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THE BOOKS OF HOMILIES: Book 2—V. Against gluttony and drunkenness

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For the Easter season, I am reading the Books of Homilies, using John Griffiths' 1859 edition (https://prydain.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/the_two_books_of_homilies.pdf).

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Transcript

An Homily Against Gluttony and Drunkenness. Ye have heard in the former sermon, well beloved, the description and the virtue of fasting, with the true use of the same. Now ye shall hear how foul a thing gluttony and drunkenness is before God, the rather to move you to use fasting the more diligently.

Understand ye therefore that Almighty God, to the end that we might keep ourselves undefiled and serve him in holiness and righteousness according to his word, hath charged in his scriptures so many as look for the glorious appearing of our Saviour Christ to lead their lives in all sobriety, modesty, and temperance. Whereby we may learn how necessary it is for every Christian that will not be found unready at the coming of our Saviour Christ to live sober-minded in this present world. For as much as otherwise being unready, he cannot enter with Christ into glory, and being unarmed in this behalf, he must needs be in continual danger of that cruel adversary, the roaring lion, against whom the apostle Peter warneth us to prepare ourselves in continual sobriety, that we

may resist being steadfast in faith.

To the intent therefore that this soberness may be used in all our behaviour, it shall be expedient for us to declare unto you how much all kind of excess offendeth the majesty of Almighty God, and how grievously he punisheth the immoderate abuse of those his creatures which he ordained to the maintenance of this unneedy life, as meats, drinks, and apparel, and again to show the noisome diseases and great mischiefs that commonly do follow them, that inordinately give up themselves to be carried headlong with such pleasures, as are joined either with dainty and over-large fare, or else with costly and sumptuous apparel. And first, that ye may perceive how detestable and hateful all excess in eating and drinking is before the face of Almighty God, ye shall call to mind what is written by St. Paul to the Galatians, where he numbereth gluttony and drunkenness among those horrible crimes, with the which, as he saith, no man shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. He reckoneth them among the deeds of the flesh, and coupleth them with idolatry, whoredom, and murder, which are the greatest offences that can be named among man.

For the first spoileth God of his honour, the second defileth his holy temple, that is, to wit our own bodies, the third maketh us companions of Cain in the slaughter of our brethren, and whoso commiteth them, as St. Paul saith, cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Certainly that sin is very odious and loathsome before the face of God, which causeth him to turn his favourable countenance so far from us, that he should clean Baris out of the doors, and disherit us of his heavenly kingdom. But he so much more abhorreth all beastly banqueting, that by his son our Saviour Christ in the gospel he declareth his terrible indignation against all belly-gods, in that he pronounceth them a curse, saying, Woe be to you that are full, for ye shall hunger! And by the prophet Esaias he crieth out, Woe be to you that rise up early, to give yourselves to drunkenness, and set all your minds so undrinking, that ye sit sweating thereat until it be night.

The harp, the lute, the chalm, and plenty of wine are at your feasts, but the works of the Lord ye do not behold, neither consider the works of his hands. Woe be unto you that are strong to drink wine, and are mighty to avoid drunkenness. Here the prophet plainly teacheth that feasting and banqueting maketh men forgetful of their duty towards God, when they give themselves to all kinds of pleasure, not considering nor regarding the works of the Lord, who hath created meats and drinks, as St. Paul saith, to be received thankfully of them that believe and know the truth.

So that the very beholding of these creatures, being the handy work of Almighty God, might teach us to use them thankfully, as God hath ordained. Therefore they are without excuse before God, which either filthily feed themselves, not respecting the sanctification which is by the word of God and prayer, or else unthankfully abuse the good creatures of God by surfeiting and drunkenness, forasmuch as God's ordinance and his creatures plainly forbideth it. They that give themselves therefore to bibbing and

banqueting, being altogether without consideration of God's judgments, are suddenly oppressed in the day of vengeance.

And thereof our Saviour Christ warneth his disciples, saying, Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcome with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this world, and so that day come on you unawares. Whosoever then will take warning at Christ, let him take heed to himself, lest his heart being overwhelmed by surfeiting and drowned in drunkenness, he be taken unawares with that unthrifty servant, which, thinking not on his Master's coming, began to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken, and being suddenly taken, hath his just reward with unbelieving hypocrites. They that used to drink deeply, and to feed at full, wallowing themselves in all kind of wickedness, are brought asleep in that slumbering forgetfulness of God's holy will and commandments.

Therefore, Almighty God, crieth by the Prophet Joel, Awake, ye drunkards, weep and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because the new wine shall be pulled from your mouth. Here the Lord terribly threateneth to withdraw his benefits from such as abuse them, and to pull the cup from the mouth of drunkards. Here we may learn not to sleep in drunkenness and surfeiting, lest God deprive us of the use of his creatures, when we unkindly abuse them.

For certainly the Lord our God will not only take away his benefits when they are unthankfully abused, but also in his wrath and heavy displeasure take vengeance on such as immoderately abuse them. If our first parents, Adam and Eve, had not obeyed their greedy appetite in eating the forbidden fruit, neither had they lost the fruition of God's benefits which they then enjoyed in Paradise, neither had they brought so many mischiefs both to themselves and to all their posterity. But when they pass the bonds that God had appointed them, as unworthy of God's benefits they are expelled and driven out of Paradise.

They may no longer eat the fruits of that garden which by excess they had so much abused. As transgressors of God's commandment, they and their posterity are brought to a perpetual shame and confusion, and as accursed of God, they must now sweat for their living, which before had abundance at their pleasure. Even so, if we in eating and drinking exceed when God of his large liberality sendeth plenty, he will soon change plenty into scarceness, and whereas we gloried in fullness, he will make us empty, and confound us with penury.

Yea, we shall be compelled to labour and travail with pains in seeking for that which we sometime enjoyed at ease. Thus the Lord will not leave them unpunished which, not regarding his works, follow the lust and appetite of their own hearts. The patriarch Noah, whom the Apostle calleth the Preacher of Righteousness, a man exceedingly in God's favour, is in Holy Scripture made an example whereby we may learn to avoid

drunkenness.

For when he had poured in wine more than was convenient, in filthy manner he lay naked in his tent. His privities discovered, and whereas sometime he was much esteemed, he is now become a laughing-stock to his wicked son Cam, no small grief to Sam and Japheth, his other two sons, which were ashamed of their father's beastly behaviour. Here we may note that drunkenness bringeth with it shame and derision, so that it never escapeth unpunished.

Lot in like manner, being overcome with wine, committeth abominable incest with his own daughters. So will Almighty God give over drunkards to the shameful lusts of their lewd hearts. Here is Lot by drinking fallen so far beside himself that he knoweth not his own daughters.

Who would have thought that an old man in that heavy case, having lost his wife in all that he had, which had seen even now God's vengeance in fearful manner declared on the five cities for their vicious living, should be so far past the remembrance of his duty? But men overcome with drink are altogether mad, as Seneca saith. He was deceived by his daughters, but now many deceive themselves, never thinking that God by his horrible punishments will be avenged on them that offend by excess. It is no small plague that Lot purchased by his drunkenness, for he had copulation most filthy with his own daughters, which conceived thereby, so that the matter is brought to light, it can no longer be hid.

Two incestuous children are born, Ammon and Moab, of whom come two nations, the Ammonites and Moabites, a horde of God, and cruel adversaries to his people the Israelites. Lo, Lot hath gotten to himself by drinking sorrow and care with perpetual infamy and reproach unto the world's end. If God spared not his servant Lot, being otherwise a godly man, nephew unto Abraham, one that entertained the angels of God, what will he do to these beastly belly-slaves, which, void of all godliness or virtuous behavior, not once, but continually day and night, give themselves wholly to bibbing and banqueting? But let us yet further behold the terrible examples of God's indignation against such as greedily follow their insatiable lusts.

Amnon, the son of David, feasting himself with his brother Absalom, is cruelly murdered of his own brother. Holofernes, a valiant and mighty captain, being overwhelmed with wine, had his head stricken from his shoulders by that seely woman Judith. Simon the high priest and his two sons Mattathias and Judas, being entertained by Ptolemy, the son of Abubas, who had before married Simon's daughter, after much eating and drinking, were traitorously murdered of their own kinsmen.

If the Israelites had not given themselves to belly-cheer, they had never so often fallen to idolatry. Neither would we at this day be so addict to superstition, were it not that we so much esteemed the filling of our bellies. The Israelites, when they served idols, sat

down to eat and drink, and rose again to play as the scripture reporteth.

Therefore seeking to serve their bellies, they forsook the service of the Lord their God. So are we drawn to consent unto wickedness, when our hearts are overwhelmed by drunkenness and feasting. So Herod, setting his mind on vanquishing, was content to grant that the holy man of God, John the Baptist, should be beheaded at the request of his whore's daughter.

Had not the rich glutton been so greedily given to the pampering of his belly, he would never have been so unmerciful to the poor Lazarus, neither had he felt the torments of unquenchable fire. What was the cause that God so horribly punished Sodom and Gomorrah? Was it not their proud banqueting and continual idleness, which caused them to be so lewd of life and so unmerciful towards the poor? What shall we now think of the horrible excess whereby so many have perished and been brought to destruction? The great Alexander, after that he had conquered the whole world, was himself overcome by drunkenness, insomuch that, being drunken, he slew his faithful friend Clitus, whereof, when he was sober, he was so much ashamed that for anguish of heart he wished death. Yet notwithstanding, after this he left not his banqueting, but in one night swilled in so much wine that he fell into a fever, and, when as by no means he would abstain from wine, within few days after in miserable sort he ended his life.

The conqueror of the whole world is made a slave by excess, and becometh so mad that he murdereth his dear friend. He is plagued with sorrow, shame, and grief of heart for his intemperancy. Yet can he not leave it? He is kept in captivity, and he, which some time had subdued many, is made a subject to the vile belly.

So are drunkards and gluttons altogether without power of themselves, and the more they drink, the drier they wax. One banquet provoketh another. They study to fill their greedy stomachs.

Therefore it is commonly said, A drunken man is always dry, and a glutton's gut is never fulfilled. Insatiable truly are the affections and lusts of man's heart, and therefore we must learn to bridle them with the fear of God, so that we yield not to our own lusts, lest we kindle God's indignation against ourselves, when we seek to satisfy our beastly appetite. St. Paul teacheth us, whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, to do all to the glory of God, where he appointeth, as it were by a measure, how much a man may eat and drink, that is, to wit, so much that the mind be not made sluggish by cramming in meat and pouring in drink, so that it cannot lift up itself to the praise and glory of God.

Whatsoever he be then, that by eating and drinking makes himself un lusty to serve God, let him not think to escape unpunished. Ye have heard how much almighty God detesteth the abuse of his creatures, as he himself declareth, as well by his holy word, as also by the fearful examples of his just judgments. Now if neither the word of God can restrain our raging lusts and greedy appetites, neither the manifest examples of God's

vengeance fear us from riotous and excessive eating and drinking, let us yet consider the manifold mischiefs that proceed thereof.

So shall we know the tree by the fruits. It hurteth the body, it infecteth the mind, it wasteth the substance, and is noifull to the neighbours. But who is able to express the manifold dangers and inconveniences that follow of intemperate diet? Oft cometh sudden death by banqueting, sometime the members are dissolved, and so the whole body is brought into a miserable state.

He that eateth and drinketh unmeasurably kindleth oft times such an unnatural heat in his body, that his appetite is provoked thereby to desire more than it should, or else it overcometh his stomach, and filleth all the body full of sluggishness, makes it unlustly and unfit to serve either God or man, not nourishing the body, but hurting it, and last of all bringeth many kinds of incurable diseases, whereof ensueth sometimes desperate death. But what should I need to say any more in this behalf? For except God bless our meats and give them strength to feed us, again except God give strength to nature to digest, so that we may take profit by them, either shall we filthy vomit them up again, or else shall they lie, stinking in our bodies, as in a loathsome sink or kennel, and so diversely infect the whole body. And surely the blessing of God is so far from such as use riot as banqueting, that in their faces be sometimes seen the expressed tokens of this intemperancy, as Solomon noteth in his Proverbs.

To whom is woe, saith he, to whom is sorrow, to whom is strife, to whom is brawling, to whom are wounds without cause, and for whom is the redness of eyes, even to them that tarry long at the wine? Mark I beseech you, the terrible tokens of God's indignation, woe and sorrow, strife and brawling, wounds without cause, disfigured face, and redness of eyes, are to be looked for when men set themselves to excess and gourmandise, devising all means to increase their greedy appetites by tempering the wine and sourcing it in such sort that it may be more delectable and pleasant unto them. It were expedient that such delicate persons should be ruled by Solomon, who, in consideration of the foresaid inconveniences, forbiddeth the very sight of wine. Look not upon the wine, saith he, when it is red, and when it showeth his colour in the cup, or goeth down pleasantly, for in the end thereof it will bite like a serpent, and hurt like a cockatrice.

Thine eyes shall look upon strange women, and thine heart shall speak lewd things, and thou shalt be as one that sleepeth in the midders of the sea, and as he that sleepeth in the top of the mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, but I was not sick, they have beaten me, but I felt it not, therefore will I seek it yet still. Certainly that must needs be very hurtful, which biteth and infecteth like a poisoned serpent, whereby men are brought to filthy fornication, which causeth the heart to devise mischief.

He doubtless is in great danger that sleepeth in the midst of the sea, for soon he is overwhelmed with waves. He is like to fall suddenly that sleepeth in the top of the mast,

and surely he hath lost his senses that cannot feel when he is stricken, that knoweth not when he is beaten. So surfeiting and drunkenness bites by the belly, and causeth continual gnawing in the stomach, brings men to whoredom and lewdness of heart, with dangers unspeakable, so that men are bereaved and robbed of their senses, and are altogether without power of themselves.

Who seeth not now the miserable estate wherein to men are brought by these foul, filthy monsters, gluttony and drunkenness? The body is so much disquieted by them, that, as Jesus the son of Sirach affirmeth, the insatiable feeder never sleepeth quietly, such an unmeasurable heat is kindled, whereof ensueth continual ache and pain to the whole body. And no less truly is the mind also annoyed by surfeiting banquets, for sometimes men are stricken with frenzy of mind, and are brought in manner to mere madness, some wax so brutish and blockish, that they become altogether void of understanding. It is an horrible thing that any man should maim himself in any member, but for a man of his own accord to bereave himself of his wits is a mischief intolerable.

The prophet Ozi, in the fourth chapter, saith that wine and drunkenness taketh away the heart. Alas, then, that any man should yield unto that whereby he might bereave himself of the possession of his own heart. Wine and women lead wise men out of the way, and bring men of understanding to reproof and shame, saith Jesus the son of Sirach.

Yea, he asketh, what is the life of man that is overcome with drunkenness? Wine drunken with excess maketh bitterness of mind, and causeth brawling and strife. In magistrates it causeth cruelty instead of justice, as that wise philosopher Plato perceived right well, when he affirmed that, A drunken man hath a tyrannous heart, and therefore will rule all at his pleasure contrary to right and reason. And certainly drunkenness maketh men forget both law and equity, which caused King Solomon so straightly to charge that no wine should be given unto rulers, lest peradventure by drinking they forget what the law appointed them, and so change the judgment of all the children of the poor.

Therefore among all sorts of men excessive drinking is most intolerable in a magistrate or man of authority, as Plato saith. For a drunkard knoweth not where he is himself, if then a man of authority should be a drunkard, alas, how might he be a guide unto other men, standing in need of a governor himself? Besides this, a drunken man can keep nothing secret. Many fond, foolish, and filthy words are spoken when men are at their banquets.

Drunkenness, as Seneca affirmeth, discovereth all wickedness, and bringeth it to light. It removeth all shamefastness, and increaseth all mischief. The proud man, being drunken, uttereth his pride, the cruel man his cruelty, and the envious man his envy, so that no vice can lie hid in a drunkard.

Moreover, in that he knoweth not himself, fumbleth and stammereth in his speech,

staggereth to and fro in his going, beholdeth nothing steadfastly with his staring eyes, believeth that his house runneth round about him, it is evident the mind is brought clean out of frame by excessive drinking, so that whosoever is deceived by wine or strong drink becometh, as Solomon saith, a mocker or a madman, so that he can never be wise. If any man think that he may drink much wine, and yet be well in his wits, he may as well suppose as Seneca saith, that when he hath drunken poison he shall not die. For wheresoever excessive drinking is, there must needs follow perturbation of mind, and where the belly is stuffed with dainty fare, there the mind is oppressed with slothful sluggishness.

A full belly maketh a gross understanding, saith St. Bernard, and much meat maketh a weary mind. But alas! nowadays men pass little either for body or mind, so they have worldly wealth and riches abundant to satisfy their unmeasurable lusts, they care not what they do. They are not ashamed to show their drunken faces, and to play the madmen openly.

They think themselves in good case, and that all is well with them, if they be not pinched by lack and poverty. Lest any of us therefore might take occasion to flatter himself in this beastly kind of excess by the abundance of riches, let us call to mind what Solomon writeth in the twenty-first of his Proverbs. He that loveth wine and fat fare shall never be rich, saith he.

And in the twenty-third chapter he maketh a vehement exhortation on this wise. Keep not company with drunkards and gluttons, for the glutton and drunkard shall come to poverty. He that draweth his patrimony through his throat, and eateth and drinketh more in one hour or in one day than he is able to earn in a whole week, must needs be an unthrift, and come to beggary.

But some will say, What need any to find fault with this? He hurteth no man but himself, he is no man's foe but his own. Indeed, I know this is commonly spoken in defence of these beastly belly-gods, but it is easy to see how hurtful they are, not only to themselves, but also to the commonwealth by their example. Every one that meeteth them is troubled with brawling and contentious language, and oft times raging in beastly lusts like fed horses, they neigh on their neighbours' wives, as Jeremy saith, and defile their children and daughters.

Their example is evil to them among whom they dwell, they are an occasion of offence to many, and whilst they waste their substance in banqueting, their own household is not provided of things necessary, their wives and their children are evil and treated, they have not wherewith to relieve their poor neighbours in times of necessity, as they might have if they lived soberly, they are unprofitable to the commonwealth, for a drunkard is neither fit to rule, nor to be ruled, they are a slander to the church or congregation of Christ, and therefore St. Paul doth excommunicate them among whore-mongers,

idolaters, covetous persons, and extortioners, forbidding Christians to eat with any such. Let us therefore, good people, eschew every one of us, all intemperancy, let us love sobriety and moderate diet, oft give ourselves to abstinence and fasting, whereby the mind of man is more lift up to God, more ready to all godly exercises, as prayer, hearing and reading of God's word, to his spiritual comfort. Finally, whosoever regardeth the health and safety of his own body, or wisheth always to be well in his wits, or desireth quietness of mind, and abhorreth fury and madness, he that would be rich, and escape poverty, he that is willing to live without the hurt of his neighbour, a profitable member of the commonwealth, a Christian without slander of Christ and his church, let him avoid all riotous and excessive banqueting, let him learn to keep such measure as behoveth him that professeth true godliness, let him follow St. Paul's rule, and so eat and drink to the glory and praise of God, who hath created all things to be soberly used with thanksgiving, to whom be all honour and glory for ever.

Amen.