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THE BOOKS OF HOMILIES: Book 2—XI. Of alms deeds

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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, of alms deeds and mercifulness toward the poor and needy. Amongst the manifold duties that Almighty God requireth of His faithful servants the true Christians, by the which He would that both His name should be glorified, and the certainty of their vocation declared, there is none that is either more acceptable unto Him, or more profitable for them, than are the works of mercy and pity showed upon the poor, which be afflicted with any kind of misery. And yet, this notwithstanding, such is the slothful sluggishness of our dull nature to that which is good and godly, that we are almost in nothing more negligent and less careful than we are therein.

It is therefore a very necessary thing that God's people should awake their sleepy minds, and consider their duty on this behalf. And meet it is, that all true Christians should desirously seek and learn what God, by His holy word, doth herein require of them, that, first knowing their duty, whereof many by their slackness seem to be very ignorant, they may afterwards diligently endeavour to perform the same. By the which both the godly charitable persons may be encouraged to go forwards and continue in their merciful

deeds of giving alms to the poor, and also such as hitherto have either neglected or contemned it, may yet now at the length, when they shall hear how much it appertaineth to them, advisedly considerate, and virtuously apply themselves thereunto.

And to the intent that every one of you may the better understand that which is taught, and also easily abear away, and so take more fruit of, that shall be said, when several matters are severally handled, I mine particularly, and in this order, to speak and entreat of these points. First, I will show how earnestly almighty God in His holy word doth exact the doing of alms-deeds of us, and how acceptable they be unto Him. Secondly, how profitable it is for us to use them, and what commodity and fruit they will bring unto us.

Thirdly, and last, I will show out of God's word, that whoso is liberal to the poor, and relieveth them plenteously, shall notwithstanding have sufficient for himself, and evermore be without danger of penury and scarcity. Concerning the first, which is the acceptation and dignity or price of alms-deeds before God, know this, that to help and succour the poor in their need and misery, pleaseth God so much, that as the holy scripture in sundry places recordeth, nothing can be more thankfully taken or accepted of God. For first we read, that almighty God doth account that to be given, and to be bestowed unto himself, that it is bestowed upon the poor.

For so doth the Holy Ghost testify unto us, by the wise man, saying, He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord himself. And Christ in the gospel advoucheth, and as a most certain truth bindeth it with an oath, that the alms bestowed upon the poor was bestowed upon him, and so shall be reckoned at the last day. For thus he saith to the charitable almsgivers, when he sitteth as judge in the doom, to give sentence of every man according to his deserts.

Verily I say unto you, whatsoever good and merciful deed you did upon any of the least of these my brethren, ye did the same unto me. In relieving their hunger, ye relieved mine. In quenching their thirst, ye quenched mine.

In clothing them, ye clothed me. And when ye harboured them, ye lodged me also. When ye visited them, being sick or in prison, ye visited me.

For as he that receiveth the prince's ambassadors, and entertaineth them well, doth honour the prince from whom those ambassadors do come. So he that receiveth the poor and needy, and helpeth them in their affliction and distress, doth thereby receive and honour Christ their master, who as he was poor and needy himself whilst he lived here amongst us, to work the mystery of our salvation. So at his departure hence, he promised in his stead to send unto us those that were poor, by whose means his absence should be supplied.

And therefore that we would do unto him, we must do unto them. And for this cause doth almighty God say unto Moses, The land wherein you dwell shall never be without poor

men, because he would have continual trial of his people, whether they loved him or no, that in showing themselves obedient unto his will, they might certainly assure themselves of his love and favour towards them, and nothing doubt but that, as his law and ordinances, wherein he commanded them that they should open their hand unto their brethren that were poor and needy in the land, were accepted of them and willingly performed, so he would on his part lovingly accept them and truly perform his promises that he had made unto them. The holy apostles and disciples of Christ, who by reason of his daily conversation saw by his deeds, and heard in his doctrine how much he tended the poor, the godly fathers also that were both before and since Christ, endued without doubt with the Holy Ghost, and most certainly certified of God's holy will, they both do most earnestly exhort us, and in all their writings almost continually admonish us, that we would remember the poor and bestow our charitable arms upon them.

St. Paul crieth unto us after this sort, Comfort the feeble-minded, lift up the weak, and be charitable toward all men. And again, To do good to the poor and to distribute arms gladly, see that thou do not forget, for with such sacrifices is God pleased. Esai the prophet teacheth on this wise, Deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the poor wandering home to thy house.

When thou seest the naked, see thou clothe him, and hide not thy face from thy poor neighbour, neither despise thou thine own flesh. And the holy father Toby giveth this counsel, Give arms, saith he, of thine own goods, and turn never thy face from the poor. Eat thy bread with the hungry, and cover the naked with thy clothes.

And the learned and godly doctor Chrysostom giveth this admonition, Let merciful arms be always with us as a garment, that is, as mindful as we will be to put our garments upon us, to cover our nakedness, to defend us from the cold, and to show ourselves comely, so mindful let us be at all times and seasons that we give arms to the poor, and show ourselves merciful towards them. But what mean these often admonitions and earnest exhortations of the prophets, apostles, fathers, and holy doctors? Surely as they were faithful to Godward, and therefore discharged their duty truly in telling us what was God's will, so of a singular love to usward, they laboured not only to inform us, but also to persuade with us, that to give arms, and to succour the poor and needy, was a very acceptable thing, and a high sacrifice to God, wherein he greatly delighted, and had a singular pleasure. For so doth the wise man, the son of Sirach, teach us, saying, Whoso is merciful and giveth arms, he offereth the right thank-offering, and he addeth thereunto, the right thank-offering maketh the altar fat, and a sweet smell is it before the highest, it is acceptable before God, and shall never be forgotten.

And the truth of this doctrine is verified by the examples of those holy and charitable fathers, of whom we read in the Scriptures, that they were given to merciful compassion towards the poor, and charitable relieving of their necessities. Such a one was Abraham, in whom God had so great pleasure, that he vouchsafed to come unto him in form of an

angel, and to be entertained of him at his house. Such was his kinsman Lot, whom God so favoured for receiving his messengers into his house, which otherwise should have lain in the street, that he saved him with his whole family from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Such were the holy fathers Job and Toby, with many others, who felt most sensible proofs of God's special love towards them. And as all these, by their mercifulness and tender compassion, which they showed to the miserable afflicted members of Christ in the relieving, helping, and succoring them with their temporal goods in this life, obtained God's favour, and were dear, acceptable, and pleasant in his sight, so now they themselves take pleasure in the fruition of God, in the pleasant joys of heaven, and are also in God's eternal words set before us, as perfect examples ever before our eyes, both how we shall please God in this our mortal life, and also how we may come to live in joy with them in everlasting pleasure and felicity. For most true is that saying which St. Augustine hath, that the giving of arms and relieving of the poor is the right way to heaven.

Via celi pauper est, the poor man saith he, is the way to heaven. The Euston times pass to set in highway sides the picture of Mercury, pointing with his finger which was the right way to the town, and we use in crossways to set up a wooden or stone cross to admonish the travelling man which way he must turn when he cometh thither to direct his journey aright. But God's word, as St. Augustine saith, hath set in the way to heaven the poor man and his house, so that whoso will go aright thither, and not turn out of the way, must go by the poor.

The poor man is that Mercury that shall set us the ready way, and if we look well to this mark, we shall not wander much out of the right path. The manner of wise worldly men among us is, that if they know a man of meaner estate than themselves to be in favour with the prince or any other nobleman, whom they either fear or love, such a one they will be glad to benefit and pleasure, that, when they have need, he may become their spokesman, either to help with his good word to obtain a commodity, or to escape a displeasure. Now surely it ought to be a shame to us, that worldly men for temporal things, that last but for a season, should be more wise and provident in procuring them than we in heavenly.

Our Saviour Christ testifieth of poor men, that they are dear unto him, and that he loveth them especially, for he calleth them his little ones. By a name of tender love he saith they be his brethren. And St. James saith, that God hath chosen them to be heirs of his kingdom.

Hath not God, saith he, chosen the poor of this world to himself, to make them hereafter the rich heirs of that kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him? And we know that the prayer which they make for us shall be accepted and regarded of God.

Their complaint shall be heard also. Thereof doth Jesus the son of Sirach certainly assure us, saying, If the poor complain of thee in the bitterness of his soul, his prayer shall be heard, even he that made him shall hear him.

Be courteous therefore unto the poor. We know also, that he who acknowledgeth himself to be their master and patron, and refuseth not to take them for his servants, is both able to pleasure and displeasure us, and that we stand in every hour in need of his help. Why should we then be either negligent or unwilling to procure their friendship and favour, by the which also we may be assured to get his favour, that is both able and willing to do us all pleasures that are for our commodity and wealth? Christ doth declare by this, how much he accepteth our charitable affection toward the poor, in that he promiseth a reward unto them that give but a cup of cold water in his name, to them that have need thereof, and that reward is the kingdom of heaven.

No doubt is it, therefore, but that God regardeth highly that which he rewardeth so liberally. For he that promiseth a princely recompense for a beggarly benevolence, declareth that he is more delighted with the giving than with the gift, and that he as much esteemeth the doing of the thing as the fruit and commodity that cometh of it. Whoso therefore hath hitherto neglected to give alms, let him know that God now requireth it of him.

And he that hath been liberal to the poor, let him know that his godly doings are accepted, and thankfully taken at God's hands, which he will requite with double and treble. For so saith the wise man, He which showeth mercy to the poor doth lay his money in bank to the Lord for a large interest and gain, the gain being chiefly the possession of the life everlasting through the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory for ever. Amen.

Ye have heard before, dearly beloved, that to give alms unto the poor and to help them in time of necessity is so acceptable unto our Saviour Christ that he counteth that to be done to himself that we do for his sake unto them. Ye have heard also how earnestly both the apostles, prophets, holy fathers and doctors do exhort us unto the same. And ye see how well beloved and dear unto God they were whom the Scriptures report unto us to have been good almsmen.

Wherefore, if either their good examples or the wholesome counsel of godly fathers or the love of Christ, whose a special favour we may be assured by this means to obtain, may move us or do anything at all with us, let us provide that from henceforth we show unto Godward this thankful service to be mindful and ready to help them that be poor and in misery. Now will I, this second time that I am treat of almsdeeds, show unto you how profitable it is for us to exercise them, and what fruit thereby shall rise unto us if we do them faithfully. Our Saviour Christ in the gospel teacheth us that it profiteth a man nothing to have in possession all the riches of the whole world, and the wealth or glory

thereof, if in the mean season he lose his soul, or do that thing whereby it should become captive unto death, sin, and hell fire.

By the which saying, he not only instructeth us how much the soul health is to be preferred before worldly commodities, but also serveth to stir up our minds and to prick us forwards, to seek diligently and learn by what means we may preserve and keep our souls ever in safety, that is, how we may recover their health if it be lost or impaired, and how it may be defended and maintained if we once have it. Yea, he teacheth us also thereby to esteem that as a precious medicine and an inestimable jewel that hath such strength and virtue in it, that can either procure or preserve so incomparable a treasure. For if we greatly regard that medicine or salve that is able to heal sundry and grievous diseases of the body, much more will we esteem that which hath like power over the soul.

And because we might be the better assured both to know and have in readiness that so profitable a remedy, he as a most faithful and loving teacher showeth himself both what it is and where we may find it, and how we may use and apply it. For when both he and his disciples were grievously accused of the Pharisees to have defiled their souls in breaking the constitutions of the elders because they went to meat and washed not their hands before, according to the custom of the Jews, Christ, answering their superstitious complaint, teacheth them an especial remedy how to keep clean their souls, notwithstanding the breach of such superstitious orders. Give alms, saith he, and behold all things are clean unto you.

He teacheth them that to be merciful and charitable in helping the poor is the means to keep the soul pure and clean in the sight of God. We are taught, therefore, by this, that merciful alms-dealing is profitable to purge the soul from the infection and filthy spots of sin. The same lesson doth the Holy Ghost also teach in sundry places of the Scripture, saying, Mercifulness and almsgiving purgeth from all sins, and delivereth from death, and suffereth not the soul to come into darkness.

A great confidence may they have before the High God that show mercy and compassion to them that are afflicted. The wise preacher, the son of Sirach, confirmeth the same, when he saith that as water quencheth burning fire, even so mercy and alms resisteth and reconcileth sins. And sure it is that mercifulness quelleth the heat of sin so much that they shall not take hold upon man to hurt him.

Or if he have by any infirmity or weakness been touched and annoyed with them, straightway shall mercifulness wipe and wash them away, as salves and remedies to heal their sores and grievous diseases. And thereupon that Holy Father Cyprian taketh good occasion to exhort earnestly to the merciful work of giving alms and helping the poor. And there he admonisheth to consider how wholesome and profitable it is to relieve the needy and help the afflicted, by the which we may purge our sins and heal

our wounded souls.

But here some will say unto me, if almsgiving and our charitable works towards the poor be able to wash away sins, to reconcile us to God, to deliver us from the peril of damnation, and make us the sons and heirs of God's kingdom, then is Christ's merit defaced and his blood shed in vain. Then are we justified by works and by our deeds may we merit heaven. Then do we in vain believe that Christ died for to put away our sins, and that he rose for our justification, as St. Paul teacheth.

But ye shall understand, dearly beloved, that neither those places of Scripture before alleged, neither the doctrine of the blessed martyr Cyprian, neither any other godly and learned man, when they, in extolling the dignity, profit, fruit, and effect of virtuous and liberal alms, do say that it washeth away sins, and bringeth us to the favour of God, do mean that our work and charitable deed is the original cause of our acceptation before God, or that for the dignity or worthiness thereof our sins be washed away, and we purged and cleansed of all the spots of our iniquity, for that were indeed to deface Christ, and to defraud him of his glory. But they mean this, and this is the understanding of those and such like saints, that God offer his mercy and a special favour towards them whom he hath appointed to everlasting salvation, hath so offered his grace effectually, and they have received it fruitfully, that although by reason of their sinful living outwardly they seem before to have been the children of wrath and perdition, yet now the Spirit of God mightily working in them unto obedience to God's will and commandments, they declare by their outward deeds and life, in showing of mercy and charity, which cannot come but of the Spirit of God and his special grace, that they are the undoubted children of God, appointed to everlasting life, and so as by their wickedness and ungodly living they show themselves, according to the judgment of men, which follow the outward appearance, to be reprobates and castaways, so now by their obedience unto God's holy will, and by their mercifulness and tender pity, wherein they show themselves to be like unto God, who is the fountain and spring of all mercy, they declare openly and manifestly, unto the sight of men, that they are the sons of God, and elect of him unto salvation. For as the good fruit is not the cause that the tree is good, but the tree must first be good before it can bring forth good fruit, so the good deeds of man are not the cause that maketh man good, but he is first made good by the Spirit and grace of God, that effectually worketh in him, and afterward he bringeth forth good fruits.

And then as the good fruit doth argue the goodness of the tree, so doth the good and merciful deed of the man argue and certainly prove the goodness of him that doeth it, according to Christ saying, he shall know them by their fruits. And if any man will object that evil and naughty men do sometime by their deeds appear to be very godly and virtuous, I will answer that so doth the crab and choke-pear seem outwardly to have sometime as fair a red and as mellow a colour as the fruit which is good indeed, but he that will bite and take a taste shall easily judge betwixt the sour bitterness of the one

and the sweet savouriness of the other. And as the true Christian man in thankfulness of his heart for the redemption of his soul purchased by Christ's death, showeth kindly by the fruit of his faith his obedience to God, so the other as a merchant with God doeth all for his own gain, thinking to win heaven by the merit of his works, and so defaceth and obscureth the price of Christ's blood, who only wrought our purgation.

The meaning then of these sayings in the Scriptures and other holy writings, alms deeds to wash away our sins, and mercy to the poor doth blot out our offences, is that we, doing these things according to God's will and our duty, have our sins, indeed, washed away, and our offences blotted out, not for the worthiness of them, but by the grace of God which worketh all in all, and that for the promise that God hath made to them that are obedient unto his commandment, that he which is the truth might be justified in performing the truth due to his true promise. Alms deeds do wash away our sins, because God doth vouchsafe then to repute us as clean and pure when we do them for his sake, and not because they deserve or merit our purging, or for that they have any such strength and virtue in themselves. I know that some men, too much addict to the advancing of their good works, will not be contented with this answer, and no marvel, for such men can no answer content nor suffice.

Wherefore, leaving them to their own willful sense, we will rather have regard of the reasonable and godly, who as they most certainly know and persuade themselves that all goodness, all bounty, all mercy, all benefits, all forgiveness of sins, and whatsoever can be named good and profitable, either for the body or for the soul, do come only of God's mercy and mere favour, and not of themselves. So, though they do never so many and so excellent good deeds, yet are they never puffed up with the vain confidence of them. And though they hear and read in God's word and elsewhere in godly men's works that alms deeds, mercy and charitableness doth wash away sin and blot out iniquity, yet do they not arrogantly and proudly stick or trust unto them, or brag themselves of them, as the proud Pharisee did, lest with the Pharisee they should be condemned, but rather with the humble and poor publican confess themselves sinful wretches and unworthy to look up to heaven, calling and craving for mercy, that with the publican they may be pronounced of Christ to be justified.

The godly do learn that when the Scriptures say that by good and merciful works we are reconciled to God's favour, we are taught then to know what Christ by his intercession and mediation obtaineth for us of his Father, when we be obedient to his will. Yea, they learn in such manners of speaking a comfortable argument of God's singular favour and love that attributeth that unto us and to our doings that he by his Spirit worketh in us and through his grace procureth for us. And yet, this notwithstanding, they cry out with St. Paul, O wretches that we are! And acknowledge as Christ teacheth that when they have all done, they are but unprofitable servants.

And with the blessed King David, in respect of the just judgements of God, they do

tremble and say, Who shall we be to abide it, Lord, if thou wilt give sentence according to our deserts? Thus they humble themselves and are exalted of God. They count themselves vile, and of God are counted pure and clean. They condemn themselves and are justified of God.

They think themselves unworthy of the earth and of God are thought worthy of heaven. Thus of God's word are they truly taught how to think rightly of merciful dealing of arms, and of God's especial mercy and goodness are made partakers of those fruits that his word hath promised. Let us then follow their examples and both show obediently in our life those works of mercy that we are commanded and have that right opinion and judgement of them that we are taught.

And we shall, in like manner as they, be made partakers and feel the fruit and rewards that follow such godly living. So shall we know by proof what profit and commodity doth come of giving arms and succoring of the poor. Ye have already heard two parts of this treatise of arms deeds, the first how pleasant and acceptable before God the doing of them is, the second how much it behoveth us and how profitable it is to apply ourselves unto them.

Now in this third part will I take away that let that hindereth many from doing of them. There may be many that when they hear how acceptable a thing in the sight of God the giving of arms is and how much God extendeth his favour towards them that are merciful and what fruits and commodities doth come to them by it, they wish very gladly with themselves that they also might obtain these benefits and be counted such of God as whom he would love or do for. But yet these men are with greedy covetousness, so pulled back that they will not bestow one half penny or one shive of bread that they might be thought worthy of God's benefits and so to come into his favour.

For they are ever more fearful and doubting lest by often giving although it were but a little at a time they should consume their goods and so impoverish themselves that even themselves at the length should not be able to live but should be driven to beg and live of other men's arms. And thus they seek excuses to withhold themselves from the favour of God and choose with pinching covetousness rather to lean upon the devil than by charitable mercifulness either to come unto Christ or to suffer Christ to come unto them. O that we had some cunning and skilful physician that were able to purge them of this so pestilent and humour, that so sore infecteth not their bodies but their minds and so by corrupting their souls bringeth their bodies and souls into danger of hell fire.

Now lest there be any such among us, dearly beloved, let us diligently search for that physician which is Jesus Christ and earnestly labour that of his mercy he will truly instruct us and give us a present medicine against so perilous a disease. Harken then, whosoever thou art that fearest lest by giving to the poor thou shouldst bring thyself to beggary that which thou takest from thyself to bestow upon Christ can never be

consumed and wasted away wherein thou shalt not believe me but if thou have faith and be a true Christian, believe the Holy Ghost give credit to the authority of God's word that thus teacheth for thus saith the Holy Ghost by Solomon he that giveth unto the poor shall never want men suppose that by hoarding and laying up still they shall at the length be rich and that by distributing and laying out, although it be for the most necessary and godly uses they shall be brought to poverty but the Holy Ghost which knoweth all truth teacheth us another lesson contrary to this. He teacheth us that there is a kind of dispensing that shall never diminish the stock and a kind of saving that shall bring a man to extreme poverty for where he saith that the good armsman shall never have scarcity, he addeth but he that turneth away his eyes from such as be in necessity shall suffer great poverty himself how far different then is the judgment of man from the judgment of the Holy Ghost the Holy Apostle Paul a man full of the Holy Ghost and made privy even of the secret will of God teacheth that the liberal arms giver shall not thereby be impoverished.

He that ministereth saith he, seed unto the sower will minister also bread unto you for food. Yea, he will multiply your seed and increase the fruits of your righteousness. He is not content here to advertise them that they shall not lack, but he showeth them also after what sort God will provide for them.

Even as he provideth seed for the sower in multiplying it and giving great increase so will he multiply their goods and increase them that there shall be great abundance. Unless we should think his sayings to be but words and not truth, we have an example thereof in the third book of Kings which doth confirm and seal it up as a most certain truth. The poor widow that received the banished prophet of God, Elias, went as she had but a handful of meal in a vessel and a little oil in a cruz whereof she would make a cake for herself and her son, that after they had eaten that they might die, because in that great famine there was no more food to be gotten.

Yet when she gave part thereof unto Elias and defrauded her own hungry belly mercifully to relieve him, she was so blessed of God that neither the meal nor the oil was consumed all the time while that famine did last. But thereof both the prophet Elias, she and her son, were sufficiently nourished and had enough. O consider this example, ye unbelieving and faithless, covetous persons who discredit God's word and think his power diminished.

This poor woman, in the time of an extreme and long dearth, had but one handful of meal and a little cruz of oil. Her only son was ready to perish before her face for hunger, and she herself liked to pine away. And yet when the poor prophet came and asked part, she was so mindful of mercifulness that she forgot her own misery, and rather than she would omit the occasion given to give alms and work a work of righteousness, she was content presently to hazard her own and her son's life.

And you, who have great plenty of meats and drinks, great stores of moth-eaten apparel, yea, many of you great heaps of gold and silver, and he that hath least hath more than sufficient, now in this time, when, thanks be to God, no great famine doth oppress you, your children being well clothed and well fed, and no danger of death for famine to be feared, will rather cast out some perils of unlikely penury, than you will part with any piece of your superfluities to help feed and succour the poor, hungry, and naked Christ, that cometh to your doors a-begging. This poor and seely widow never cast out in all her misery what want she herself should have. She never distrusted the promise that God had made to her by the prophet, but straight way went about to relieve the hungry prophet of God, yea, preferring his necessity before her own.

But we, like unbelieving wretches, before we will give one might, we will cast a thousand doubts of danger, whether that will stand us in any stead that we give to the poor, whether we should not have need of it at any other time, and whether here it would not have been more profitably bestowed, so that it is not more hard to wrench a strong nail, as the proverb saith, out of a post, than to wring a farthing out of our fingers. There is neither the fear nor the love of God before our eyes. We will more esteem a might, than we either desire God's kingdom, or fear the devil's dungeon.

Hearken therefore, ye merciless misers, what will be the end of this your unmerciful dealing? As certainly as God nourished this poor widow in the time of famine, and increased her little store, so that she had enough and felt no penury when other pined away, so certainly shall God plague you with poverty in the middays of plenty. Then, when other have abundance and be fed to the full, you shall utterly waste and consume away yourselves, your store shall be destroyed, your goods plucked from you, all your glory and wealth shall perish, and that which when you had, you might have enjoyed yourself in peace, and might have bestowed upon other most godly, ye shall seek with sorrow and sighs, and nowhere shall find it. For your unmercifulness towards other, ye shall find no man that will show mercy towards you.

You that had stony hearts towards other, shall find all the creatures of God to youwards as hard as brass and iron. Alas, what fury and madness doth possess our minds, that in a matter of truth and certainty we will not give credit to the truth, testifying unto that which is most certain. Christ saith that, if we will first seek the kingdom of God, and do the works of righteousness thereof, we will not be left destitute, all other things shall be given to us plenteously.

Nay, say we, I will first look that I be able to live myself, and be sure that I have enough for me and mine, and, if I have anything over, I will bestow it to get God's favour, and the poor shall then have part with me. See, I pray you, the perverse judgment of men. We have more care to nourish the carcass than we have fear to see our soul perish.

And, as Cyprian saith, whilst we stand in doubt lest our goods fail in being over-liberal,

we put it out of our doubt that our life and health faileth in not being liberal at all. Whilst we are careful for diminishing of our stock, we are altogether careless to diminish ourselves. We love mammon, and lose our souls.

We fear lest our patrimony should perish from us, but we fear not lest we should perish for it. Thus do we perversely love that we should hate, and hate that we should love. We be negligent where we should be careful, and careful where we need not.

This vain fear to lack ourselves, if we give to the poor, is much like the fear of children and fools, which when they see the bright glimpsing of a glass, they do imagine straightway that it is the lightning, and yet the brightness of a glass never was the lightning. Even so, when we imagine that by spending upon the poor a man may come to poverty, we are cast into a vain fear, for we never heard nor knew that by that means any man came to misery, and was left destitute, and not considered of God. Nay, we read to the contrary in the Scripture, as I have before showed, and as by infinite testimonies and examples may be proved, that whosoever serveth God faithfully and unfeignedly in any vocation, God will not suffer him to decay, much less to perish.

The Holy Ghost teacheth us by Solomon, that the Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to perish for hunger. And therefore David saith unto all them that are merciful, O fear the Lord, ye that be his saints, for they that fear him lack nothing. The lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they which seek the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good.

When Elias was in the desert, God fed him by the ministry of a raven, that evening and morning brought him sufficient vittles. When Daniel was shut up in the lion's den, God prepared meat for him, and sent it thither to him. But there was the saying of David fulfilled, The lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they which seek the Lord shall want no good thing.

For while the lions, which should have been fed with his flesh, roared for hunger and desire of their prey, whereof they had no power, although it were present before them, he in the meantime was fresh fed from God, that should with his flesh have filled the lions. So mightily doth God work to preserve and maintain those whom he loveth, so careful is he also to feed them who in any state or vocation do unfeignedly serve him. And shall we now think that he will be unmindful of us, if we be obedient to his word, and according to his will have pity upon the poor? He gives us all wealth, before we do any service for it.

And will he see us to lack necessities when we do him true service? Can a man think that he that feedeth Christ can be forsaken of God and left without food? Or will Christ deny earthly things unto them whom he promises heavenly things for his true service? It cannot be therefore, dear brethren, that by giving of alms we should at any time want ourselves, or that we, which relieve other men's need, should ourselves be oppressed

with penury. It is contrary to God's word, it repuneth with his promise. It is against Christ's property and nature to suffer it.

It is the crafty surmise of the devil to persuade us it. Wherefore stick not to give alms freely, and trust notwithstanding that God's goodness will minister unto us sufficiency and plenty, so long as we shall live in this transitory life. And after our days here well spent in his service and the love of our brethren, we shall be crowned with everlasting glory, to reign with Christ our Saviour in heaven, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory for ever.

Amen.