Gen 32.25-29], for he was wounded in the thigh. The centurion of whom the text is now speaking dismissed by his king's power anything against his authority and managed the king's affairs in accordance with his wishes. It seems to me that the centurion is especially worthy of admiration, and because he says of those soldiers under his command that he dismisses and summons whomever he pleases and orders his servant for any service at hand. The centurion's words contain a lesson because once he has dismissed his servant, he no longer brings him back; once the servant is let go, another is let into the centurion's house (He said, 'Go, and he goes;' the centurion calls another servant, but not the one whom he first sent away).

J.298 I believe this text teaches us that elements opposed to one another do not have the same nature and cannot occupy the same place together. There is no fellowship between light and darkness, says the Apostle (2Cor. 6.14), but if all darkness departs, light must take its place; also once evil is removed, virtue takes its place. When this is brought about, the prudence of the flesh can no longer resist the Spirit (having been mortified, the flesh cannot be in opposition); rather, it becomes a well-disposed minister in every circumstance, subservient and docile in obedience to the Spirit's rule. When the support of the wicked soldier is taken away, the well-

armed soldier of virtue takes his place. He is clothed with the breastplate of righteousness, hears the sword of the Spirit, has the protective covering of armor, the helmet of salvation and the shield of faith: he thus hears the full spiritual armor [Eph 6.14-17]. Then will the body, his servant, fear his master, that is, his mind, and it will readily take orders from its master who applies virtue which is applied to the body's service. The text indicates this saying, "And to my servant I say, 'Do this,' and he does it."

But let us pay attention to the way in which the queen makes the north wind depart from herself and return. She does not order it to be calm in the same way the Lord ordered **J.299** the storm to quiet down when he was upon the sea's waves [Lk 8.23-24], but she commands the south wind to depart and flee so that it might blow unhindered and not be impeded by **M.984** any contrary wind: "Rise," she says, to the north wind. What causes this wind's departure? Proverbs calls the north wind [Prov 27.16] by a favorable name, but the north wind does not lie on the right unless a person has the sun's rising behind him. The sun's course is towards sunset. You indeed understand the mystery contained in these words: the sun rising from the east (for Christ is so named by the prophet [Zach 6.16]) hastens towards sunset, that is, towards the power of darkness; the north is on the sun's right and receives insults on its journey which ends in darkness. Thus the undisciplined person finds himself to be the north wind at the right and blowing with ignominy: this evil wind at the right becomes **J.300** greedy when it avariciously heaps up material things as if they were sand or dust. As a result, the north wind cooperates with each person's errors and is situated at his right hand; however, should this wind be too harsh, it takes on the disguise of pleasure. Therefore the bride makes the north wind, whose strength comes from passions, flee by her own authority: "Arise, north wind."

The north wind signifies the power set up in opposition (to God), a fact which becomes clear to anyone considering the nature of visible reality. Who is unaware of the sun's course from its rising? It proceeds through the south and sets in the west. As experts say, the earth's shape is spherical; if part of the earth is illumined by the sun, the opposite part is darkened and shadowed over by an obstruction between it and the sun. Since the north is always cold and frigid, never **J.301** illumined and warmed by the sun's rays, the ruling power of darkness petrifies souls by making them solid and hard. The Song calls this hardness "north," the effect of winter's gloom. I call "winter" the inability to escape in winter of which the Gospel speaks [Mt 24.20]. In winter, too, the lovely characteristics which blossom according to virtue are extinguished.

Rightly does the queen drive away the north wind with her authority. She summons the hot, bright midday wind named "south wind" by which a torrent of delight flows: "And come, south wind, blow through my garden and let my spices flow out." This is similar to the strong wind we hear in the upper room which came to the disciples [Acts 2.2] and fell upon them as "living plants." This wind makes the garden of God produce spices, gives forth fragrant prophecies and salvific precepts about the faith by the Apostles' mouths and freely pours out the good fragrance of their teachings in every language. The one hundred and twenty disciples [Acts 1.15] planted in God's house made their teaching flow by the breath of this south wind.

J.302 & M.985 The bride now says to the south wind, "Blow through my garden" because her bridegroom made her a mother of the gardens: the text contains both gardens and a fountain. For this reason the bridegroom wishes his garden the Church teeming with "animated trees" to be blown through that spices may flow from them. The prophet's voice says, "He breathed his breath and the waters flowed" [Ps 147.7]. The bride, decorated with queenly splendor, changes the flowing streams of spices to something more magnificent: she makes them flow from the garden's trees by the Spirit's power. This image teaches us about the difference

between the Old and New Testaments: the prophetic river is filled with water while the evangelical rivers are filled with spices. The great Paul, whose stream was a good fragrance of Christ, was such a river of spices flowing from the Church's garden by the Spirit. Other examples are John, Luke, Matthew, Mark and all the others; they are noble plants of the bride's garden. When that bright **J.303** noonday south wind blew through them, they became fountains of spices with the fragrance of the Gospels.

"Let my beloved come down into his garden and eat the fruit of his choice berries" [4.16]. Oh, what a bold statement! Oh, what a zealous, splendid soul, surpassing every wonder! Whom does the bride invite to her feast furnished with her own fruit? For whom does she prepare a banquet from her own resources? Whom does the bride call to feast on what she has spread out? It is none other than him from, by and in whom all things exist [Rom 11.36]. He gives to each person his food in due season [Ps 145.15], opens his hand and fills every living thing with blessings. Descending as bread from heaven [Jn 6.41], he gives life to the world and lets water flow from his own fountain of life. This is the One for whom the bride arranges her table. The table is a garden planted with living trees. We indeed are the trees, and the food offered to him is our soul's salvation. While feasting on our life he said, "My food is that I do the will of my Father" **J.304** [Jn 4.34]. The aim of the divine will is clear since "he wishes all men to be saved and to come to recognize the truth" [1Tim 2.4]. This salvation then is the food prepared for him. The fruit is our free will which gives God our souls to pluck, as it were, on a small branch. The bride first enjoyed the apple's sweet fruit saying, "And his fruit was sweet to my taste" [2.3]. Then she herself becomes the lovely, sweet fruit offered to the husbandman for his enjoyment.

The words "Let him come down" signify choice as in the case of "hallowed be thy name" and "may your will be **M.988** done." Just as these two sentences show free choice, the bride's prayer in "let him come down" shows God the bounty of virtue's fruit. The bridegroom's coming down signifies his love for mankind--We cannot otherwise be lifted up to the Most High unless the Lord inclines to the humble and exalts the meek [Ps 146.6]. Therefore the soul rising on high calls **J.305** upon the help of the transcendent God and prays that he descend from his own greatness so that those here below may easily reach him. He says through the prophet, "while you were still speaking, behold, I am here" [Is 58.9]. Before the bride's prayer went forth, God heard it, attended to the readiness of her heart, came to her garden where the south wind blows, picked the fruits of spices, was filled with the fruits of virtue and spoke of his feast saying: "I have come into my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spices; I have eaten my bread with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, my companions, drink and be inebriated, my brethren" [5.1].

Do you now see how the bridegroom exceeds his spouse's request by his great gift? The bride wished fountains of spices to be in her garden, her own plants to have the south wind blowing at midday and to have the husbandman with the fruit of choice berries. (It is clear that each good scent is sweet smelling while choice berries are not as good as bread for fostering health.) When the bridegroom descends into his garden, he changes the fruits into something better and more worthy; **J.306** he also gathers myrrh from the garden along with spices (For if anything lovely should be found in the bridegroom, the prophet sings of it [Zach 9.17]). In place of choice berries the bridegroom makes trees produce bread mixed with his honey (We have a prophetic statement here, namely, the bridegroom's honey and other delights), and the wine drawn from the trees is mixed with his milk. "For from him and through him and in him are all things" [Rom 11.36]. Oh blessed gardens, whose plants swell with such fruit and are transformed into every kind of nourishment according to the desire of those who enjoy them! To be enjoyed along with the fragrance of the bride's fruit is myrrh combined with spices. They

mortify our earthly members and make a pure, fragrant life from the varied, different spices of virtue.

For the person seeking more perfect nourishment, there is bread which is no longer eaten with bitter herbs as the Law **J.307** commands [Ex 12.8]. (This present life contains bitterness); rather, honey is changed into solid food when at the proper time, the fruit of virtue sweetens the soul's senses. Such an occurrence happened when the bread appeared to the disciples after the Lord's (*tou kypiou*) resurrection. It was sweetened **M.989** with honey from the comb (*to kerio*). A cup of wine and milk is offered to a thirsty person, not gall on a sponge and moistened with vinegar [Mk 15.36] as when the Jews offered their Benefactor the cup of friendship upon a reed. Indeed, we are not ignorant of the mystery contained in these words, that is, how St. Paul was a myrrh-bearing tree who was daily put to death [1Cor 15.31] and who put himself under death's sentence; being fragrant through purity and detachment he became a scent of life to those who were saved. Paul ground into wheat the living plants of the garden for the Lord. The One seated on the throne testified to this by saying, "I was hungry and you gave me to eat" [Mt 25.35] (The bread of gladness is a delight sweetened by the honey of the command).

Again the bride pours out the garden's flourishing plants as **J.308** wine for her bridegroom who said, "I was thirsty and you gave me to drink" wine mixed with milk; not with water which is the practice of tavern keepers. Milk is the first pure, simple nourishment of our human nature [1Pt 2.2]; it is not mixed with anything else and is pure from every source of evil.

Once the bridegroom has addressed her spouse, the Song offers the bride's companions the mystery of the Gospel saying, "Eat, my companions and drink, be inebriated, my brethren" [5.1]. To the person familiar with the Gospel's mystic words, there is no difference between this sentence and the words applied to the disciples' mystic initiation: in both cases it says "Eat and drink" [Mt 26.26-27]. The bride's exhortation to her friends seems to have more weight than those in the Gospel. If anyone carefully examines both texts, he will find the Song's words to be in agreement with the Gospel, for the word addressed to the companions is brought to fruition in the Gospel. All inebriation makes the mind overcome with wine go into ecstasy. Therefore, what the Song enjoins **J.309** becomes a reality by that divine food and drink of the Gospel; as then and always, this food and drink contains a constant change and ecstasy from a worse to a better condition.

As the prophet says [Ps 35.9], those who drink from the richness of God's house and the stream of his delight become inebriated. Similarly, the great David became inebriated because he went out of himself and into ecstasy: he saw the invisible beauty and exclaimed in that inspired voice of his, "Every man is a liar" [Ps 115.2]. By that statement David explained those ineffable treasures. Thus Paul, the new Benjamin, was inebriated and said in ecstasy "whether we are transported in mind, it is to God (Here ecstasy is a movement towards God) or whether we be sober, it is for you" [2Cor 5.13]. In a similar way, Paul showed to Festus that he was not insane but uttered words of sobriety and righteousness [Acts 26.25].

I know that blessed Peter participated in this kind of inebriation **J.310 & M.992** while being hungry and drunk at the same time. Before material food was offered to him, Peter was hungry and wished to taste it. While his family members were preparing food [Acts 10.10], Peter experienced that divine, sober inebriation. By it he went out of himself and saw the "linen sheet" of the Gospel "let down by its four corners." It contained every kind of man in countless forms as well as birds, four-footed beasts, reptiles and beasts according to the different forms of cults. The Word ordered Peter to sacrifice the animals and irrational beasts because once these animals had been purified, the remaining beasts would be fit to eat. The message of faith is

handed down in purity; the voice of God has spoken not only once that "what God has cleansed is not common" [Acts 10.15] but three times. By the first voice we learn that God the Father purifies; by the second voice, that it is the only begotten God who purifies; and by the third voice, that God the Holy Spirit purifies everything. Such is the inebriation from wine which the Lord offers to those at his table. The Lord rightly exhorts those near **J.311** him by their virtuous lives but not those who are far off: "Eat, my companions, and drink, and be inebriated." For he who unworthily eats and drinks does so in judgment against himself [1Cor 11.29]. Rightly does he call those worthy of this food "brothers," for the person who does his will is named a brother, sister and mother by the Word himself [Mk 3.35].

Sleep results from inebriation; it is an occasion for the digestion of food and the maintenance of health for those at the banquet table. Therefore the bride sleeps after her banquet. This sleep is quite extraordinary and different from one's natural habit, for in natural sleep one is not awake. Both are opposed to each other, for sleep and waking succeed and follow one another. We see in the bride a new, paradoxical mixture of opposites: "I sleep," she says, "but my **J.312** heart is awake" [5.2]. What can we understand by this statement? This sleep is like death. In it each sensory function of the body is lost: there is no vision, hearing, scent, taste nor feeling but the body's tension is loosed. Sleep brings about forgetfulness of anxieties; it calms fears, softens rage, slackens the tension from bitter experiences and makes one unaware of evils. Therefore we have learned from the bride that she has risen higher and boasts, "I sleep but my heart is awake."

M.993 As long as the mind lives alone and untroubled by the senses, it is as though the body were overcome by sleep and torpor. One can then truly say that sight is at rest through inaction while the soul has contempt for visions which frighten little children. I speak not only of material things such as gold, silver and colorful stones which arouse greedy eyes but the wonderful marvels in the heavens: the twinkling stars, the sun's orb, the moon's many changes and anything else giving **J.313** pleasure to the eyes; these things will not last forever but will move and pass away with the cycle of time. Despising all such wonders through the contemplation of true goodness, the body's eye becomes tired, and the more perfect soul is not attracted to anything visible; with the mind it regards only what transcends visible objects. Hearing, too, is dead and does not function because it is now occupied with what lies beyond speech. The soul keeps far away from our more animal sensations as if they were a foul stench; I mean the sense of smell which enjoys perfumes, the sense of taste which is subservient to the stomach and the vulgar sense of touch which lacks sight; it seems that touch is for the blind. Once all these senses have been put to sleep and are gripped by inaction, the heart's action is pure; reason looks above while it remains undisturbed and free from the senses' movement.

Pleasure has two aspects: one is effected in the soul by freedom from passion and another by passion in the body. Of these two, the one which free will chooses has power over the other. If a person pays attention to the senses and is drawn by pleasure in the body, he will live his life without tasting the divine joy since the good can be overshadowed by what **J.314** is inferior. For those who desire God, a good not shadowed over by anything awaits them; they realize that what enters the senses must be avoided. Therefore when the soul enjoys only the contemplation of Being, it will not arise for those things which effect sensual pleasure. It puts to rest all bodily movement and by naked, pure insight, the soul will see God in a divine watchfulness. May we be made worthy through this sleep of which the Song has spoken to keep our soul vigilant in Christ Jesus, our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE ELEVENTH HOMILY

The Song of Songs, 5.2-7

2. The voice of my beloved knocks at the door:
"Open, open to me, my sister, my companion,
my dove, my perfect one:
for my head is filled with dew,
and my locks with the drops of the night."
3. I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on?
I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?
4. My beloved put his hand through the hole (of the
door),
and my belly was moved for him.
5. I rose up to open to my beloved;
my hands dropped myrrh, my fingers dropped choice
myrrh,
on the handles of the lock.
6. I opened to my beloved; my beloved was gone;
my soul went forth at his speech,
I sought him, but found him not;
I called him, but he did not answer me.
7. The watchmen that go their rounds in the city
found me; they smote me; they wounded me;
the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.

* * *

J.315 Our Lord has given us precepts [Mt 24.42] to make the **M.996** disciples desire the transcendent once they have shaken off as dirt every material element from their nature. One of these precepts is the necessity to overcome sleep in searching for the life on high. They must always keep their minds awake warding off the insidious deceiver both of souls and of truth, the deceiver who creates a kind of drowsiness. **J.316** By such drowsiness and sleep I mean those dream-like fantasies formed in persons such as rulers and rich lords who are sunk in the deceptions of this life: vanity, seductive pleasures, love of glory and its enjoyment, love of honor and every other kind of deception sought after in this life by careless persons. Such things are transitory and pass with the flow of time. They seem to have existence but are not what we think, nor do they always remain in the way we think of them. Just as the sea swells into waves and has a kind of substance by the wind's movements then suddenly subsides and is calm, so it is with transitory things. They are destroyed like waves.

J.317 In order that our minds may not partake of illusions, we are exhorted to shake off heavy sleep from our soul's eyes lest by our inclination to non-existent things we slip away from what has substance and true being. Christ, therefore, admonishes us to be watchful: "Let your loins be girded and have lamps burning in your hand" [Lk 12.35]. Light shining in our eyes will scare off sleep: our loins girded with a belt will not let the body sleep and the exertion of labor will not allow sleep. The meaning of these symbols is evident: he who has girded himself with

temperance lives in the light of a pure conscience, for his life is illumined by the lamp of confidence. His soul remains sleepless and undeceived under truth's rays, and he is not idly occupied by useless dreams. If we achieve this with the Word's assistance, we will attain the angelic life. For the divine precepts compare us to angels **J.318** saying, "And you ought to be like men waiting for their master to return from the marriage feast, in order that when he comes and knocks, they will immediately open the door for him" [Lk 12.36].

M.997 Those expecting the Lord's return are watchful at the heavenly gates when he, the King of glory, enters his transcendent blessedness. According to Psalm Eighteen [vs. 6]--"As a bridegroom coming from his chamber"--he has betrothed us, we who had committed fornication with idols, as a virgin through a mystical rebirth, restoring our nature to virginal incorruptibility. The marriage ceremonies are complete, and the Word is espoused to the Church. As John says, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom" [Jn 3.29]. The bride-Church is received into the mystical bridal chamber, and the angels expect the king's return while he leads the Church as a bride to a blessedness befitting her nature. He said that our lives are to be free from evil and deception and hence prepared to receive the Lord's coming. By watching at the **J.319** gates of our dwellings, we prepare ourselves for the bridegroom's summons when he arrives and knocks at the door. "Blessed are those servants whom the master finds so doing when he comes" [Lk 12.37].

Because it is blessed to obey the One knocking, the soul which always looks to that blessedness, perceives its bridegroom standing at the door. She diligently watches at her own treasure house and says, "The voice of my beloved knocks at the door" [5.2]. How can we worthily consider the bride's ascent to what is more divine? By exhibiting such authority and boldness, she dismisses the biting north wind, summons the light breeze [i.e., the south wind], makes by the sound of her voice a garden of apples whose spices are the choice berries and sets her garden as a table for the Lord of creation who rejects nothing set before him, but says that all things are lovely: the myrrh, spices, bread with honey and wine with milk. Of these the Word himself testified, "You are wholly **J.320** beautiful, and there is no spot in you" [4.7]. She is now disposed to receive God's appearance, but she does not yet receive the Word standing at her door; rather, she admires the sound of his voice. She says that this voice is not hers, but the bridegroom's at her door: "The voice of my beloved knocks at the door."

You see how boundless is the path for those rising up to God, yet how is it that what the soul has always comprehended is the beginning of something beyond her? We expected that the bride would come to a stop on her way on high because of the words addressed to her. (For what more could she seek after so great a testimony to her perfection?) We then see her inside, not outside her house. She has not yet delighted at the appearance of her groom's face but is still **M.1000** led by hearing to participate in the good. We learn that for those who are always advancing to what is greater the Apostle's words hold true: "If anyone thinks he knows something, **J.321** he does not yet know as he should" [1Cor 8.2]. Hitherto the soul understands only what she has understood, but what she still does not know is infinitely greater than what she has already comprehended. Because of this, the bridegroom often appears to the soul; although not present to her sight, he promises the bride by his voice that he will appear.

To clarify this point, I will give an example. If anyone happened to be near the fountain which scripture says [Gen 2.6] rose from the earth at the beginning of creation and was large enough to water the earth's surface, he would approach it marveling at the endless stream of water gushing forth and bubbling out. Never could he say that he had seen all the water (For how can what is hidden in the earth's bosom be seen? Even if he remained a long time near the gushing water, he would always behold the water as for the first time, for the water never ceases

to gush forth). Similarly, the person looking at the divine, invisible beauty will always discover it anew since he will see it as something newer and more wondrous in comparison to what he had already comprehended. He continues to wonder at God's continuous revelation; he never exhausts his desire to see more because what he awaits is always more magnificent and more divine than anything has seen. Thus the bride wonders and is amazed at her knowledge. Despite this, she never ceases to long for further vision. Now the bride perceives the Word knocking **J.322** and she rises at the sound saying, "The voice of my beloved is knocking at my door" [5.2].

Once the bride has quieted those who have listened to her, the text then says, "Open, open to me, my sister, my companion, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night" [5.2]. Our interpretation will help you grasp the meaning of this text. God's manifestation to the great Moses began with light [Ex 19.18], after which he spoke through a cloud [Ex 20.21]. Having risen higher and having become more perfect, Moses saw God in darkness [Ex 24.15-18]. By this example we learn that our withdrawal from false, deceptive ideas of God is a transition from darkness into light. Next, a more careful understanding of hidden things leads the soul through appearances to God's hidden nature which is symbolized by a cloud overshadowing all appearances and which little by little accustoms **J.323** the soul to behold what is hidden. Finally the soul is led on high. Forsaking what human nature can attain, the soul enters within the sanctuary of divine knowledge where she is hemmed in on all sides by the divine darkness. The soul forsakes **M.1001** everything without, that is, appearances and ideas; the only thing left for her contemplation is the unseen and unattainable in which God dwells. Scripture says of the Lawgiver, "Moses entered into the darkness where God was" [Ex 20.21].

Having considered these matters, we must now examine the words before us which are related to what we said earlier: the bride was "black" when shadowed by obscure teachings. Then the sun looked unfavorably upon her, the very sun that warms the seeds lacking roots cast upon the rocks by temptation. The bride was defeated by those who fought against her; she has not kept her vineyard. Because the bride did not know herself, she pastured flocks of goats instead of sheep. But when she disassociated herself from evil and desired to approach **J.324** the fountain of light by that mystical kiss, she became bright with the light of truth, having washed herself of the ignorance of darkness. Next the bride is compared to a horse because of the swiftness of her progress and to a dove because of her nimble mind. Like a horse she runs through everything she has understood and experienced; she flies like a dove and rests with desire under the apple tree's shadow. The Song speaks of the shade of an apple tree instead of a cloud. She is now embraced by a divine night where the bridegroom comes near but does not appear.

How can what is invisible be seen at night? The bridegroom bestows upon the soul a perception of his presence although a clear apprehension escapes it since his invisible nature lies hidden. What is the mystic initiation which the soul experiences during this night? It is the Word touching the door. We understand by this door the human mind searching for what is hidden; through it the object sought after enters. Therefore, truth stands outside our souls because, as the Apostle says [1Cor 13.12], we know in part. Truth knocks at the mind by means of allegory and mystery saying "Open," and with this summons the bridegroom suggests a way we can open the door. He gives us certain keys, that is, the beautiful **J.325** words of the Song. Names such as sister, companion, dove and perfect one are clearly the keys which open what is hidden.

The bridegroom says, "If you wish to open the door and raise the gates of your soul that the king of glory may enter [Ps 23.7], you must receive my wishes in your soul." As the Gospel makes clear, whoever lives in accord with Christ, he is his brother and sister [Mt 12.50]. You

must approach the truth and be its companion so that you are not separated from it. You must be perfect like a dove, that is, you must lack nothing and be completely filled with innocence and purity. Once you have received these names as keys, O soul, let truth enter and **M.1004** become a sister, companion, dove and perfect one. Your reward for receiving me and letting me dwell with you is dew from my head of which I am full and the drops of the night flowing down from my locks. These words symbolize the healing power of the dew as we have learned from the prophet: "Your dew is their healing" [Is 26.19]. The "drops of the night" have a meaning which we have examined earlier. It is impossible for a person entering the inner part of the sanctuary **J.326** of the invisible to meet a drenching torrent of knowledge. Rather, one must be content, if by a few obscure insights, truth bedews his knowledge: these spiritual drops flow from the saints and the hearers of the divine.

I understand the locks suspended from the head of the universe to symbolize the prophets, evangelists and apostles. Although they are dew-drops in comparison with the truth, despite the fullness and depth of their teaching, each one draws water from dark, hidden and unseen treasures that have become rivers for us. Paul was such a river born aloft on the wave of his thoughts to the paradise of the third heaven, that is, to those unutterable, indescribable words. Paul swells like the sea with all this eloquence, showing again that it is a dew drop in comparison with the true Word. He says, "We know in part and we prophesy in part" [1Cor 13.9]; and "If any man thinks he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know" [1Cor 8.2]; and "I do not estimate myself to have apprehended" [Phil 3.13]. If then the dew and the **J.327** drops from the bridegroom's locks seem like rivers, the open sea and waves, how necessary it is for us to think of that fountain of which Christ says, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me" [Jn 7.37]. Let each person listening to these words form an idea of such a wonder by comparing it to what we have said. If such a small drop gives birth to rivers, how can we form an idea of the river of God from this mere drop?

Let us see how the bride obeys the Word and makes an entrance for her spouse. "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them" [5.3]? Rightly the bride heard her spouse summoning her to be a sister, companion, dove and perfect one so that through these words truth might dwell in her. She did what she had heard, that is, she removed her garment of skin [Gen 3.21] with which she clothed herself after her sin. The bride also washed from her feet the dust with which she was covered when returning to earth after her time in paradise because she had heard "You are dust and unto dust you shall return" [Gen 3.19]. **J.328** Therefore the bride opened a way into her soul for her **M.1005** spouse by removing the veil from her heart, that is, her flesh. By flesh I mean the old man. Those who are about to wash the filth from their soul's feet in the bath of the Word are exhorted by the Apostle to remove it and to cast it off. By stripping off the old man and by removing the veil from her heart, the bride opened a way for the Word. Upon his entrance, the soul makes him her garment according to the Apostle's bidding that he strip off the fleshly garment of the old man and put on the tunic created according to God in holiness and righteousness [Eph 4.24]. He says that Jesus is this garment.

The bride confesses that she will no longer take up this rejected tunic but is content with the one tunic which she put on by a rebirth from above according to the command given to the disciples [Mt 10.10]. This action confirms divine garment to no longer put on the tunic of sin nor to have two tunics but only one, lest these two tunics be incompatible with each other. For what fellowship does the dark **J.329** garment have with the luminous, immaterial one? Not only does the law forbid us to have two tunics but also to sew a patch on an old cloak [Mk 2.21]. This is to prevent the shame of the person putting it on from becoming worse because the patch may not adhere, and the tear of the old garment may become worse and harder to fix. Christ says, "remove (the patch) from the old and a worse tear results" [Mk 2.21] and by it, what is shameful

may be exposed. Thus the bride says, "I have taken off my garment; how shall I put it on again?" For the person who beholds himself clothed with the radiant tunic of the Lord which he put on with purity and incorruptibility is like the tunic Christ showed in his transfiguration on the mountain. This person then rejects the poor, tattered garment with which a drunk and a harlot clothe themselves according to the proverb [Prov 23.21].

Neither is a person soiled again with dust from the earth after having washed his feet. "I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them" [5.3]?, says the bride. For by a divine command Moses removed from his feet the covering of dead **J.330** skins because he walked upon holy, enlightened ground [Ex 3.5]. The text says that Moses never again put his sandals on even when, according to the pattern received on the mountain, he fashioned the priestly garments with gold, purple, linen, hyacinth and scarlet, combining these splendid colors into a woven material that their combined beauty may shine forth [Ex 28.5,8]. Still, Moses fashioned no adornment for his feet, for the priests' feet were bare and lacked covering. A priest must tread on holy ground, and here it is unlawful to tread with dead skins. Therefore the Lord forbids his disciples to wear sandals since he bids them to go on the way **M.1008** of sanctity [Mt 10.5-6]. You are not unmindful of that holy way on which the disciples are hidden to run, instructed by him who said, "I am the way" [Jn 14.6]. We cannot go on this way unless we remove the covering of the dead man.

The bride had entered this way in which the Lord washes her feet and wipes them with the linen cloth girding him (This towel girding the Lord has power to cleanse from sins. The "Lord has clothed himself with power and has girded himself" [Ps 92.11]). Once the bride has set her feet **J.331** on this royal road she watches herself; neither straying to the right nor to the left, she does not defile her feet with mud by stepping off the road. You certainly understand what these words mean: through baptism the bride has once and for all removed her sandals (For the task of him who baptizes is to loosen the sandal strap as John bore witness when he could not do this for the Lord. How could John loosen the strap of him who was never bound by the strap of sin?). The bride keeps her feet undefiled on the paved road just like David when he placed his feet on a rock after washing them from mud. David then said, "He brought me out of the pit of misery and from miry clay. He set my feet on a rock and directed aright my footsteps" [Ps 39.3]. We understand this rock to be the Lord who is the light, truth, incorruptibility and righteousness with which the spiritual road is paved. The **J.332** person not going off either side of the road keeps his footsteps always unsoiled by pleasure's mire. These, then, are the means by which the bride's door is opened to the Word. She promises to no longer take up the rejected dirt nor to receive any earthly defilement on the road of this life. Her soul is now ready to be sanctified. The Lord himself is this sanctification [1Cor 1.30]. Therefore we have finished examining the sense of these words.

No longer does the bridegroom's voice knock at her heart but the divine hand penetrates inside through the door's opening: "My beloved put forth his hand through the hole of the door, and my belly was moved for him" [5.4]. It is indeed clear to a person of prudent understanding that these words are more sublime than what has preceded. "Open," says the Word to his bride, that he might give her the capacity to open the content of the divine names. The bride obeys the Word (She has become what she has heard: a sister, companion, dove and perfect one). She removes the tunic of skins, washes dirt off her feet and does not put on again that ugly, ragged **J.333** garment. Neither does she fix her footsteps on the earth. She **M.1009** has heard her bridegroom's voice and trusts in its command. The bride opens the door after removing the veil from her heart; she opens the door, the veil of flesh; once the door has been flung wide open, the king of glory may enter. But the gate has a narrow aperture through which the bridegroom cannot fit, for he can scarcely get his hand inside. However, his hand reaches inside and rouses

the bride's desire for seeing him. She considers as gain the knowledge of the hand of him whom she desired.

If we linger here a little on the Song, its contents may impart to us a lesson. The human soul has two natures: the incorporeal, intellectual and pure on the one hand; the bodily, material and irrational on the other. When the soul is **J.334** purged of the gross habits of earthly life, it looks up through virtue to what is connatural and divine; it does not cease to search out and seek the origin of created reality, the source of its beauty from which springs the power whose wisdom is manifested in it. Wisdom moves all one's thoughts and capacity for investigation to grasp out of curiosity the object of one's search. Wisdom limits our comprehension of God and is the sole divine operation which descends to our mortal existence for the purpose of giving us life. Similarly, water moved by wind does not remain at the edge of the lake but becomes a spring gushing forth which rushes on high to its connatural state. Once it has passed the highest manifestation of water and becomes mixed with air, the wind's movement comes to rest on high. Such is the case with the soul seeking the divinity. Because the soul reaches from below to a knowledge of the transcendent and to a comprehension of God's wonderful works, it is unable to proceed further in curiously scrutinizing **J.335** these works; rather, it marvels and worships him who alone is recognized by his works. The soul sees the heavenly beauty, the splendor of the luminaries, the swiftness of the earth turning on its axis, the good order of things, the harmony of the stars' course and the yearly cycle with its four seasons. The earth is sustained by God who embraces it. He changes the functions of the stars above. He sustains the great variety of living beings: water creatures, birds, things on the earth such as plants and grasses, their quantities and differences and the properties of fruits and juices. All these manifest God's power.

When the soul beholds these wonders, it considers him **J.336** who is recognized in his works. Similarly, in the age to come **M.1012** all limitations will yield to that life which is beyond anything seen, heard or understood. As the Lord says, "Heaven and earth will pass away" [Mt 24.35]. Then we will no longer know in part [1Cor 13.12] the Good through its works as now, nor will we understand the Transcendent by its manifestations, but we will fully comprehend the form of ineffable beauty according to a different mode of enjoyment, the nature of which has not yet entered man's heart [1Cor 2.9]. Meanwhile our soul's limit of ineffable knowledge consists in appearances whose operation in creation we symbolically understand as the bridegroom's hands. By them the purified soul no longer sets foot upon material existence so that it may not defile its footsteps by being frustrated in expectation for the bridegroom to enter its house.

For the time being the bride has enjoyed contemplating only her spouse's hand which signifies his capacity for action: "My beloved has put his hand through the hole of the **J.337** door." Human nature is not able to contain the infinite, unbounded divine nature. "My belly was moved (*throeo*) for him," the bride says. The term "wonder" (*throesis*) signifies amazement and astonishment at the sight of this miracle. Every soul endowed with the faculty of reason is struck by the wonderful deeds of the divine hand which transcends our human capacity, for the divine nature effecting such wonders can neither be grasped nor contained. Every created being is the work of that hand which appeared through the aperture. So John cries out about this out in his Gospel, "Everything was made through him" [1.3] and the prophet Isaiah expresses the same thought. He calls the hand God's operative power: "My hand made all these things" [Is 66.2]. Man's inquiring mind cannot comprehend that operation: the celestial beauty, namely the sky, the sun or any other wonder of creation. His heart is nevertheless moved at God's power. If he cannot understand these things, how can he comprehend God who lies beyond them?

J.338 I think that the image of the bride's house represents human life. God's creative

hand contracted itself to reside in our small, worthless human existence; he partook of our human nature in everything except sin [Heb 4.15] and filled us with astonishment at his appearance in the flesh, at his birth **M.1013** from his mother who remained a virgin, at the mixture of light with darkness, of life with death, at the shortness of life and at the door's aperture which received him whose hand embraces all things and measures the heavens, earth and seas. For the bride, her spouse's hand represents the gift of the Gospel. Because God was seen on earth and conversed among men, we have known the pure, immortal beauty of the bridegroom, the Word's divinity and the splendor of true light by the work of his hands. For we understand God's hands as **J.339** the operative power of the wonders by which the dead were restored to life, sight was restored to the blind, suffering of lepers was assuaged and every kind of incurable and severe illness was dismissed from bodies at his command.

The bridegroom's hands offer us two points for consideration: they suggest that the incomprehensible divine nature is made known through these operations alone. Through the bride's words the divine nature prophesies in advance the gift of the Gospel. Upon hearing them, we prepare ourselves to choose something better than what the Song contains. The way to the good may be adequately expressed through each of the Song's words. For if according to Paul [Rom 1.20] we seek to know something of God from creation, we turn away from curiously examining what cannot be comprehended. If we cannot understand God's incomprehensible, unutterable nature, there arises an occasion for heresy against the truth. But if we look to the Gospel, we understand the mystery of the bridegroom's hand; thus our faith will become stronger with regard to the Gospel's hidden teachings, and we will **J.340** receive what cannot be doubted through the prophetic words of the Song in Christ Jesus, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

THE TWELFTH HOMILY

The Song of Songs, 5.5-7

5. I rose up to open to my beloved;
my hands dropped myrrh, my fingers were full of
myrrh,
on the handles of the lock.
6. I opened to my beloved; my beloved was gone;
my soul went forth at his word.
I sought him, but found him not;
I called him, but he answered me not.
7. The watchmen that go their rounds
in the city found me.
They smote me, they wounded me;
the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.

* * *

J.340 Those preparing to travel abroad have high expectations **M.1013** for the coming voyage. When they bring their merchant ship out from port and the helmsman directs the ship's prow **J.341** towards the open sea, the sailors offer a prayer at the voyage's **M.1016** start, asking God for a safe journey. Of chief concern in their prayer is a gentle breeze to push their sails in the direction desired by the pilot at the ship's stern. With a favorable wind, calm sea and gentle,

rippling waves, the sea causes no distress because the ship easily flies over the waves. To the sailors' eyes is already present the hoped-for wealth while their voyage is proceeding well and before any danger arises. I use these examples as a kind of prologue, for what I mean is quite evident to those receptive in listening. The vast sea represents contemplation of the divine words. From this voyage we expect great wealth; the Church is this living vessel which expects the riches of divine guidance in all its fullness. But the **J.342** Song's text acting as pilot does not touch the tiller before prayer is offered to God by the entire crew so that the Holy Spirit's power might breathe on us and put into motion the waves of our thoughts. In this way he guides our prayer as one directs a voyage. Having thus traversed the open sea by contemplation, we might traffic in the wealth of knowledge if by your prayers the Holy Spirit strikes our sails.

Let us begin with the divinely inspired words which read as follows: "I rose up to open to my beloved; my hands dropped myrrh, my fingers were full of myrrh on the handles of the lock" [5.5]. The living Word cannot be present in us (I mean the pure, invisible bridegroom who unites the soul to himself by incorruptibility and holiness), unless we remove the veil of flesh by the mortification of our bodies on earth. In **J.343** this way we will open the door to the Word that he may enter and dwell with the soul. This is clear not only from the Apostle's divine teachings but from the bride herself. "I rose," she said, "to open to my beloved" by making my hands fountains of myrrh from which flowed spices and by showing that my fingers were filled with myrrh. By such words the bride opens a way for her spouse: "being buried with him through baptism into death, I rose" [Rom 6.4].

Resurrection is not effected in us unless a voluntary death precedes it, Such a voluntary death is indicated by the drops of myrrh dripping from the bride's hands because her fingers are filled with this spice. She says that myrrh did not come into her hands from any other source (if this were so, myrrh would mean something accidental and involuntary); rather, her **J.344** hands (the operative faculties of the soul) drop myrrh, **M.1017** meaning a voluntary mortification of her bodily passions. This is why all her fingers are filled with myrrh. By using the word "fingers" the Song interprets each activity affected by virtue. We can understand this as meaning, "I received the power of the resurrection by mortifying my bodily members on earth. Freely have I taken this task of mortification; the myrrh placed in my hands was not someone else's but flowed from my own free will. Thus the same disposition may always be seen in all my acts of virtue which are named 'fingers.' "

As for those who practice virtue, you can see some dead to one passion but alive to others. We observe some putting intemperance to death, but they still foster pride or other passions destructive to the soul such as cupidity, anger, ambition, love of honor or anything else of the sort. If these evil passions abide in the soul, one cannot show myrrh on one's **J.345** fingers, for mortification and estrangement from evil do not extend throughout one's life. Once all the fingers are filled with what is understood as myrrh, the soul then rises and opens to the bridegroom. The great Saint Paul seems to have well understood the Lord who says, "An ear of corn cannot grow unless the grain be dissolved in death" [Jn 12.24]. Paul preaches this doctrine to the Church: the necessity for death to precede life, for life cannot be in a person unless it enters death's gate.

Our nature is two-fold: on the one hand, the subtle and light and on the other, the thick, material and heavy. Thus the movement of each has a proper activity which cannot be communicated to the other. For the intelligent and light is characteristic of upward movement, whereas the heavy and material always tends downward and is carried there. Because these two movements are by nature contradictory, the movement of one cannot function properly unless the other is slackened in its natural movement. Between these two is **J.346** located our faculty of

free choice which of itself makes the weak strong and visa versa: our will bestows victory to whichever side it supports. Thus in the Gospel [Mt 24.45] the faithful and prudent steward is praised (In my opinion, the steward represents our free will. He is lauded because he maintains the master's house by destroying his foes. Their destruction is both food and health for what is good in us.). On the other hand, the bad servant who associates with drunkards is condemned since he mistreats and strikes those of God's household. A blow is truly given to virtue when evil has its day. Because of this it does us well to be zealous for the prophet's word, **M.1020** that is, to destroy all evildoers of the land in the early morning and to wipe out from the Lord's city (the city is the soul) all thoughts desirous of evil [Ps 100.8]. Once these evils are destroyed, our better part will prosper. Thus by death do we live when one of the two men within us is put to death, and the Word bestows life to the other. As the **J.347** prophet says, "I will kill and I will bring to life" [Dt 32.39]. **J.347** Paul lived by dying: he was strengthened in weakness, followed his course while in chains, had wealth in poverty, was rich while having nothing and always had the death of Jesus in his body [2Cor 4.10].

But let us return to our discussion, that is, it is through death that the soul rises (If it does not die, it remains forever dead and is incapable of life. By dying the soul passes into life and rejects everything mortal). This teaching is confirmed for us in the bride, "I rose up to open to my beloved; my hands dropped myrrh, my fingers were filled with myrrh on the handles of the lock." Myrrh is symbolic of death, as no one acquainted with sacred scripture can doubt. How can death raise us up from death? I think that we should seek a clearer understanding of this point. We will respond to the best of our ability, treating it in an orderly fashion. God made all things exceedingly beautiful as the Genesis story of creation testifies [Gen 1.31]. Among such exceedingly beautiful **J.348** things is man; rather, he was adorned with a beauty better than other created beings. What can be better than the image of incorruptible beauty? If everything is exceedingly beautiful, and man was among them and created above them, death certainly was not present in him. Man would not have been beautiful if the sullen stamp of death were in him. However, man was the image and likeness of eternal life, truly beautiful and exceedingly good, adorned with the radiant form of life.

God's paradise was for man, and it teemed with life due to an abundance of trees. God's commandment was the law of life which promised that man would not die. In the midst of paradise was planted a tree teeming with life: how necessary it is to understand what is meant by that tree whose fruit was life! On the other hand, there was a death-giving tree whose **J.349** fruit was both good and evil. It, too, was in the center of paradise. These two trees could not occupy the same place at the center of paradise: if we allow one to be at the center, the other must be excluded. The dead center of a completely **M.1021** bounded object is determined by its equidistance from the circumference. Since a circle has only one center, it can never have two centers occupying the same location. If the center of the other circle takes the place of the one already there, it is necessary to substitute another circle; thus the first center is excluded from being its center, while a new circle is described about the second center. But scripture says that in the center of paradise both trees had a power contradictory to each other [Gen 2.9, 3.3]; I mean one tree bestowed life and the other's fruit was death. Saint Paul named this latter fruit "sin" saying that the "fruit of sin is death" [Rom 6.23].

The lesson we must understand here is that life is the most central of God's plants. Death was not planted, nor did it have **J.350** roots nor room of its own; by the barrenness of its life, participation in the good became fruitless for living beings. Since life was at the center of all the things God planted, death's nature consists in the cessation of life. Therefore the death-giving tree which is symbolically presented to us and whose fruit has a power from contradictory qualities is in the center of paradise. The text clearly says that it was at once good and evil,

hinting, I think, at sin's nature. Pleasure indeed precedes everything done through evil, for a sin cannot be found without being yoked to pleasure, for instance, a sin connected with anger and lust. Because of this, the fruit is called "beautiful" by the mistaken judgement of those finding their good in pleasure. As a result, the fruit is found to be evil due to the bitterness of its taste. According to Proverbs [5.3], honey drops from the lips of evil and moistens the throat for a time; afterwards it is found more bitter than gall by those who tasted its sweetness with wicked intent.

Man cut himself off from the fruitfulness of good things and was filled with the fruit bringing ruin through disobedience (the name of this fruit is death-yielding sin). Man **J.351** immediately died to the better life, having exchanged divine life for one brutish and devoid of reason. Once death had been mixed with nature, mortality passed on to successive generations of children. Thus our very life has become death, for in a way, our life has died. Our life is mortal indeed and was deprived of immortality. But the person knowing that he is in the midst of two lives crosses over from mortality to immortality. By eliminating the former, the bad one, he gives victory to the latter. By death man **M.1024** exchanged true life for this mortal life; thus when he dies to this mortal, brutish life, he passes over to life eternal. Undoubtedly one cannot enter a life of blessedness unless he is dead to sin. The [Genesis] text interpreted this point saying that there are two trees at the center of paradise: one there by nature and the other coming afterwards by privation. For the alternation of life and death occurs through participation and deprivation with regard to the same thing. Whoever dies **J.352** to good lives for evil, and he who dies to evil, lives for virtue. Thus the bride's hands are correctly shown to be full of myrrh; by her death to all sin she rises to make an entrance for the Word. The Word whom she admits is Life.

The soul looking towards God is raised to this sublime height as we have observed earlier. It does not know as it ought, as Paul says [1Cor 8.2], nor does the soul estimate itself to have comprehended but runs to what lies beyond, stretching forward to what is before [Phil 3.13]. The Song offers these words of the bride: "Upon the handles of the lock. I opened to my beloved." And she adds, "My beloved was gone. My soul went forth at his word" [5.5-6]. The bride teaches us here that the only way for comprehending that power which transcends all understanding is never to remain in any notion of him but to always move forward and never stand still. Being filled with myrrh, the bride symbolically **J.353** names "fingers" death to evil in every action of life. By her hands dripping myrrh she shows her own free consent to virtue. She says that her hands touched the door's bolt, that is, her good deeds have approached the narrow, constricted entrance whose bolt the Word offers to persons like Peter [Mt 16.19]. Thus the bride opens the kingdom's door: by her hands which manifest her good deeds and by the key of faith; through both deeds and faith the Word prepares the key of the kingdom in us.

When she hoped, like Moses, that the king's face would appear to her [Ex 33.13-22], the one whom she desired escapes her grasp. She says, "my beloved has passed by;" he did so not to forsake her soul's desire but to draw her to himself. "My soul went out at his word." Oh how blessed is this going out and coming in, says the prophet [Ps 120.8]. God truly watches the coming and going of those who are worthy. The **J.354** exit from our present state becomes an entrance to the transcendent **M.1025** good. The soul thus goes out using the Word as a guide who says, "I am the gate, the way," and "if anyone enters through me, he shall go in and out" [Jn 10.9]. The bride never ceases going in nor going out, but she rests only by advancing towards that which lies before her and by always going out from what she has comprehended. In a similar way the Lord's face passed Moses by, and thus the lawgiver's soul kept going out of that state which it had attained, ever following the Word who went before him.

Who does not know of those ascents which Moses experienced? He always grew greater and never remained stationary at any point of his growth. Moses grew right at the beginning when he put Christ's humiliation higher than the kingdom of Egypt; he preferred to share the afflictions of God's people rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasure of sin. Again, Moses waxed stronger when Egypt fought the Hebrews; he killed a foreigner and struggled on behalf of the Israelites. One rightly understands these examples of growth by shifting the narrative to a symbolic plane. Yet again Moses **J.355** grew by keeping his life tranquil when he spent much time in the desert. Then he is illumined by fire in a bush: next he bares his feet of that dead covering of skin. His staff consumes the Egyptian serpents; he frees his tribe from Pharaoh the tyrant; he is guided by the cloud; he divides the sea; he drowns the tyrant; he sweetens Marrha; he makes the rock flow; he is provided with angelic nourishment; he hears trumpets; he braves the burning mountain; he touches its summit; he enters the cloud; he enters its midst where God is; he receives the covenant and becomes like a sun unable to be approached by those coming near. How can anyone fully list Moses' ascents and various theophanies?

But as great and exalted as he was with such experiences, **J.356** Moses still had an insatiable desire for more. He implored God to see him face to face, despite the fact that scripture already says that he had been allowed to speak with God face to face. But neither did his act of intimately speaking with God as a friend make him cease to desire more; rather, "If I have found favor before you, show me your face clearly." And he who promised to grant this request said, "I have known you above all others" [Ex 33.17]. God passed Moses by at the divine place in the rock shadowed over by his hand. Moses could hardly see God's back even after he had passed by. I believe we are taught that the person desiring to see God can behold the desired One by always following him. The contemplation of God's face is a never ending journey toward **M.1028** him accomplished by following right behind the Word. Once the soul has risen through death and has been filled with myrrh, it places its hands on the door's bolt by means of good works and hopes that the desired One will enter within. Then the bridegroom passes by and the bride exits; she no longer **J.357** remains in the place where she had been but touches the Word who leads her onward.

The words which follow confirm what we have understood thus far: we cannot comprehend the greatness of the divine nature, yet we must pass by all illusions. The soul already "went out" from its nature so that its habits will not interfere with knowing invisible reality; neither does it stop to seek that which cannot be found nor does it cease to call the divine nature inexpressible. The bride says, "I sought him but found him not" [5.6]. How can the bridegroom be found when he does not reveal anything of himself? He has no color, form, quality, quantity, place, appearance, evidence, comparison nor resemblance; rather, everything we can discover always transcends our comprehension and completely escapes our search. Therefore the bride says, "I have sought him by my soul's capacities of reflection and understanding; he completely transcended them and escaped my mind when it drew near to him."

How can that which is always beyond everything we know be designated by a name? For this reason the bride understands **J.358** every function of a name as a sign of the ineffable good; the significance of each word falls short and shows something inferior to the truth. She thus says, "I called as best I could, taking these names to indicate an ineffable blessedness, for my spouse showed himself to be greater than any name." Similarly, the great David often called God by a multitude of names and admitted them as being inferior to the truth: "For you are God, compassionate, merciful, patient, rich in mercy, true, strong, steadfast, a refuge, power, help, assistance, horn of salvation, and so forth" [Ps 86.15, 17.2-3]. And again David confesses that God's name is not known in all the earth, yet it is admired: "How wonderful is your name in all

the earth" [Ps 8.1]. God also spoke to Manasseh who prophesied about his son. When asked about God's name, Manasseh responded that he is marvelous and greater than the human ear can contain [Jg 13.18]. The soul calls the Word as best it can; it cannot do so as it wishes, for the soul desires more than it is capable of. The soul does not wish **J.359** what it is incapable of receiving such as God himself, but its choice is in accord with its wish. Since the one called is unattainable, the bride says, "I called him, but he did not answer."

M.1029 The bride speaks further as if she were indicating her dejection, yet it seems to me that we must examine her words which contain an ascent to something more exalted: "The watchmen that go their rounds in the city found me. They smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me" [15.7]. These seem to be words of pain rather than of gladness especially when she says, "They smote me, they took away my veil." If you consider the meaning of these words carefully, they show that the bride boasts in what she finds most beautiful. We may clarify her words as follows: somewhat earlier the Song testifies that the bride is being purified of every garment when it has her say "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them" [5.3]? Here the Song says that her veil is removed. A bridal veil is a cover for both head **J.360** and face as in the story of Rebekah [Gen 24.65]. How, then, does the bride, stripped of every garment, have a veil which the guards now remove from her? Is it not clear from these words that the bride has advanced to a higher state? Having removed her old tunic and every covering, she became even purer. In view of her current purity the bride does not seem to have removed her covering. Even after that stripping of herself she still finds something further to be removed.

Thus the ascent to God always indicates something unbecoming in the bride. In comparison with her current purity, that removed tunic becomes a garment to be removed again by those who find the bride, the guards going about the city (the soul is the city). Those whose task it is to guard the city walls remove the bride's veil by striking and wounding her. A certain benefit lies in this removal of her veil: her eye is free and unhindered to contemplate her beloved. **J.361** There can be no doubt from the Apostle's words that the veil's removal refers to the Spirit's action: "When a person turns to the Lord, his veil will be removed. The Lord is the Spirit [2 Cor 3. 16-17].

Any one acquainted with logical thinking cannot doubt that whatever produces the good must itself be good: If the veil's removal is a good thing, so is the blow and the wound which effects its removal. But a certain unpleasantness is evident from the obvious meaning of the text (for the expressions, **M.1032** "He struck me" and "He wounded me" indicate pain). It would be helpful to first consider the use of these words in sacred scripture, that is, whether it ever uses them in a good sense.

How does wisdom free a youth's soul from death? What does wisdom advise him to do that he may not die? Let us pay attention to her words: "If you strike him with a rod, he will not die" [Prov 23.13]. If you strike him with a rod, you rescue his soul from death. The Song's text, "They struck me," now suggests immortality in light of "If you strike him with a rod he will not die." Unless the youth be stricken by a rod his soul will not otherwise be rescued from **J.362** death. It is good, then, to be stricken as these words show us, for it is good to rescue a soul from death. The prophet says that God accomplishes the same effect when he brings to life by killing, and cures by striking: "I will strike and I will make life to live" [Dt 32.39]. The great David said that this rod produces no wound but only consolation: "Your rod and staff have comforted me" [Ps 22.4]. By these actions the divine table is prepared with the other details which psalm twenty-two relates: oil upon the head, a cup of unmixed wine causing sober inebriation, mercy which follows him so well and a long life in God's house. If that sweet blow embraces such

elements of which Proverbs and the prophet speak, it is good to be struck by the rod from which comes an abundance of good things.

Let us now examine some of the earlier sections of the text which we have passed over. The Word passed by his bride **J.363** who could not grasp her desired lover. He did not pass her as one to run ahead and forsake her; it was rather to draw her to himself. The bride says, "My soul went out at his word." Her soul now goes out from that place where she had been and is found by the city guards: "The watchmen that go their rounds in the city found me. They smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me." If any pains of hell or a robber found the bride, this would have been a distressing experience for her ("The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy" [Jn 10.10]). But to be found by the city guards is indeed a blessing, for what they find cannot be stolen by robbers. Who are these guards anyway? None other than those guarding Israel [Ps 120.4], those **J.364** keeping guard at our right hand, those whom we believe are **M.1033** protecting our souls from evil and are watching our coming in and going out. God is the city watchman of whom it says, "Unless the Lord keeps the city, in vain does he watch while keeping it" [Ps 126.1]. Those whom the text indicates as city guards are the ministering spirits sent to serve those to inherit salvation [Heb 1.14].

The text, however, says that the soul is God's dwelling. Here the soul is found as in the case of a sheep by the Good Shepherd at which all the angelic choirs are moved to celebrate as the Lord tells us. Similarly, the drachma is found with a lamp, upon whose discovery all the friends and neighbors rejoice [Lk 15.9]. God's servant David was found when the psalm says, "I have found David my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him" [Ps 88.21]. After being found, David was the possession of him who found him as we learn from the following, "My hand will help him, and my right **J.365** hand will make him strong. The enemy will not prevail against him, and the wicked man will not oppress him. And he will strike from his presence his enemies and I will put to flight those who hate him" [Ps 89.21-23]. There are other elements to be included in this list of praises.

Therefore it is good for the soul to be found by the angels going about the city. David also suggests this by saying, "The angel of the Lord will surround those who fear him and will rescue them" [Ps 33.8]. When the bride says, "the guards struck me," she boasts about her further advancement to on high. If she says this upon being wounded, the divine rod has penetrated deep within. The bride did not superficially receive the spiritual rod's effect, the place it struck, but the blow is marked by a wound of which the bride is proud. Such is the significance of the text. The divine rod or Spirit is a comforting **J.366** staff whose blow effects healing and whose fruit consists of those other goods listed by Paul, especially temperance, the teacher of a virtuous life. For Paul was stigmatized by such blows and rejoiced in these wounds saying, "I bear the marks of Christ in my body" [Gal 6.17]. He showed weakness in every kind of evil by which the power of Christ is perfected in virtue [2Cor 12.9]. These words show us the beautiful wound which removed the bride's veil. In this way the soul's beauty is revealed, no longer overshadowed by a covering.

Let us recapitulate the sense of the text. The soul which looks to God and conceives that desire for incorruptible **M.1036** beauty always has a new desire for the transcendent, and it is never dulled by satiety. Such a soul never ceases to stretch forth to what lies before, going out from her present state to what lies ahead. Anything great and marvelous always seems inferior in comparison to what succeeds it since what the bride has found seems more beautiful than her earlier discoveries. Thus Paul died each day [1Cor 15.13] because at all times he partook of a new life, being dead to the past and forgetful of previous things.

J.367 In running towards her spouse, the bride finds no rest in her advancement towards perfection. She has made a "garden of apples" with fragrances flowing from her mouth; she prepares food for the Lord of creation with her own fruit; waters her gardens and becomes a spring of living water; shows herself to be all-beautiful and blameless according to the text. Going beyond these, the bride perceives something even more majestic: as the Word precedes her, her head is filled with dew, and drops of the night are in his locks. She washes her feet, removes her tunic and her hands drop myrrh. She puts her hand to the door's bolt, opens the door, seeks him who cannot be grasped and calls him who cannot be attained. The bride is found by the city guards, receives a blow from a rod and imitates the rock of which the prophet speaks, "He struck the rock and waters flowed out" [Ps 77.20]. Observe that **J.368** height to which the bride has run. The bride thus received a blow like the flint Moses struck so that she might stream forth for those thirsting after the Word [Ex 17.6]. The guards then expose the beauty of her face by removing her veil. Such is the symbolic meaning. However, there is no reason for jealousy should anyone obtain a better understanding of the text from him who reveals the hidden mysteries.

Someone may see a relationship between Isaiah's vision [Is 6.1] and the Song's text. I speak of his vision after the king died from leprosy. Isaiah beheld one sitting in magnificence upon a lofty, exalted throne though he could not see his form and greatness (Isaiah would have spoken of this if he could when he saw the other things, such as the number of the wings of the seraphim, their location and movement). He only speaks of the Voice he heard, the lintels raised because of the seraphim's singing and the house filled with smoke. One of the seraphim touched his mouth with a fiery coal; not only were his lips purified but his ears in order to receive God's word. **J.369** Similarly, the bride says that she was struck and wounded by **M.1037** the city guards and her veil was removed; instead of a veil, the lintel was removed so that Isaiah's contemplation may not be hindered; in place of guards seraphim are mentioned; instead of a coal, a rod; and burning heat in place of a blow. There is a common goal for both the bride and Isaiah: purification. As the prophet was not harmed by a burning coal but glorified for being illumined, the bride for her part does not question the pain received from the guard's blow, but boasts in her freedom at the removal of her veil. The Song calls this veil a light garment.

Another understanding is to be found here which is not out of harmony with what we have examined. After the soul has gone out at her spouse's word, she seeks him who cannot be found. She calls him who cannot be comprehended by any name, is taught by the guards that she loves him who is unattainable and goes after him who cannot be seized. They strike, wound and frustrate the bride. Because the desire for her beloved is frustrated, her yearning for his beauty cannot **J.370** be fulfilled. But the veil of despair is removed when the bride learns that the true satisfaction of her desire consists in always progressing in her search and ascent: when her desire is fulfilled, it gives birth to a further desire for the transcendent. Thus the veil of her despair is removed, and the bride will always see more of her beloved's incomprehensible beauty throughout all eternity. The bride is inflamed by a more vehement longing and makes known her heart's affliction through the daughters of Jerusalem because she has received God's chosen arrow within her. Her heart was struck by the arrow tip of faith and was mortally wounded by the arrow of love. "God is love," as John says [1Jn 4.8], to whom be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

THE THIRTEENTH HOMILY

The Song of Songs, 5.8-12

8. I have charged you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the powers and the virtues of the field:
if you should find my beloved,
tell him that I am wounded with love.
9. What is your beloved, O beautiful among women?
What is your beloved, that you have so charged us?
10. My beloved is white and ruddy,
chosen from myriads.
11. His head is fine gold,
his locks are silver fir, black as a raven,
12. His eyes are as doves by plentiful waters,
washed with milk
sitting by plentiful waters.

* * *

J.371 & M.1037 He who ordained the mysteries of the Law through Moses fulfilled the entire Law and prophets through his own person. As he says, "I have not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it" [Mt 5.17]. By taking away anger he abolished **M.1040** murder and by banishing desire, he removed the guilt of adultery. He thus removed from life the curse that comes from breaking an oath by shackling the scythe in powerlessness: **J.372** an oath cannot be violated if there is no oath. Therefore Christ says, "You have heard that it was said to them of old, 'You shall not swear, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear; neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shall you swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your word be 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one" [Mt 5.33-37].

The soul testifies to perfection through the Song of Songs. The covering of its head is removed by stripping off the old tunic and by casting away the veil from its face which we understand as a doubtful, wavering mind. Thus the soul may look straight at the truth. The bride adjures the daughters of Jerusalem neither by God's throne in heaven, nor by the **J.373** kings of God who hear the name of Jerusalem, nor by the honor of one's head, the hair of which can neither turn white nor black. Rather, the bride transfers her oath to the "field," making her young maidens swear by its "powers." "I have charged you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the powers and the virtues of the field" [5.8]. The bride says that she is thoroughly beautiful and cleansed from every stain and that she utters nothing worthless--for this would be from the Devil--but following the example of Michaia [Zach 9.17], she speaks a word from God. If the Lord's statement above is valuable, the bride's oath in the Song must have more significance. Because she is free from every prohibitive kind of oath, she neither has her maidens take an oath by the royal city, nor by the great king's throne. (We are taught here to refrain from any rashness in oaths made to God because it does not lie within our capacity to pledge a throne nor a city in an oath.)

The head's honor is spared--later described as being made of gold--whose hairs can turn neither white nor black (How **J.374** can gold become black or change to white?). Indeed, this oath which the bride extends to the virgins is not contested by the Gospel's law but becomes an

occasion for praise. As the prophet says, "Everyone who swears by him shall rejoice" [Ps 62.12]. That the sense of these words may be within our "yes or no" by which the Gospel wishes the truth to be confirmed **M.1041** it says, "Let your word be, 'Yes'" [Mt 5.37]. If it is prohibited to make a pledge by the king's throne, by the city of his rule and by the true head, only the "Yes" and "No" is allowed; through both words truth is equally seen is the necessary to confirm our souls' ascent: "I have charged you, Oh daughters of Jerusalem, by the powers and the virtues of the field: if you should find my beloved, what are you to say to him? That I am wounded with love."

J.375 We have already considered these words as the sequence of ideas suggests. Now we can briefly state what we have found in the text. The Apostle says that an oath confirming the truth cannot be altered; it puts an end to all controversy by confirming what we know [Heb 6.16]. Therefore the bride charges an oath upon her virgins that they may carefully guard it. Since every oath is sworn by something greater, as the Apostle says [Heb 6.16-18] (no one would swear an oath beneath his honor), we must now consider why the oath enjoined upon the maidens by the bride is greater. She says, "I have charged you, Oh daughters of Jerusalem, by the powers and the virtues of the field." What do these words enjoined upon us mean? We certainly understand the "field" to be the world in a symbolic sense as the Lord explains it [Mt 13.38]. What are the many "powers" and "virtues" of the world proposed in the oath? We should understand these powers and virtues greater than ourselves so that **J.376** the oath may confirm us in the truth of these greater realities It is necessary for the sake of clarity to give another interpretation of the words: "I have charged you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and harts of the field" [5.8]. These words teach us about the world's strength and its power which confirm the truth of an oath.

Man is united to God in two ways: one is not to have erroneous ideas about reality such as false notions about God as held by pagans and heretics. Indeed this is a "Yes." Secondly, one must have a pure mind which banishes every passion from the soul. This cannot be opposed to a "Yes." This two-fold notion of the good allows us to consider that which truly exists and to put to flight passions harmful to the soul. The mention of "roes and stags" symbolically represent the "power." He who truthfully examines these symbols has the consuming, destructive power of beasts. The bride then enjoins this "Yes" upon her maidens: they must **J.377 & M.1044** faithfully look towards God and make their lives free from passion. Once this is accomplished, the "Yes" which cannot be changed will be confirmed in us. As the prophet says [Ps 62.12], this is the oath which strengthens truth in faith and is praised in everyone who takes it. A person truly establishes certitude within himself, that is, faith, when he looks steadily at the truth and lives by it after having been cleansed from every defilement of evil. This person who swears an oath to the Lord [Ps 131.3] will not rest upon his bed, nor give sleep to his eyes, nor let his eyelids become drowsy until he finds a place for the Lord and a tabernacle within himself in which to live.

If we too are children of the Jerusalem above, let us listen to the bride's teachings and see what she desires. What does the bride say? If we put ourselves under oath to the powers of the clear-sighted roes and to the virtues of stags which destroy evil, we will be able to see the spotless bridegroom, the archer of love. Each soul will say to him, "I am wounded with love." The wounds of love are beautiful as we learn from Proverbs: "Desirable are the wounds of a **J.378** friend, but the kisses of an enemy are bad" [Prov 27.6]. Who is that friend whose wounds are better than the enemy's kisses? The answer is clear to anyone familiar with the mysteries of salvation. A true, steadfast friend does not cease to love us even though we are enemies; the foe, however, is both unfaithful and savage. He subjects us to death although we have not harmed him. The wound attributed to the first human beings came through the commandment which

forbade evil (for this wound is thought to be a separation from what is sweet), while the kiss is a summons to that which is both pleasant and lovely. But experience shows that the honored wounds of a friend are more desirable than an enemy's kiss. Therefore the noble lover of our souls shows his love by which Christ dies for us sinners [Rom 5.8]. The bride, in turn, is inflamed with love and shows the shaft of love deeply placed in her heart, for this represents fellowship with God. For God is love [1Jn 4.8] who penetrates the heart by the arrow of faith. If we must find a name for this arrow, we say with Paul [Gal 5.6] that is faith produced by love.

J.379 Let the reader understand the text as best as possible while we now consider the question the virgins put to their teacher: **M.1045** "What is your beloved, Oh beautiful among women? What is your beloved, that you have so charged us" [5.9]? To me this verse resembles what we have considered earlier. The virgins saw the wondrous exits of the soul, that is, the bride, when she addressed the Word, "My soul went out at his word." They know that after the bride had gone out, she sought him who cannot be found by any signs and cried out to him who is not summoned by any name. Therefore the virgins say, "How can we know him who cannot be known by any name? He does not answer if you call, nor is he found when you seek him. Remove then, the veils from our eyes as the city guards did to you, that we may know where to seek him. Tell us of your **J.380** beloved and of his nature. Give us, you who are filled with loveliness and 'beautiful among women,' a means to recognize him. Indicate to us the one whom you seek and teach us by what signs this unseen lover can be found that we may know him by the shaft of love which wounded your heart and intensified your desire for him through a sweet pain."

It would be profitable to repeat this verse so that what we have set just forth may be in harmony with the maidens' words: "What is your beloved, Oh beautiful among women? What is your beloved that you have so charged us?" Let us attentively listen with our veils removed and gaze upon the truth with our soul's eye. How does the bride describe to her maidens the one whom she seeks How does she depict in words his form which she desires? How does she bring to the virgins him who is unknown to them? Christ is both uncreated and created (We say that part of him is uncreated. It is eternal, exists before the ages and is the creator of all; on the other hand, his created part administers to us since it has been formed according to the lowliness of our body [Phil 3.21]. We get a better understanding of these divine words if **J.381** we examine them in relation to scripture. We say that in the beginning was the Word. He was always with God and the Word was uncreated, without whom nothing was made [Jn 1.3]. The Word was always with God and was God. Through him all things were made. Christ was created, that is, he became came flesh and dwelt among us. His incarnation clearly revealed his glory, namely, that God, the only-begotten God in the Father's bosom, appeared in human flesh. John said of him, "We saw his glory," Christ who indeed appeared as man. John adds that "the glory as the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and of truth" [Jn 1.14] was also made known through Christ).

Since Christ is uncreated and before all the ages, eternally incomprehensible and totally ineffable, that which appeared to us through flesh allowed something of him to be known. Our teacher the Church looks at this aspect of **M.1048** Christ and explains it as best she can to her listeners. I am speaking now of the great mystery of our religion [1Tim 3.16] through which God was manifested in the flesh; he was in the form of God and lived with men in the disguise of a slave. Once he took on by way of first fruits flesh's mortal nature through the incorruptible virgin, Christ continually sanctified the common mass of mankind by uniting it to himself in a **J.382** mysterious fellowship. He nourishes his own body the Church and harmoniously arranges limbs begotten through faith to form the eye, mouth, hands and other limbs. Paul says "the body is one while the members are many" [1Cor 12.14].

All members are not the same. The eye does not despise the hand, and the hand does not spurn the feet but through its limbs the body is joined together by various functions in order that the members may be in harmony with the whole. Paul says that God established in the Church, "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" [Eph 4.11-13]. And again, "May we grow up in all things into him who is the head, namely, Christ; from him all the body is joined and **J.383** knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" [Eph 4.15-16].

He who sees the Church sees Christ who builds and increases it by the addition of the saved. With her veil now removed, the bride sees with pure eyes the ineffable beauty of her spouse and is wounded by a spiritual, fiery shaft of desire (*eros*). For love (*agape*) which is aroused is called desire. There is no shame present because the arrow is not from the flesh but from God; the bride boasts of her wound when she receives the point of spiritual desire in the depths of her heart. She makes this known to her maidens saying, "I am wounded with love."

The bride advances in perfection and is obliged to show her maidens the bridegroom's beauty; she does not speak of **M.1049** what existed from the beginning (for she was unable to manifest the ineffable divinity), but she leads the virgins to God's manifestation in the flesh. (The great John did this too [1Jn 1.1] by remaining silent about him who was from the beginning. However, John carefully mentioned, "what we have **J.384** seen, heard and our hands have touched regarding the word of truth"). The bride says to her maidens, "My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out from myriads. His head is very fine gold; his locks are silver fur, black as a raven. His eyes are as doves by plentiful waters, washed with milk, sitting by plentiful waters. His cheeks are as bowls of spices pouring forth perfumes; his lips are lilies dropping choice myrrh. His hands are as gold rings set with beryl from Tarshish. His belly is an ivory tablet on a sapphire stone. His legs are marble pillars set on golden bases. His form is as Lebanon, choice as the cedars. His throat is most sweet, and altogether desirable. This is my beloved, and this is my companion, Oh daughters of Jerusalem" [5.10-16].

All these elements constituting the bridegroom's beauty are made known for our benefit but do not show his invisible, incomprehensible beauty. He was seen on earth and conversed with men; He clothed himself with human nature as the Apostle says [Rom 1.20]; He made the invisible visible by deeds and was manifested through the Church. The establishment **J.385** of the Church is the creation of the world, and according to the prophet [Is 65.17] a new heaven is created in it (faith in Christ is the firmament as Paul says [Col 2.5]). A new earth is created which drinks the rain coming upon it, and another man is created who is renewed according to his creator's image through a rebirth from above. There is a new light of which Christ says, "You are the light of the world" [Mt 5.14] "among whom you are seen as light in the world" [Phil 2.15]: thus many stars rise in the firmament of faith. The multitude of stars numbered and named by God is not the only wonder about creation. Their names, the maker says, are written in heaven (I have heard the creator of the new universe (I say to his own luminaries, "Your names are written in heaven" [Lk 10.20]). In addition to these stars created by the Word are many suns whose rays of good deeds illumine the world. The maker of these suns says, "Let your light shine before men" [Mt 5.16], and "The righteous shall **J.386** shine as the sun" [Mt 13.43]. Thus whoever looks at the visible world and understands the wisdom that has been made manifest by the beauty of creatures, can make an analogy **M.1052** from the visible to invisible beauty, the fountain of beauty whose emanation established all living beings in existence. Similarly,

whoever views the world of this new creation in the Church sees in it him who is all in all. This person is then led by faith through what is finite and comprehensible to knowledge of the infinite. For this reason the virgins approach the soul running on high to perfection that she may make known to them her beloved. She describes to them by the deeds of salvation some indications of whom she seeks. She shows that the entire Church is one body of the bridegroom and gives a meaning to each one of his members. The body is completed only by the unity of each member.

We have given an introduction to what scripture wishes to teach us. The Song begins its instruction with the human body as does Matthew's genealogy from Abraham and David [1.2-17] when they both describe God's mystery according to the flesh. On the other hand, the great John speaks about the beginning of this mystery whose roots lie **J.387** in eternity, and he announces the Word as present in the beginning. The bride initiates her maidens by similar notions because our mind does not first attain God's incomprehensible, invisible nature unless the visible or the flesh is grasped through faith. She says, "my beloved is white and ruddy" [2.3]. The mixture of these two colors describes the properties of flesh. This was touched upon earlier when the bride calls her spouse an apple whose form is composed by a blend of two colors. An apple is white and becomes red, the symbol of blood.

All flesh implies birth with marriage as the means for bringing it about. The person, however, who is not subject to a birth of flesh with respect to the mystery of religion does not submit to the actions effected by human nature nor to the passions arising from the mind. He understands that the generation of the flesh belongs to all mankind. The bride says that he who partakes of flesh and blood is white and ruddy. Yet by indicating the body's nature by these two colors, she does not say that Christ partakes of that birth common to mankind. Rather, God assumed our human nature **J.388** from the multitude of men which he had begotten. From the passage of succeeding generations, Christ alone entered this life by a new form of birth. Nature did not co-operate in this birth but served it. Therefore the bride says that her spouse is white and ruddy; that is, he dwells in this present life through flesh and blood while having been begotten from virginal purity **M.1053**. His conception is virginal; his birth is undefiled and without pangs; his bridal chamber is the power of the Most High overshadowing the virgin like a cloud; he is a nuptial torch of the Holy Spirit's splendor; his bed is free from passion and his marriage is incorruptibility.

The bridegroom born under such circumstances as these is rightly called "chosen from myriads:" He was free from birth resulting from marriage because his existence does not come from marriage. No terminology pertaining to human birth can rightly pertain to Christ's incorruptible, painless birth because virginity and childbirth cannot apply to the bridegroom at the same time. As the Son is given to us without the Father, the child is begotten without birth. The virgin did not know how the divine body was produced in her body **J.389** and did not undergo birth pangs. As the prophet Isaiah says, "Before she travailed she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man-child" [Is 66.7]. Therefore Christ was chosen and was unfamiliar with any of birth's consequences. His mortal existence did not begin in pleasure nor did it come forth through pain. This happened in good order and time. Because woman brought death to human nature through sin, she was condemned to give birth in pain and labor [Gen 3.16]. It was indeed necessary that the mother of life conceive her child with joy and to perfect her act of giving birth in joy. The archangel said to her, "Rejoice, full of grace" [Lk 1.28]. His message banished grief which from the beginning we inherited through childbirth under sin. This, then, is he who alone was begotten by a new and special kind of generation "from all the myriads." Rightly is he called "white and ruddy" because of his flesh and blood and "chosen from myriads" because of his incorruptibility and freedom from birth pangs. For

this reason his birth is distinct from any other birth. The bride adapts these words to her spouse because of his other forms of birth. You indeed know how often he, the first born of the new creation, the first born of many brothers, came to birth [Rom 8.29]. He is the first **J.390** born from the dead [Col 1.18] who first loosened death's pangs and prepared a birth from the dead by his resurrection [Acts 2.24]. Christ was begotten in all these births while he did not suffer childbirth itself. He did not experience birth by a generation through water, nor a re-birth from the dead, nor a birth in his status of first born of this divine creation; rather, his birth is free from pain. For this reason the bride says "chosen from among myriads."

Now let us consider the bridegroom's beauty which is praised in each of his bodily limbs: "His head is fine gold **M.1056** (*kephaz*)" [5.11]. If the Hebrew is translated into our [Greek] language, *kephaz* signifies pure, uncontaminated gold which is free from any impurity. It seems to me that those translating Hebrew into Greek have left the term *kephaz* unexplained; they could not find any word to convey the Hebrew meaning. We have learned however, that *kephaz* represents uncorrupted purity because it is free from anything base. We have come to understand that this term pertains to Christ as head of his body the Church [Col 1.18]. We maintain that this word **J.391** does not refer to Christ's eternal divinity but to that man who received the divinity. He was seen upon earth and conversed among men; He was an offshoot of virginity in which dwelt bodily the fullness of his divinity; He was the first fruit of the common mass of dough by which the Word assumed our nature; He restored it to purity and cleansed it from every inherent defect. The prophet says of him, "He did not commit sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth" [Is 53.9]. "He was tempted in everything according to our nature and was without sin" [Heb 4.15]. Thus he is the head of his body the Church, the first fruit of our nature, is free from evil and composed of pure gold.

The bridegroom's locks of hair are dark and black like a raven (I mention a raven which plucks out eyes [Prov 30.17]. It uses these mutilated eyes as food for its young). The bridegroom's locks are the lofty trees of heaven extending from **J.392** earth to heaven. They add to the bridegroom's beauty by being fixed upon his divine head. The reader is indeed aware of the locks' function which teach us of the bridegroom already mentioned: "My locks are heavy with the dew of the night." These locks laden with dew are named "clouds" by the prophets. From them come the rain of teaching to water the lifeless land and to make the fields of God fertile. The Word symbolically names Apostles "locks." Their lives were first dark such as a tax collector, a robber, a persecutor and anything else black and carnivorous like a raven which destroys our eyes. I am speaking of that prince of the power of darkness [Eph 2.2] in the same way Paul turned from a raven into a fir and became a "lock" of the divine head. Paul had first been a blasphemer, persecutor and source of violence [2Tm 3.3], that is a raven. He was transformed into a lock pregnant with heavenly dew for the entire body of the **J.393** Church and distilled the hidden, obscure mysteries of God's **M.1057** word. Therefore the locks hanging from the bridegroom's head of gold add to his beauty and are aroused by the Spirit's breeze. They become crowns to enhance the bridegroom's pure head by being fashioned into a circular kind of adornment. To me, the following words convey meanings of these locks: "You have placed on his head a crown of precious stone" [Ps 20.4]. Thus what we have spoken of here makes the locks fitting, precious stones to adorn the bridegroom's head.

Let us now consider what the Song says about the bridegroom's eyes: "His eyes are as doves by plentiful waters, washed with milk, sitting by plentiful waters." The meaning of these words is beyond our comprehension (for whatever we may understand of them would, I believe, fall short of the truth), yet after diligent consideration, we offer our interpretation. The divine Apostle somewhere says that the eyes should not say to the hands, "I have no need of you" [1Cor 12.21]. He teaches us here that the Church's body must use both the eyes and hands to

function properly: the power of **J.394** sight must be united with truth to effect action. Contemplation by itself cannot perfect the soul unless accompanied by actions which direct a morally good life nor can an active way of life suffice unless guided by true piety. The eyes, therefore, must be joined to the hands. Perhaps the Song may point out to us the meaning of the eyes, and we can then see why they are praised. However, we will discuss the significance of the bridegroom's hands in another place.

The eyes' natural function is to see. For this reason they are situated above all the sense organs and are ordained by nature with the guidance of the entire body. We hear of persons named by divine scripture for guiding us into the truth such as "he who sees" [1Sam 9.11], "he who looks" and "watchman" [Ezk 3.17]; The prophets bestow names to such persons. "Eyes" represent those commanded to watch, to observe and to carefully pay attention. We learn about their **J.395** qualities by comparing their beauty to something better. The bride says, "Your eyes are as doves." The spouse's eyes are indeed praised, for they live by the Spirit's direction and are thereby innocent and undefiled.

The spiritual, pure life is expressed by a dove, the form which John saw as the Holy Spirit flying upon the waters [Jn 1.32]. Thus he who is **M.1060** established by God as eyes for the Church's body must wash away anything blocking his vision if he is to watch and oversee as he should. God says that there is not only one kind of water to wash our eyes but many different kinds. There are as many virtues as fountains of purifying water by which our eyes become ever purer. One such fountain of purifying water is temperance. Another is humility, along with truth, righteousness, fortitude, desire for the good and aversion from evil. These waters and others like them flow **J.396** from one fountain, merging their streams into a single one by which the eyes may be purified from any discharge of the passions.

But the eyes "upon the fullness of waters" are compared to doves because of their simplicity and innocence, and the Word says they have been washed in milk. A quality of milk is that it does not reflect any image. Every other liquid is like a mirror whose smooth surface serves to reflect the image of those gazing in it. However, milk lacks such reflective capacity. This is the best praise for the Church's eyes: they do not reflect deceptive, shadowy pictures of non-existent things which are erroneous, vain or contrary to the true **J.397** nature of reality; rather, they look at Being itself and do not reflect the false visions and fantasies of life. Thus the perfect soul bathes her eyes in milk to keep them pure.

The Song now offers something for which its readers should strive, the eyes "sitting by plentiful waters." By praising these pure eyes, the Word requires that we must assiduously apply ourselves to the divine teachings. It teaches us that we can acquire the bridegroom's own beauty by always sitting by the "plentiful waters." Indeed, many who have been designated as eyes have renounced their diligence; instead, they have sat by the rivers of Babylon and have been condemned by God himself: "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water and have hewn out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, which hold no water" [Jer 2.13]. Thus the eye is to become beautiful and fitting for the bridegroom's golden head, that is, pure as a dove, true and **J.398** undeceptive as milk and never deluded by insubstantial fantasies. **M.1061** We must patiently sit by the "plentiful (divine) waters" like a firm tree planted by flowing waters. Then we will bring forth fruit in due season, and the branch will always be kept verdant, embraced by the lovely color of its leaves [Ps 1.3].

Now many persons let their spiritual eyes neglect these waters and pay scant attention to the Word of God. Rather, they hollow out for themselves a well of greed, serve their own vain-glory, make wells of arrogance and diligently dig other wells of deception which by nature

cannot forever hold the waters they so eagerly desire. Thus honor, power and glory for which many eagerly strive will at once leak out when gathered; no trace of all their vain effort will be left for those persons who have been deceived. The Word desires that such guardians and protectors set up a defensive wall (their eyelids), the certainty of divine teachings. With continence they must hide the purity and splendor of their lives by their eyelids, so to speak, that the ray of conceit may never fall on their vision. We may later examine the bridegroom's other members, **J.399** provided that God grants us time by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE FOURTEENTH HOMILY

The Song of Songs, 5.13-16

13. His cheeks are as bowls of spices
pouring forth perfumes;
his lips are lilies,
dropping choice myrrh,
14. His hands are of embossed gold, plentiful from
Tarshish (Beryl);
his belly is an ivory tablet on a sapphire stone.
15. His legs are marble pillars set on golden bases;
his form is as Lebanon, choice as the cedars;
16. His throat is sweet;
and altogether desirable.
This is my beloved,
and this is my friend,
Oh daughters of Jerusalem.

* * *

J.399 & M.1061 As the Apostle says [Heb 5.14], he who nourishes a newly born infant with pure milk during its early spiritual life cares for those newly born in the Church. He dispenses the bread of wisdom to the perfect according to the inner man. **J.400** "We speak wisdom among the perfect" [1Cor 2.6], that is, we train with good doctrine the soul's senses to receive the bread of wisdom. The jaws⁴ of these persons receive as food reflections upon wisdom and reduce it to small pieces. Such jaws in Christ's body must no longer attend to the teats of the Word, but go after firmer food of which the bride says, "His cheeks are as bowls of spices pouring forth perfumes." She speaks of her spouse's cheeks after his eyes, a **M.1064** fact evident to everyone attentive to her words. The eye situated by the fullness of spiritual waters must be washed by unmixed, pure milk like an innocent dove in order that the bridegroom may share his own goodness with all the members of the Church. For this reason the great Isaiah ascended a lofty mountain and was commanded to cry out with a clear voice [Is 40.9-12] to make known the Lord who comes with power. He wields authority over creation by his arm, nourishes his flock, leads his lambs, tenderly consoles the tender **J.401** lambs with hope, embraces heaven in the palm of his hand, holds the entire world in his grasp and utters proclamations for the person ascending his mountain. If recognition of the truth comes from

⁴*Siagon*: this term means both "jaws" and "cheeks."

washing one's eyes with these waters and this milk, the bridegroom's cheeks rightly follow. Their task is to break up food for maintaining the body. Let us examine the bridegroom's cheeks and listen to the bride who speaks of them: "His cheeks are as bowls of spices pouring forth perfumes." If the text signifies a drinking cup, this bowl is neither very deep nor high, and if the bridegroom's cheeks represent this bowl, they are praised because they resemble its shape. Should anyone praise a simple, open and pure kind of teaching like this bowl, its **J.402** depth cannot be defended. As the prophet says, "Let me be delivered from those who hate me and from the deep water" [Ps 68.15]. We therefore say that truth in its simplicity has no part in any deceitful hollowness as signified by the bowl used for holding spices which give forth perfumes. The bridegroom's cheeks are as bowls of spices. Not being made of silver, gold, crystal nor of any such material, his cheeks produce instead these spices from which come his perfumes.

It is clear that the Song speaks of the pure eyes of those in the Church. They prepare food for the body by reducing it to small pieces with their jaws so that nothing hidden nor deceitful may be seen in their words. Their eyes are radiant, free, lack deceit and are found in children. The prophet **M.1065** says "The testimony of the Lord is faithful, instructing babes. The ordinances of the Lord are right, giving light to the eyes." [Ps 18.8-9]. If the "bowls" of the Word are like this, they are clearly not made of any earthen material but from the bridegroom's spice mentioned at the beginning of the Song, **J.403** for it is better than all spices. Paul was a bowl who proved himself by manifesting truth, not deceit. He rejected earthly material through baptism which removed the husk of his bodily eyes [Acts 9.18], and he became a child of the Holy Spirit by being made a good fragrance. After this vessel was constructed with choice copper, it became a bowl for pouring out the wine of the Word. Filled with the knowledge of mysteries, the bowl no longer needs human works (Paul does not ascribe his knowledge to flesh and blood [Gal 1.16]) but produces the divine drink and pours it out while the various virtues resemble perfumes by means of the fragrance of Christ. They are adapted according to the different persons who receive God's word--Jews, Greeks, women, men, lords, slaves, parents, children, both those subject and not subject to the Law. The loveliness of this manifold teaching is combined with every virtue. The bowl compounds the perfume according to each person's need who receives God's word. Therefore the beauty describing the bridegroom's body also serves to praise his cheeks.

The praise attributed to these cheeks is testified to by the **J.404** bridegroom's lips which yield spice: "His lips are lilies, dropping choice myrrh" [5.13]. The two examples here suggest two qualities. One is truth which shines in his words (for a lily symbolizes purity and truth). The other is the spiritual, immaterial way of life set forth by his teaching and by contemplation of the spiritual realm which mortifies the world, that is, the life of flesh and blood. Myrrh, a symbol of death, flows from his body and fills souls docile to him. Quite often the divinely inspired scripture uses myrrh as referring to death. Therefore the perfect, pure eye makes its cheeks a bowl which pours forth spices. Adorned with divine splendor, it buds with the lilies **M.1068** of his words from his mouth. In this way the Word names those who are pure and fragrant with virtue; from them drop myrrh which continuously fills the minds of those who receive it. As a result, they have contempt for a simply material life. Out of **J.405** desire for the transcendent good, the cares of this life are nullified and put to death. Paul pours this myrrh from his mouth. It is mixed with the pure lily of temperance and fills the ears of that holy virgin Thekla was her name) who received in her soul these flowing drops. She put the outer man to death and quenched every carnal thought and desire. After Thekla received this salvific teaching, her youth and external beauty died along with all her body's faculties. The Word alone lived in her. Because of him the entire world was dead for her, and she the virgin had died to the world.

Also the great Peter poured forth the shining lilies of the Word when he was at

Cornelius' house, filling his listeners with myrrh. As soon as they received the Word they were buried with Christ and became dead to the world [Acts 10.34-48]. A multitude of examples can also be found in the lives of the saints. They became the Church's common mouth and filled their listeners with myrrh which mortified their passions and bore fruit with the lilies of the Word. They became great champions **J.406** of faith. By a good confession at their time of witness, they were drenched with myrrh in their struggle on behalf of their religion. There is no need to dwell at length on these matters now that my understanding of the text has become clear: we have considered how the Church's mouth became a lily, how the lily can drop myrrh and how such drops fill the souls of those who receive them.

Let us now move on to the next verse of the Song. "His hands are of embossed gold, plentiful from Tarshish (Beryl) [15.14]. The eye's function for the body of the Church is imperfect if not joined with the hands' service. We clearly understand this from the great Paul who says "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you' " [1Cor 12.21]. A person's actions testify to a sharp eye and reveal a virtuous life out of his longing for true beauty. Since we must praise the divine body, let us consider what place the eyes have in relation to the Church's hands. By offering the divine words of the Song to our listeners, we attempt to gather what God intends for us as far as it is possible. "His hands are of embossed gold, plentiful from Tarshish (Beryl)."

Up to this point we clearly understand that the bridegroom's **J.407** head is praised, and this praise is fulfilled in his hands. **M.1069** The head is Christ according to the flesh in whom God was present reconciling the world to himself [1Cor 5.19]. According to Paul, he manifested himself in the flesh through virtues and miracles. If the bridegroom's head is of pure gold, it lacks sin ("He committed no sin, nor was there deceit in his mouth" [Is 53.9]). In like manner, the text says that the bridegroom's hands are gold, signifying that he is completely pure, undefiled and without evil. The "hands" are members who administer to the Church's common need at the divine command. Their praise resembles that of the head's; that is, both hands and head are pure and sinless. The hand will become pure when stripped of anything carved in **J.408** gold which hinders its beauty. In the case of chiseling a certain form in marble, sculptors chisel and remove material to represent the model's form. Thus the many hands of the Church's body must be fashioned into something beautiful by the chiseling effected through much reflection so that their hands may be pure gold. It is evident that anything removed from the hand destroys its beauty, that is, what pleases men, love of glory, greed, looking to externals, notoriety, concern about one's glory and satisfaction with luxury and pleasure from giving orders. Things such as these must be removed by the instruments of reflection so that the pure, unadulterated gold of free will might alone remain which has been compared to a pure head of gold.

The Apostle's own words will help clarify the Song's text. After calling God faithful, Paul sought among his stewards only worthy and faithful persons. He writes, "Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy" [1Cor 4.2]. Thus the faithful and prudent master [Lk 12.42] takes the place of the Church's hand and manifests his golden hand in imitation of his wise Lord which, in the Song's words, consists in following the example of the "head of fine gold." Judas was certainly not a golden hand in the body of the apostles; he was wretched and miserable or better, loathsome **J.409** and abominable. Being entrusted with care for the poor, Judas did not remove the stone of avarice from his hand but stole from the apostles' money bag; like a thief. Judas held the bag and secretly stole from it without regard for God's command. What became of his pleasure? Judas freely hanged himself, removed himself from this life, brought ruin upon his soul and was put in a tomb for evildoers which endures for all time. Thus it is necessary for our hands to be **M.1072** carved and hollowed out for the removal of our connatural evils. Only gold which conforms to the head's beauty must remain.

The word "Tarshish" (Beryl) has many meanings as commonly used in scripture. It is often used in a negative way while on the other hand, it frequently takes on a divine, noble significance. When the prophet Jonah fled from God's face, he sought a boat going to Tarshish [Jon 1.3]. The great David said that the boats of Tarshish were destroyed by a powerful wind [Ps 48.7]. Such a wind, I believe, appeared **J.410** to the disciples gathered in the upper room. It was first recognized by a violent, rushing wind; afterwards it appeared to them like a shining fire [Acts 2.3] in the form of tongues. The multiform wind which destroyed the evils warring against human nature is called ships of Tarshish. These ships signify evil, yet the great Ezekiel, expresses one form of this divine vision when describing God's theophany: "His form was like that of Tarshish" [Ezk 1.16, Septuagint]. Those who know Hebrew say that "Tarshish," as used here in prophecy signifies anything spiritual and incorporeal which lacks color. Therefore we have two meanings of the Song's text: "Tarshish" is taken in a better sense (for anything negative is not praised) if we apply it to the bridegroom's hands. One must carefully remove everything superfluous and corporeal in order to pass over into the divine, spiritual realm and shake off whatever is material, heavy and pertaining to this life. Sculptors working on **J.411** emeralds also follow this procedure. They remove dark, earthy material by a whetstone. The material not removed is pure, bright and green like olive oil. It seems to me that the divine Apostle explains this process more clearly by counseling us to remove everything external out of desire to see the invisible. "Because we look not to the things that are seen; for the things that are seen are transient but the things that are unseen are eternal" [2Cor 4.18]. We understand these words as applying to the hands. By carving away any material attractions, our hands might become pure and transformed by our free will into what is immaterial and spiritual. "His hands are as embossed gold, plentiful from Tarshish (Beryl)."

M.1073 Let us now look at the Song's words pertaining to the bridegroom's belly: "His belly is an ivory tablet on a sapphire stone" [5.14]. The Lawgiver of human nature gave to Moses the Law inscribed on stone tablets and called them **J.412** small stone tablets on which were engraved the divine letters. When he was about to transmit the Law, God said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and wait there; and I will give you the tablets on stone with the Law and the commandments" [Ex 24.12]. Since the Gospel's clarity removed everything corporeal and earthly, no longer were the letters inscribed on stone tablets but upon brightly polished ivory. The location of the commandments and laws is called "belly" which is an "ivory tablet on a sapphire stone."

An example from the human body better helps us to comprehend these words of the Song. Boxwood (*puxos*) is a solid, white material used for writing tablets, so whenever we hear of an instrument made of this light material, we understand it as something used by scribes for writing on. Since the **J.413** general name of these tablets is *puxion*, the Song says that its material is boxwood, not ivory. Because of its great solidity and firmness, the tablet is incorruptible like a bone's substance: no damage is done to it over the course of time.

The dark-blue color of sapphire provides relief for the weary eyes of persons diligently reading the letters on a tablet because sapphire's splendor naturally makes one's eyes relax. This example may be applied to the "belly" of the Church. I have heard the prophet exhorted by God say, "Write this vision which you have clearly seen on a tablet" [Hab 2.2]. I take the word "belly" as a convenient term to praise our Lord's body. If the text exhorts Habakkuk to inscribe his vision on a tablet, we could call the tablet purity of heart on which our memories have inscribed the divine visions. Similarly, when the great Ezekiel opened his mouth, he put in it the book's scroll full of letters on each side: "Eat with your mouth, and your belly will be filled" [Ezk 3.3]. The rational part of the soul in which is placed the divine teachings is **J.414** named

"belly." We may also call the great Jeremiah's heart **M.1076** a belly which was afflicted by sad thoughts: "My belly grieves me, and the senses of my heart disturb me" [Jer 4.19]. If a greater authority must be given from the divine scriptures we state what our Lord said to those who believed in him: rivers of living water will flow from whoever believes in him. "He who believes in me, as the scriptures said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water'" [Jn 7.38]. We further add that the term "belly" signifies a pure heart; it becomes a tablet of the divine law [Rom 2.15], as the Apostle says. It shows the effect of this law written in the heart not by ink [2Cor 3.3] but by the Spirit of the living God who fashions these letters in the soul: not upon stone tablets as the Apostle says, but upon the tablet of the heart which is pure, light **J.415** and shining. The guiding faculty of the soul must be engraved with the clear, pure memory of the divine words and be made clear by conspicuous letters. Indeed, sapphire is included to praise the bridegroom's belly alone with the tablet whose gleam resembles the sky. This image counsels us to be attentive to heavenly matters, the place of our treasure [Mt 6.21]. By not growing weary in keeping the divine precepts, the vision of our divine hope refreshes our soul's eyes.

Next the bride praises her spouse's legs: "His legs are marble pillars set on golden bases. "Wisdom's house has many columns adorned with various materials [Prov 9.1], which support the tent of witness. The column's capitals and bases are gold, whereas their middle sections are sheathed with silver. The bride says that the Church's columns are marble firmly set upon golden bases (The Church is a house as the Apostle says, "How should one behave in the household of God" [1Tim 3.5]). **J.416** Thus the bride's words concur with the wisdom of Bezalel [Ex 35.30-33] when he describes her spouse's beauty. Both the column's head and bases are adorned with gold, making it clear that these words refer to the tent of witness. Each of the column's heads rest upon gold pillars. Hence the bridegroom's head is pure, undefiled gold to whomever gazes upon his beauty with pure eyes (the Song designates such pure gold by the term *Kephaz*), while his legs are founded upon golden bases. This statement compels us to interpret the symbolism of the pillars, and we do not err if we are disciples of the holy Paul who applies the term "pillars" to his fellow apostles Peter, James and John [Gal 2.9]. It is to our benefit **M.1077** to learn from Paul that we may become worthy of being called a pillar. Again, Paul's wisdom teaches us that a pillar must rest on the foundation of truth. Truth is golden **J.417** and its bases are the bridegroom's legs adorning his hands and head. The foundation may be interpreted as marble. We understand by the Song's words that the body's legs are marble pillars (that is, those persons who support and hear the body of the Church by exemplary lives and sound words. Through them the base of our faith is firm, the course of virtue is completed, and the entire body is raised on high by our longing for God's promise). Truth and stability guide the Church's body. Gold represents truth which, according to Paul, is called the foundation of the divine edifice ("For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ" [1Cor 3.11]. Christ is the truth upon whom is founded the "legs" or the Church's pillars).

Marble represents the splendor of a life which is firm and unmoved in its desire for the good. Many columns compose the tent of witness and support wisdom's house, while two columns suffice to support the human body. We must apply this mystery to something else, that is, the various **J.418** means to obtain virtue by means of the Law. Many instructions in wisdom can be obtained by looking at the meaning of the words. The concise word of the Gospel leads us to a short, condensed way of perfection for a virtuous life. Thus our Lord said, "On these two commandments depend the entire Law and the prophets" [Mt 22.40]. It is wholly within your power to bear this burden placed on you, for both commandments have one meaning. A person bears the load whether it is suspended or carried by hand. Our Lord says that the entire Law and the prophets hangs on these two commandments, while the bride says that her spouse's body is carried by two columns fixed upon gold foundations. We should correctly understand the

mystery of his legs as these two commandments, for the Lord says that the first commandment resembles the second: to love God with one's whole heart, soul and strength is the first one; to love one's neighbor as oneself is like it [Mt 23.37-39].

J.419 & M.1080 However, in preparing the great Timothy to be a house of God, Paul sets these two pillars in him: faith and conscience [1Tim 3.15]. Faith leads to loving God with all one's heart, soul and strength; a good conscience consists of a loving disposition towards one's neighbor. Such an understanding of columns is not contrary to our earlier considerations because each of these columns represents Peter, James, John and anyone else worthy of the same name both now and in the future. According to the Apostle [1Tim 3.15], the person perfected by these two commandments is made into a column and support of truth. Thus the entire body of truth is set aright on these two columns which are supported by legs. The foundation is made of gold, that is, the base of faith which is unmovable, constant and firm in every good with the proper dispositions.

The bride now proceeds to sum up her spouse's beauty by saying: "His form is as Lebanon, choice as the cedars. His throat is sweet and altogether desirable. This is my kinsman and **J.420** this is my beloved, Oh daughters of Jerusalem" [5.15-16]. I think that she points out her spouse here more clearly because the beauty she praises is visible. This visibility follows the Apostle's consideration of the Church as a body with its respective limbs [1Cor 12.12]. The bride says that his form composes the infinite number of cedars hewn from all over Lebanon. Nothing humble nor base composes his bodily form but it is made of the lofty cedar which raises its head on high.

Let us examine the first of the bridegroom's comparisons: "His form is as Lebanon." A choice is made by comparing opposites. Since the good alone has one name in reference to what truly exists, anything not partaking of it is false and does not exist. The person who exercises good judgement does not choose what is false in place of the good. Since the bridegroom's form is composed of choice Lebanon cedars, scripture **J.421** suggests two ways of understanding "Lebanon:" one is bad and to be rejected. According to the prophesy [Ps 28.5-6], it is like a calf which must be destroyed. The other form is honorable, fitting for God and like him. These words teach us that one king is creator of the universe. On the other hand is the lord of this world who calls himself king of darkness. Legions of angels attend the true king while legions of demons attend the prince of the power of darkness [Col 1.13]. Principalities, powers and virtues belong under the King of kings and Lord of lords. The former has, according to the Apostle, principalities, powers and virtues which will be abolished with evil's destruction ("He will destroy every principality, power, and virtue" [1Cor 15.24]).

The prophet Ezekiel [Ezk 10.1] sees the king of glory sitting upon his exalted, lofty throne. His throne is set above the stars and resembles the throne of the Most High. The Lord of all has his chosen vessel in his great house as well as the vessel of wrath ready for destruction [Rom 9.22]. Furthermore, **J.422** the Lord of the angels provides both life and peace for his saints. He sends fury, wrath and affliction to the wicked by the had angels [Ps 77.49]. We have no further need to speak of how the adversary sets himself up against the good.

The mountain Lebanon perceptible to our senses is visible from round about. Its slopes are thickly shaded and bristling with forests. For this reason the different notions about the mountains of Lebanon in scripture are at variance, so we must deal with each one individually. The prophets see Lebanon in its different manifestations, praise and condemnation. The Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon and reduces Lebanon in its entirety with its cedars into little pieces like the calf worshiped in the desert [Ps 28.5-6] (This prophesy teaches us that every evil raising

itself high against the knowledge of God will be brought to nothing). A better meaning may be applied **J.423** to Lebanon: "The just man will flourish as a palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon" [Ps 91.13]. The Just One arises as a lofty palm tree for he is truly just (The Lord is the Just One who rose from the earth for us). He is a palm tree with much foliage. In our human nature, Christ became a mountain which filled with cedars those rooted through faith in him; when planted in God's house, they will flourish in the courts of our God.

According to the Apostle, the Church is this house [1Tim 3.15] in which the plants are God's cedars. The courts are the tabernacles of eternity in which our hopes flourish and will become manifest in their proper season. Therefore the body of Christ is made whole through each of its limbs ("Although there are many members, the body is one" [1Cor 12.12]). For this reason the bride calls her spouse's beauty the "chosen one of Lebanon." This is distinct from the Lebanon that is rejected. According to Isaiah [Is 10.34-11.1] this second Lebanon falls with the lofty ones when the blossom from **J.424** & **M.1084** Jesse's root springs up. When his rod of authority grows up, it will change a lion, leopard and serpent into a tame, gentle animal. Thus the lion will dwell together with the calf and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and that little child born for us will have charge over them. He will place his hand in the asp's hole and touch its offspring, thereby blunting its poison. As the prophet says [Is 10.34], Lebanon will fall with the lofty ones. Prophecy reveals these things by symbols. It would be superfluous to explain them all carefully since they are clear to everyone. For who does not know that the child born for us touched the asp? His authority destroys beasts; dwelling under the same roof with tame beasts, he has blotted out their harsh nature. Because Lebanon, that is, wickedness, falls by this child's actions, that which exalted itself against the truth will fall along with the very beginning of evil. Therefore the bride compares her Lord's beauty to that of choice cedars of Lebanon: "His form is as Lebanon, choice as the cedars."

Praise is fittingly bestowed upon the bridegroom's throat: "His throat is sweet, and altogether desirable" [5.16]. We **J.425** understand these words as follows: what lies under the chin is called the throat and sound emanates from the windpipe by wind whirling about inside. Since the bridegroom's words are lovely with honey from the comb, his voice is the organ of the Word. His voice originating in the throat may be called ministers and interpreters of the Word in whom Christ speaks. We will not fail to understand the bridegroom's throat in this way. Upon being asked his identity, the great John calls himself a voice, a precursor of the Word [Jn 1.23]. And blessed Paul offers proof of Christ speaking within him by whom his voice became sweet [2Cor 13.3]. All the prophets offered themselves as vocal organs of the Spirit and became sweet by fixing the divine honey in their throats. Kings and commoners used this honey for their health. Its enjoyment does not slacken desire by satiety; rather, by intense desires it heightens our longing. Therefore the bride calls her spouse **J.426** "altogether desirable," a definition of him whom she seeks. How blessed are those limbs which made the bridegroom so desirable! Perfect in every good, the bridegroom's limbs form a desirable beauty composed from all his members. Not only is he desirable in his eyes, hands and locks, but also in his feet, legs and throat. No member is of less account because of another's superiority.

M.1085 "This is my beloved and this is my friend, Oh daughters of Jerusalem" [5.16]. After the bride set before her maidens the characteristics by which they could recognize the one **J.427** whom she sought, she points him out by saying, "This is he, the sought-after one, who rose from Judah to become our brother. He became the companion of him who fell in among robbers; he healed his wounds with oil, wine and bands; he placed him upon his own ass; he gave him rest at the inn; he offered two denarii for staying there; and upon his return, promised to pay for any extra service [Lk 10.30-35]". Each of these deeds is quite evident. When the lawyer wished to test the Lord and set himself above the others, and in his haughtiness despised

any equality with them he said, " And who is my neighbor" [Lk 10.29]? Then the Word of God explained in a story the full dispensation of God's love for mankind. He told of man's descent from heaven, the ambush of robbers, the removal of the garment of incorruptibility, sin's wound and the progress of sin over half of man's nature while the soul remained immortal. Our Lord also spoke of the passing by of the Law which was of no avail; neither priest nor Levite tended the wounds of the man who fell in among robbers, for the blood of goats and bulls are unable to take away sin [Heb 9.13]. However, Christ put on our full human nature as the first fruits of the dough **J.428** [Rom 11.16] which included a part of each race: Jew, Samaritan, Greek and all mankind. With his body, that is, the ass, he hastened to the place where evil had befallen man, healed his wounds, put him upon his own beast and made for his loving providence a resting place in which all those who labor and are burdened can rest [Mt 11.28]. Whoever enters him receives him, as the Word said, "Whoever remains in me, I will remain in him" [Jn 6.56].

Man receives within his own capacity the one who cannot be contained. He takes two denarii: the love of God with one's whole heart, and the love of one's neighbor as oneself in response to the lawyer's question. Since those hearing the Law are not just before God but only its doers [Rom 2.13], we must receive these two coins (faith in God and a good conscience with regard to our fellow men), and **J.429** fulfill these two commandments by our deeds. Our Lord says to the innkeeper that all the care needed for the wounded man will be paid back at the Lord's second coming according to the degree of his care. He who became our companion through such love became our brother by rising for us from Judah; it is he whom the bride makes known to the **M.1088** daughters of Jerusalem saying, "This is my companion, Oh daughters of Jerusalem." By understanding these characteristics of the bridegroom, we will find and receive him by the holy Spirit's guidance for the salvation of our souls, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE FIFTEENTH HOMILY

The Song of Songs, 6.1-9

1. Where has your beloved gone, Oh beautiful among women?
To where has your beloved looked aside?
We will seek him with you.
2. My beloved has gone down to his garden,
to the beds of spice, to feed (his flock)
in the gardens, and to gather lilies.
3. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine,
who feeds among the lilies
4. You are fair, my companion, as pleasure,
beautiful as Jerusalem
terrible as (armies) set in array.
5. Turn away your eyes from before me,
for they have given me wings.
Your hair is as flocks of goats
which have appeared from Galaad.
6. Your teeth are as flocks of shorn (sheep),

that have gone up from the washing,
all of them bearing twins,
and there is not one barren among them.

7. Your lips are as a thread of scarlet,
and your speech is comely;
your cheek is like the rind of a pomegranate
without your silence.
8. There are sixty queens and eighty concubines,
and maidens without number.
9. My dove, my perfect one is one;
she is the one of her mother,
she is the choice one of her who bore her.

* * *

J.431 & M.1088 The Gospel says that the Apostle Philip comes from the same town as Andrew and Peter [Jn 1.44] (I think that Philip is praised because he is a companion of those two brothers first admired in the Gospel. It was Andrew, who after the Baptist pointed out the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, understood this mystery and followed Christ. Andrew learned where he dwelt and brought to his brother Simon Peter the good news proclaimed long ago in prophecy. But hearing must precede faith. A person who unites his whole heart to the Lamb becomes divine by a change of names: instead of Simon, the Lord called him Peter, and he became Peter. A change of names applies to Abraham and Sarah, who after many theophanies, received a blessing from the Lord with the passage of much time: Abraham became a father and Sarah the head [of many nations] by a change of names. **J.432** Similarly, Jacob became worthy of the surname and dignity of "Israel" after his all-night struggle with an angel. The great Peter also grew by a similar grace; he heard his brother, believed in the Lamb, was perfected through faith, and was made a rock). Therefore, Philip was worthy of being a fellow **M.1089** companion of Peter and Andrew after Jesus had found him. As the Gospel says, Jesus found Philip who was made a follower of the Word: "Follow me" [Jn 1.43]. After Philip approached the true light, he drew Nathaniel to partake of this light and lit up for him faith's mystery as with a torch. Philip said, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote, Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee" [Jn 1.45]. **J.433** Nathaniel attentively received the Gospel whose prophetic mystery about the Lord resounded in his ears. He knew that Bethlehem was the location of the first theophany of God in the flesh but that by his life in Nazareth, Christ was called a Nazarene. Therefore Nathaniel carefully considered both that God's birth according to the flesh must be in Bethlehem of David and that this mystery must occur in a cave with swaddling clothes and a manger. Nevertheless, Galilee was named by scripture as the home of the Gentiles (for it means "place of the peoples" [Is 8.23]). The light of knowledge was shown to Nathaniel who said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Thereupon Nathaniel left the fig tree of the Law whose shadow hindered participation in the light, and he laid hold of the One who caused the fig tree's leaves **J.434** to dry up because of its unfruitfulness. The Word testified that Nathaniel was a true, genuine Israelite in whom was no deceit since he showed himself pure like the patriarch Abraham [Gen 25.27]. "Behold, Christ says, "an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

These introductory remarks are clear to anyone who has studiously paid attention to the Gospel's words which are in accord with the Song of Songs. Just as Andrew was led by John's

voice to the Lamb and Nathaniel was guided by Philip's light who left the Law's shadow and entered the true light, the young maidens led to discover the good revealed to them have used the soul perfected through beauty and said, "Where has your beloved gone, Oh beautiful among women? To where has your beloved looked aside? We will seek him with you" [6.1]. The virginal souls question their master but first utter the question "What?" as they had earlier questioned, "What is your beloved, Oh you who are beautiful among women" [vs.9]? When the maidens learn that the bridegroom's appearance is described as white, ruddy and so **J.435** forth, they go on to inquire, "Where"? They say, "Where has your beloved gone?" or "to where has he looked aside?" **M.1092** By knowing his location, the maidens might worship in the place where he stands and learn where he looked aside that they might see his glory whose manifestation is salvation to those beholding it. As the prophet says, "Show us your face, and we shall be saved" [Ps 79.4]. The Teacher, like Philip, says "Come and see." He leads the virgins to lay hold of him they seek instead of saying "See." He thus indicates the location of the sought-after One and the direction of his gaze. The bride says, "My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spice" [6.2]. So far she has shown the location of her bridegroom. She then shows what he sees and to where, looks as the mistress demonstrates: "he feeds in the gardens and gathers lilies." Thus the literal sense of these words shows the maidens the bridegroom's location and to where he looks.

J.436 We come to know the usefulness of the divinely inspired Scriptures through spiritual contemplation. When we hear that "My beloved has gone down to his garden," we learn about the Gospel's mystery whose each word reveals its mystic sense to us. The God made manifest in the flesh and who arose from Judah and received the nations sitting in darkness and the shadow of death is appropriately called "beloved" by the bride betrothed to him for everlasting union. She is a sister of the people of Judah. "He descended" refers to the One who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among robbers. He followed the descent of the one who fell among enemies which signifies his descent from his ineffable majesty to the humility of our human nature. We learn from the symbol of a garden that the true husbandman plants a field for himself, that is, us (For we are his field as Paul says, 1 Cor 3.9). **J.437** In paradise Christ initially cultivated human nature which his heavenly Father had planted. However, that special field, the garden we possessed, was devastated, so God came down again to adorn the garden with the plants of virtues, for it had become a desert. With the care of his Word, he irrigated these plants by the pure, divine fountain of his teaching.

The bowls of perfume describing the bridegroom's beauty fittingly praise his cheeks ⁵ which grind up the spiritual wheat for nourishment. Hence, the bridegroom's location and dwelling teaches us that he does not dwell in a soul deserted of virtues. If anyone becomes a bowl of perfume which pours forth choice myrrh, he will become a cup of wisdom which receives the pure wine of gladness.

M.1093 The following words of the Song teach us about the nourishment which the good shepherd feeds his flocks. He does not let his sheep enter a desert or thorny place for pasture **J.438** but offers them the garden's spices as food. In place of pasture are lilies gathered by the shepherd for nourishment. The Word teaches us by these examples because we see that the nature and power encompassing all things arranges a place for those who receive him in purity. They have a garden of many different plants cultivated by virtues. The bridegroom makes them thrive by the flourishing of lilies and teem with the fruitfulness of spices. Lilies are symbolic of a bright, pure mind, and their scent is alien to sin's foul odor. The bride says that the master knows his spiritual flocks. He nourishes them in his gardens and gathers lilies as

⁵*Siagon*: Gregory uses this term to mean both "cheeks" and "jaws."

sustenance for the sheep. The great Paul brings out for us from the divine storehouse lilies as food: whatever is true, righteous, honorable, pleasing, holy, auspicious, virtuous and worthy of praise [Phil 4.8]. In my opinion, these are the lilies with which the good teacher **J.439** and shepherd nourishes his flock.

The following words come from the pure, unsullied bride: "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine" [6.3]. Such is the measure and bond of perfection in virtue. We learn here that the purified soul must have God alone and never look at anything except him. Thus it must cleanse itself of every material deed and thought and be transformed into that which is spiritual and immaterial, a splendid image of the archetype's beauty. When a person sees a picture upon a board which accurately conforms to its model, he exclaims that one form exists in both: the model's beauty is in the likeness and the archetype is clearly seen by the imitation. Similarly, the bride says, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." In her conformity to Christ she receives her proper beauty, that primal blessedness of our nature, according to the image and likeness of the original beauty which alone is true and worthy **J.440** of adoration. This resembles a mirror expertly fashioned by hand which accurately reflects the image of a face. When the soul has prepared itself and has rejected every material stain, it represents the image of that pure, unstained beauty.

M.1096 The soul, a living mirror possessing free will, says, "when I look at my beloved's face, the beauty of his form is reflected in me." Paul clearly imitates these words by saying that he lives for God and is dead to the world, and that Christ alone lives in him [Gal 2.20]. When saying that "For me to live is Christ" [Phil 1.21], Paul cries out that no human, material passions live in him, neither pleasure, grief, anger, fear, timidity, strong passions, pride, rashness, ill-will, jealousy, vindictiveness, love of gain nor any such habit that ruins his soul. "I have him alone, and he is none of these things. I have stripped off my exterior, visible nature; I do not have in **J.441** myself anything which is not Christ." Indeed, "for me to live is Christ," or as the bride says, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." This is holiness, purity, incorruptibility light and truth which nourish my soul. He does not pasture my soul with dry grass or bushes but with the splendor of his saints. Lilies suggest splendor by the radiance of their good color. Because of this, he "who feeds among the lilies" leads his flock to the meadow of lilies that "the splendor of the Lord our God may be upon us" [Ps 89.17].

We become like the food we have eaten. Let us take the example of a hollow vessel of crystal; anything put in it is clearly visible. Similarly, by placing the lilies' splendor in our souls, they become radiant and show from outside the forms within. Let us clarify this point. The soul nourishes itself by the virtues which are symbolically called "lilies." The person **J.442** formed with these by a good life becomes radiant by showing in his life each form of virtue. Let your pure lily be continence, righteousness, fortitude, prudence and whatever the Apostle says is true, honorable, worthy of love, just, holy, gracious, virtuous or worthy of praise [Phil 4.8]. All these virtues are in the soul by a pure life, and they adorn the soul which possesses them.

Thus the bride gives herself to her beloved and receives the beauty of him whom she loves. In the text which follows we will hear about the glory from God bestowed on those who glorify him. The Word says to his bride, "You are fair, my companion, as pleasure, beautiful as Jerusalem, terrible **M.1097** as (armies) set in array" [6.4]. The fact that glory was given to God in the highest by the heavenly host for his good pleasure with men within the hearing of shepherds when they saw peace born on earth [Lk 2.14], and that the city of the **J.443** great king is called Jerusalem by the Lord of all creation is clear to anyone familiar with the Gospel text. Thus we should not be unaware of the beauty praised in the bride who is compared to pleasure and Jerusalem. By these terms the Word clearly reveals the correct manner of ascent until the

soul is exalted and reaches out for her Lord's glorious deeds. For if God is on high, then the One in the Father's bosom is united with men of flesh and blood for bringing peace on earth to please his Father. It is clear that the bride compares her own beauty to such divine benevolence by imitating Christ in her works; she is to others what Christ was in his human nature. Paul imitated Christ by cutting off his life that he might give Israel salvation in exchange for his suffering. "For I wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race" [Rom 9.3]. These words may be adapted to the bride: such is the beauty of your soul **J.444** and such is the benevolence of the Lord who emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave [Phil 2.7] and who gave himself for the life of the world. Being rich, he became poor for us, that we might live by his death. By his poverty we might become rich, and by his form of a slave we might reign [2Cor 8.9].

God's majesty appears like the beauty of the heavenly Jerusalem to be the city of the great king by the Lord's own words [Mt 5.35]. It contains within itself the uncontainable. God dwells and walks about in it; He adorns it by his presence, thereby making the heavenly Jerusalem receive his beauty, the beauty of the great king's city. The psalm speaks of this loveliness as follows: "in your majesty and beauty, direct, prosper and reign because of truth meekness and righteousness" [Ps 44.5]. The divine beauty is thus characterized by **J.445** truth, righteousness and meekness. The soul formed by such embellishments becomes lovely like Jerusalem which is adorned by the king's beauty.

M.1100 We have no doubt that the bride's praise is now mentioned, yet we cannot easily learn how her praise is honored, even though its dignity is enhanced. The text reads, "terrible as (armies) set in array" [6.4]. Perhaps the bride's praise may be enhanced with regard to our earlier considerations when she was compared to the transcendent powers. Those forces in battle array are the Powers perpetually holding sway; Dominations rule over everything; Thrones are firmly established; Principalities remain free from servitude; the Powers praise God without interruption. The flying Seraphim do not remain still, and their position does not change; Cherubim do not cease to bear the lofty, elevated throne **J.446** of God; and the ministering spirits do not cease their work nor to hear God's words [Ps 103.21]. Since these powers are established by God, the order of spirits and transcendent powers remain distinct and constant, for their order is not upset by evil. In imitation of this array the soul arranges everything in order and marvels at these forces set in array. Fear signifies consternation, and we will not err by attempting to understand the wonder created by this fear.

It is difficult to know to whom and by whom the following words are spoken: "Turn away your eyes from before me, for they have given me wings" [6.5]. It seems that the Lord addresses these words to the pure soul, although I think they can apply to the bride. Anyway, I will now present their meaning **J.447** as they appear to me. I have often heard in scripture that wings are attributed to God as when the prophet says, "You will hide me in the shadow of your wings" [Ps 16.8]. And, "You will hope under the shadow of his wings" [Ps 90.4]. Again, Moses in his great canticle suggests this when he says "He received them, having spread his wings" [Dt 32.11]. And the Lord says to Jerusalem, "How often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings" [Mt 23.37]! Such expressions are not irrelevant to what we have been considering. If for some mysterious reason, the divinely inspired text says that the divine nature has wings, then the first man made according to God's image and **J.448** likeness was in every way like its archetype [Gen 1.26]. But according to scripture, **M.1101** the prototype has a wing; hence human nature was created with wings so that it may be in the divine likeness. It is clear that the term "wings" may be symbolically applied to God. They represent God's power, blessedness, incorruptibility and anything else. All these divine attributes were in man as long as he resembled God in everything, but the inclination

towards evil robbed us of our own wings (Not being under the protection of God's wings, we were stripped of our own wings). Therefore God's grace became manifest to us and enlightened us. By rejecting impiety and worldly desires, we might again grow wings through holiness and righteousness.

If these words do not overstep the bounds of truth, it is **J.449** fitting that the bride mentions the grace she received from the divine eyes. In the same way, God looked upon us with benevolence and furnished us with wings according to his pristine grace. I think these words become clear in David's prayer to the Lord, "Let your eyes see the right," that is my own, "for you have proved my heart and visited me by night; you have tried me by fire and have not found iniquity in me" [Ps 16.2-3]. This is as if David said, "Your eyes do not behold what is contrary." For the person who sees correctly does not see crookedly, and he who does not see crookedly always sees correctly. By removing what is contrary, David points out the good to God's eyes, the manner by which the soul regains its wings lost through the disobedience of our first parents. We understand these words as follows: "When your eyes behold me they turn away from what is contrary, for they will not see anything of the sort in me. Therefore I am winged once more by your eyes, and I take up the wings of a dove through the virtues which give me the power of flight. **J.450** I can now fly and rest in the same repose which God had when He rested from his works [Gen 2.2]."

After these words the description of the bride's beauty is resumed; each aspect of her beauty is honored by an appropriate comparison. Her hair is praised, the evenness of her teeth, the blossom of her lips, her sweetness of speech and ruddiness of cheeks. Each aspect of the bride has an appropriate comparison. Her hair is compared to flocks of goats appearing from Galaad; the flocks of shorn sheep bearing twins complete the praise of her teeth by way of comparison; **M.1104** her lips are compared to a scarlet thread and her cheeks are adorned by comparing them to a pomegranate's skin. "Your hair is as flocks of goats which have appeared from Galaad. Your teeth are as flocks of shorn (sheep) that have gone up from the washing, all of them bearing twins, and there is none barren among them. Your lips are as a thread of scarlet, and your speech is comely; your cheek is like the rind of a pomegranate without your silence" [6.5-7].

Since all these words were sufficiently examined above, it would be superfluous to repeat them. If anyone who did **J.451** not hear them now seeks to understand them, let us briefly examine their symbolic content. The body's hair differs from other parts of the body. Sensory powers govern the entire body without which it cannot live (the body's life consists in sense perception). We see that hair, a part of the body, lacks sensation. Hair displays its uniqueness by feeling no pain from burning nor from cutting when compared with other bodily parts. Paul therefore says that a woman's glory is her hair [1Cor 11.15] which is adorned with braids. The bride's hair teaches us that those persons seen around the bride's head must be of greater value than the senses, for they conceal sensation with wisdom. Such persons give glory to the Church. As the book of Proverbs says, "The wise conceal sensation" [10.14].

The wise do not judge beauty by sight, nor the good by taste; neither is assessment of beauty entrusted to smell, touch or any other sense organ. When each sense is dead, the soul **J.452** alone lays hold of and stretches forward to the good with respect to the mind. Such wise persons glorify that woman, the Church. They do not puff her up by honors nor cast her soul down in sorrow by manifesting scorn. Even if they must be killed due to faith in Christ, cast to beasts, thrown in the fire or must bear any other pain, these persons assume the insensitivity of hair when experiencing pain. Such was Elijah who came from Galaad. He had a hairy, squalid body covered with goat skins and was undaunted by the tyrant's threats. Those who imitated the

prophet's nobility have raised themselves above this world while they remain indigent, oppressed, afflicted, dwell in mountains, caves and holes in the earth. The world is not worthy of them [Heb 11.37-38]. Seen as herds around the head of the universe, they glorify the Church and ascend with that Galaadite [Elijah] to celestial beauty.

M.1105 A goat is honored because its thick coat provides an image of beauty for the bride. Another reason for praise is that a **J.453** goat can pass over rocks with a sure foot, agilely turn on mountain peaks, courageously pass through difficult, rough places and can go safely on the road of virtue. Some would maintain that this animal is suitable for the comparison to the bride because Moses the lawgiver uses it for many of the Law's sacred functions [Lev 4.23; 9.3]. I know that a goat leading the herd along the right path is mentioned among the four kinds of animals in the book of Proverbs [30.24-31]. We may suppose this to mean that every task begun by one person is shared by many. Scripture says that Thobel was the discoverer of things fashioned with iron, and all those who practice the making of iron implements attribute it to him.

It is the same with Abel as shepherd, Cain as farmer, Nimrod who first knew about hunting, Noah as dresser of vines and Enoch who first hoped in God. Holy Scripture teaches us here to follow the example of one person. Elijah stands out as an eminent guide in his zeal for God. Those who imitate **J.454** his zeal follow in the footsteps of his boldness; they become a herd of goats whose leader is the master of this life. They are the glory and praise of the Church set as an ornament in the hair; their lives have nothing to do with the senses.

The teeth of the bride are likewise praised, for they nourish the Church's body. The bridegroom always wishes these teeth to be clean from all filth, lack hair by having been recently shorn, bear twins according to the birth of virtues and be seen as having destroyed by their teeth everything defective with respect to soul and body. The scarlet thread upon the bride's lips symbolizes the function of a speech which the prophet calls a guard and door of meaning [cf. Ps 140.3]. Such is the case when one's mouth opens to speak and then closes, with each activity occurring at its proper time. We learn from the prophet Zachariah that this thread is a measure [Zach 2.1] which an angel holds as a rod. A measuring line is especially **J.455** appropriate since it happens to be colored red, a symbol of our redemption. If anyone, like Paul, has Christ speaking in him [2Cor 13.3], who redeemed us by his own blood, he imitates this thread upon his lips as a kind of measure made lovely by being dipped in blood.

M.1108 The words which follow explain what we said earlier. The bride's beautiful speech is a scarlet thread. It signifies suitability and temperance, for her beauty which is neither immature nor untimely, is manifested at the time of its vigor. Her ruddy cheeks are adorned like a pomegranate's skin. They testify to the bride's perfection in the good, because she herself is a treasure of every good. As skin surrounds the edible part of a pomegranate, so does the beauty of her outward life manifest her inner treasure. Therefore something like a pomegranate's skin surrounds the hidden treasure of the bride's longings, the fruit of her own soul produced from **J.456** a virtuous life.

To me, the phrase "outside your silence (or veil)" means that the bride's praise is not made known by words; rather, her silence withholds information. Silence is opposed to speech, and we are silent when we cannot express anything through words. If silence is opposed to speech, the opposite holds true: speech is "outside silence." Thus the Song reads "outside your silence." This clearly means that anything not manifested by speech and belonging to silence is beautiful; it is ineffable and more wonderful than words.

Genesis [Chapter 29] depicts a well with a heavy stone over its mouth which makes it

difficult for the female shepherds to draw water. But Jacob removes this stone, fills their jars **J.457** with water and lets the sheep take as much water as they need. To what can we compare this well? "There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and maidens without number. My dove, my perfect one is one; she is the one of her mother" [6.8.9]. Who will roll back the stone of this obscure passage is beyond our comprehension? It seems that the knowledge of these things alone refers to the Apostle's words: "that in **M.1109** every way you were enriched with all speech and all knowledge" [1Cor 1.5]. Our poverty is incapable of grasping the treasures lying in these words of the Song but in order not to be condemned for laziness, we will not hesitate to explain the scriptures as ordained by law [Jn 5.39].

We say that the bride's praises are lessons which teach about more refined matters, for example, beings are created and renewed not in accord with the same order and system. Because creation exists from its very beginning by the divine power, the end of each created being is **J.458** linked with its beginning: everything created from nothing comes into existence with its beginning. Human nature is also created but does not, like other created beings, advance towards its perfection, but right from the beginning it is created perfect: "Let us make man according to the image and likeness of God" [Gen 1.26]. Here is the very summit and perfection of goodness. What can be more exalted than similarity to God? The end of the first creation is simultaneous with its beginning, for human nature originated in perfection. Since this human nature became subject to death because of its disposition to evil, perseverance in the good was destroyed. Human nature takes up its perfection not at once, as in the beginning, but progresses towards the good by an order which gradually gets rid of our inclination towards evil. In the first creation there was no impediment present with the birth of our human nature, for it was perfect and lacked evil. But in the second restoration, an interval of time necessarily accompanies those pursuing the first good. Because our **J.459** minds incline towards evil, our association with evil is removed like bark which is gradually scraped off by a more becoming life.

We have learned that the Father's house has many mansions [Jn 14.2]. This analogically corresponds to the good state of each person and to the rejection of evil prepared as a remedy. For example, one person with a better inheritance from the beginning has recently emerged from the depths of an evil into the truth, whereas another has done it by diligence and progress in the good. Still another person has grown by a desire for the good; yet another remains firmly in his ascent to on high, while another person goes further; some even pass these while others press forward in their upward course. God accepts each person according to his free will; He allots the choice according to each one's worthiness, bestows compensations **J.460 & M.1112** to nobler persons and measures out rewards to those of a lesser account.

By the words set before us we undertook the task of learning about the different kinds of souls who behold the bridegroom as we distinguished above. The bridegroom mentions young maidens beyond number; others are concubines and still others are queens. There are eighty concubines plus sixty queens, and placed above all these is the bride seen in her uniqueness as a "perfect dove, the one of her mother, the chosen one of her who bore her." Right from the womb some persons lie in the depths of error. As newly born, they cannot yet articulate anything. Because of their inability to assent to the faith they are considered to be infinite in number. They believe that the Word of mystery is salvific, yet it does not establish truth in them by knowledge and certainty. Such persons are called "young maidens" because they have attained spiritual youthfulness. Begotten by the Word of faith, they do not advance further to marriage or attain perfection. Instead, they are pregnant with fear of the Lord and beget the **J.461** spirit of salvation; however, they still have an infantile, imperfect understanding or a somewhat brutish disposition. Nevertheless, they are among the saved as the prophet says, "You, Lord, will save both man and beast" [Ps 36.6]. He calls the more irrational among the saved "beasts."

Persons who have outgrown childhood may be divided into two kinds: some grow by studious application of their minds while others are of one body with the Word and cling to him affectionately (Such a soul resembles David and Paul. They say, "For me, it is good to cling to God" [Ps 71.28], and "No one can separate us from the love of Christ; neither life, nor death, nor the present, nor the future nor anything else which exists" [Rom 8.35; 38-39]). On the other hand are persons who flee any contact with adultery through fear of punishment; **J.462** they remain incorruptible and holy, but trained by fear instead of desire, they reject evil. Those of a more perfect disposition are united in incorruptibility to God's purity; they are called "queens" by their associations with the king. Persons who cultivate virtue out of the threat of fear are called "concubines." For neither are the concubines the **M.1113** king's mother, nor are they worthy to share his dignity. How can a person lacking a master and a mind governed by virtue dissociate himself from evil expected by servile fear? The word "queens" is an example of persons made worthy to stand at the king's right side. He says to them, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you" [Mt 25.34]. To those in an inferior and lower rank, the Lord says, "Fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into the fire of Gehenna" [Lk 12.5].

To me, this difference in numbers makes clear through symbols the distinction of the groups. How do I express this? There are six commandments which prepare the kingdom of master offers to the good and faithful steward. It is to be **J.463** multiplied ten times through good works in order that we may enter the Lord's joy after being found faithful in small matters and that we may be set over many things [Lk 19.17]. If the soul becomes associated with the king by these six commandments, the talent put to work multiplies the commandment ten-fold. As the good servant says, one talent effects the work of ten. Thus we find that the one queen is multiplied to sixty of them. She is associated with the kingdom by the tenfold multiplication of the six commandments. This one commandment is divided into many by the manifold nature of the commandments, and the perfection of each one is expressed individually. One queen becomes sixty according to the distinct, enumerated forms of the commandments. The bride associates herself with Christ's kingdom; while being one of the queens, she grows through these honors according to the commandments.

The six commandments multiplied by ten which are cultivated in one soul may symbolize the sixty queens. Similarly, we say that the number eight is suggested by these eighty **J.464** concubines or persons educated by fear who do not associate with evil. The psalms with the inscription eight ⁶ admonish us out of fear for things hoped for and bend God's ears to us in mercy. The number eight speaks of a fearful judge: "Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor chasten me in your wrath. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am languishing; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled" [Ps 6.2-3]. And what is offered to the judge is not subject to bribery as when anything offered to the judge is not subject to bribery as when it is lamented that there is no remembrance of God in death **M.1116** [Ps 6.6] (For how can those condemned to wailing and grinding of teeth be happy when remembering God?). In another place the prophet says that remembrance of God produces gladness [Ps 77.3]. The prophet offers the person fearing the number eight similar words when he partakes of God's mercy: "He has heard the weeping of my voice" [Ps 6.81. Holy Scripture expresses many examples of such fear, hence, we **J.465** have a tenfold increase similar to the six commandments. Thus the fear of the Lord might succeed in turning the person taught by the psalter away from evil toward doing good. Their fear, like a

⁶Gregory wrote two essays (cf. PG44.608-16) on the titles of the Psalms in which he says that the Psalter's five books form five steps on the ladder to perfection. The sole purpose of these titles is to lead us to what is good. The Septuagint title of Psalm 6 is "For the end, a psalm of David, among the hymns for the eighth."

mina⁷ or a talent, might then he multiplied through good works. The soul obtains a secondary position after the queen; its beauty comes from fear, not love, and is multiplied to the number eighty. Each one's deeds done through fear are manifest with regard to the number eight which increases ten-fold. Because a person attains the good by servile fear and not out of love for the bridegroom, he is compared to a concubine, not a queen. By fear of the number eight which increases ten-fold by good actions, such a person attains the number eighty.

The story of Hagar says that a concubine is illegitimate and not suited for someone well born; this person may not partake of what belongs to the queen and cannot share the royal inheritance because of his birth as a slave." Cast this slave woman out with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with the son of the free born" [Gen 21.10]. If **J.466** our consideration of the numbers mentioned above seems farfetched, one should remember that a person cannot attain the truth contained in the Song's words. We have only examined those symbols in a general way that we may not leave them unexamined.

If love perfectly casts out fear, as it is written [1Jn 4.18], and if fear changes into love, then unity follows, the result of salvation, for all have been united in the sole good through that perfection symbolized by a dove: "My dove, my perfect one is one; she is the one of her mother, she is the choice of her who bore her" [6.9]. The Lord's words in the Gospel explain this more clearly. In bestowing all power to his disciples through his blessing, he gives other blessings to his saints by his prayer to the Father. He adds the crown of such blessings, that in the diversity of their lives' activities, they should not be divided in their choices of the good; rather, they should all be one [Jn 17.22], united into a single good through the **M.1117** unity of the Holy Spirit. As the Apostle says, joined in the **J.467** bond of peace, all might become one body, one spirit, through the one hope to which they have been called [Eph 4.3].

It would be better here to state the divine words of the Gospel: "That they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us" [Jn 17.21]. Glory is the bond of this unity. The Holy Spirit is said to be this glory which cannot be denied by anyone prudently examining the Lord's words. He says, "The glory which you have given me, I have given to them" [Jn 17.22]. Indeed, Christ gave this glory to his disciples when he said "Receive the Holy Spirit" [Jn 20.22]. He received this glory which he already had before the world's beginning when he clothed himself with human nature. Because his human nature was glorified by the Spirit, such a relationship in the glory of the Spirit is distributed to everyone united with Christ, beginning with the disciples. Therefore, Christ says, "The glory which you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one" [Jn 17.22-23]. He who quickly grew from a youth to a perfect man arrived at the measure of that spiritual age [Eph 4.13]; even though he was born of a slave and a concubine, he received a royal dignity and the **J.468** Spirit's glory by detachment and purity. Such is the perfect dove to which the bridegroom looks when saying, "My dove, my perfect one is one; she is the one of her mother, she is the choice of her who bore her."

We know the mother of the dove, for the tree is known by its fruit. With regard to man, we do not doubt that he is born from man; by seeking the mother of the chosen dove, we will know her as no one other than that dove already mentioned because the nature of the parent is recognized in the child. Since what is born of the Spirit is spirit, the offspring is a dove. Indeed, the mother is the Dove which descended from heaven at the Jordan River, as John testifies [Jn 1.32]. This is the Dove which the young maidens call blessed and whom the concubines and queens praise. For a way lies open to all souls from every rank to that blessedness. Thus the

7A mina equals ten drachmae.

Song says, "The daughters saw her, and bless her; the queens and concubines praise her" [6.9]. Everyone is drawn to desire what they bless and praise, so the daughters praise the Dove and **J.469** desire by all means to become doves. And the fact that they praise the dove shows their zeal to attain what they praise until all become one. All will look to the same goal, and every evil will be destroyed. God will be all in all, and all persons will **M.1120** be united together in fellowship of the Good, Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

+ The End +