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THE BOOKS OF HOMILIES: Book 2—XX. Of Repentance and true Reconciliation unto God

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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 Repentance and of True Reconciliation unto God. There is nothing that the Holy Ghost doth so much labor in all the Scriptures to beat into men's heads as repentance, amendment of life, and speedy returning unto the Lord God of hosts. And no marvel why, for we do daily and hourly, by our wickedness and stubborn disobedience, horribly fall away from God, thereby purchasing unto ourselves, if he should deal with us according to his justice, eternal damnation.

So that no doctrine is so necessary in the Church of God as is the doctrine of repentance and amendment of life. And verily the true preachers of the gospel of the kingdom of heaven, and of the glad and joyful tidings of salvation, have always in their godly sermons and preachings unto the people joined these two together, I mean repentance and forgiveness of sins, even as our Savior Jesus Christ did appoint himself, saying, So it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise again the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name among all nations. And therefore the

holy apostle doth in the act speak after this manner, I have witnessed both to the Jews and to the Gentiles the repentance towards God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Did not John Baptist, Zachary's son, begin his ministry with the doctrine of repentance, saying, Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand? The like doctrine did our Savior Jesus Christ preach himself, and commanded his apostles to preach the same. I might here allege very many places out of the prophets, in the which this most wholesome doctrine of repentance is very earnestly urged, as most needful for all degrees and orders of men, but one shall be sufficient at this present time. These are the words of Joel the prophet.

Therefore also now the Lord saith, Return unto me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning, and rent your hearts, and knot your clothes, and return unto the Lord your God. For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great compassion, and ready to pardon wickedness. Whereby it is given us to understand that we have here a perpetual rule appointed unto us, which ought to be observed and kept at all times, and that there is none other way whereby the wrath of God may be pacified, and his anger assuaged, that the fierceness of his fury, and the plagues or destruction, which by his righteous judgment he had determined to bring upon us, may depart, be removed, and taken away.

Where he saith, But now therefore saith the Lord, Return unto me, it is not without great importance that the prophets speaketh so. For he had afore set forth at large unto them the horrible vengeance of God, which no man was able to abide, and therefore he doth move them to repentance, to obtain mercy. As if he should say, I will not have these things to be so taken, as though there were no hope of grace left.

For although ye do by your sins deserve to be utterly destroyed, and God by his righteous judgments hath determined to bring no small destruction upon you, yet, now that ye are in a manner on the very edge of the sword, if ye will speedily return unto him, he will most gently and most mercifully receive you into favour again, whereby we are admonished that repentance is never too late, so that it be true and earnest. For sith that God in the scriptures will be called our Father, doubtless he doth follow the nature and property of gentle and merciful fathers, which seek nothing so much as the returning again and amendment of their children, as Christ doth abundantly teach in the parable of the prodigal son. Doth not the Lord himself say by the prophet, I will not the death of the wicked, but that he turn from his wicked ways and live? And in another place, if we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to make us clean from all wickedness.

Which most comfortable promises are confirmed by many examples of the scriptures. When the Jews did willingly receive and embrace the wholesome counsel of the prophet Esai, God by and by did reach his helping hand unto them, and by his angel did in one night slay the most worthy and valiant soldiers of Sennacherib's camp. Whereunto may

King Manasses be added, who after all manner of damnable wickedness returned unto the Lord, and therefore was heard of him, and restored again into his kingdom.

The same grace and favour did the sinful woman, Magdalene, Zacchaeus, the poor thief, and many other feel. All which things ought to serve for our comfort against the temptations of our consciences, whereby the devil goeth about to shake, or rather to overthrow our faith. For every one of us ought to apply the same unto himself, and say, Yet now return unto the Lord.

Neither let the remembrance of thy former life discourage thee, yea, the more wicked that it hath been, the more fervent and earnest let thy repentance or returning be, and forthwith thou shalt feel the ears of the Lord wide open unto thy prayers. But let us more narrowly look upon the commandment of the Lord touching this matter. Turn unto me, saith he by his prophet Joel, with all your hearts, with fasting, with weeping, and mourning, rent your hearts, and not your garments, etc.

In which words he comprehendeth all manner of things that can be spoken of repentance, which is the turning again of the whole man unto God, from whom we be fallen away by sin. But that the whole discourse thereof may the better be borne away, we shall first consider in order four principal points, that is, from what we must return, to whom we must return, by whom we may be able to convert, and the manner how to turn to God. First from whence or from what things we must return.

Truly we must return from those things whereby we have been withdrawn, plucked, and led away from God. And these generally are our sins, which, as the holy prophet Esaias doth testify, do separate God and us, and hide his face, that he will not hear us. But under the name of sin are reckoned not only those gross words and deeds which by the common judgment of men are counted to be filthy and unlawful, and so consequently abominable sins, but also the filthy lusts and inward concupiscences of the flesh, which, as St. Paul testifieth, do resist the will and spirit of God, and therefore ought earnestly to be bridled and kept under.

We must repent of the false and erroneous opinions that we have had of God, and the wicked superstition that doth breed of the same, the unlawful worshipping and service of God, and other like. All these things must they forsake that will truly turn unto the Lord, and repent are right. For sith that for such things the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience, no end of punishment ought to be looked for as long as we continue in such things.

Therefore they be here condemned, which will seem to be repentant sinners, and yet will not forsake their idolatry and superstition. Secondly, we must see unto whom we ought to return. *Revirtimini usque ad mea*, saith the Lord, that is, return as far as unto me.

We must then return unto the Lord, yea, we must return unto him alone, for he alone is

the truth and the foundation of all goodness. But we must labour that we do return as far as unto him, and that we do never cease and rest till we have apprehended and taken hold upon him. But this must be done by faith, for sith that God is a spirit, he can by none other mean be apprehended and taken hold upon.

Therefore first they do greatly err which do not turn unto God, but unto the creatures, or unto the inventions of men, or unto their own merits. Secondly they that do begin to return unto the Lord, and do faint in the midway, afore they come to the mark that is appointed unto them. Thirdly, because we have of our own selves nothing to present us to God, and do no less flee from him after our fall than our first parent Adam did, which, when he had sinned, did seek to hide himself from the sight of God, we have need of a mediator for to bring and reconcile us unto him, who for our sins is angry with us.

The same is Jesus Christ, who being true and natural God, equal and of one substance with the Father, did at the time appointed take upon him our frail nature in the blessed Virgin's womb, and that of her undefiled substance, that so he might be a mediator betwixt God and us, and pacify his wrath. Of him doth the Father himself speak from heaven, saying, This is my well-beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And he himself in his gospel doth cry out, and say, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No man cometh unto the Father but by me. And he alone did with the sacrifice of his body and blood make satisfaction unto the justice of God for our sins. The apostles do testify that he was exalted for to give repentance and remission of sins unto Israel, both which things he himself did command to be preached in his name.

Therefore they are greatly deceived that preach repentance without Christ, and teach the simple and ignorant that it consisteth only in the works of men. They may indeed speak many things of good works and of amendment of life and manners, but without Christ they be all vain and unprofitable. They that think that they have done much of themselves toward repentance are so much more the further from God, because that they do seek those things in their own works and merits, which ought only to be sought in our Saviour Jesus Christ, and in the merits of his death, passion, and bloodshedding.

Fourthly, this holy prophet Joel doth lively express the manner of this our returning or repentance, comprehending all the inward and outward things that may be here observed. First, he will have us to return unto God with our whole heart, whereby he doth remove and put away all hypocrisy, lest the same might justly be said unto us, This people draweth near unto me with their mouth, and worship me with their lips, but their heart is far off from me. Secondly, he requireth a sincere and pure love of godliness, and of the true worshipping and service of God.

That is to say, that, forsaking all manner of things that are repugnant and contrary unto God's will, we do give our hearts unto him, and all the whole strength of our bodies and souls, according to that which is written in the law, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with

all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength. Here therefore nothing is left unto us that we may give unto the world, and unto the lusts of the flesh. For sith that the heart is the fountain of all our works, as many as do with their whole heart turn unto the Lord, do live unto him only.

Neither do they yet repent truly that, halting on both sides, do otherwise obey God, but by and by do think that, laying him aside, it is lawful for them to serve the world and the flesh. And because that we are letted by the natural corruption of our own flesh, and the wicked affections of the same, he doth bid us also to return with fasting, not thereby understanding a superstitious abstinence and choosing of meats, but a true discipline or taming of the flesh, whereby the nourishments of filthy lusts, and of stubborn contumacy and pride, may be withdrawn and plucked away from it. Whereunto he doth add weeping and mourning, which do contain an outward profession of repentance, which is very needful and necessary, that so we may partly set forth the righteousness of God, when by such means we do testify that we deserve punishments at his hand, and partly stop the offence that was openly given unto the weak.

This did David see, who being not content to have bewept and bewailed his sins privately, would publicly in his psalms declare and set forth the righteousness of God in punishing sin, and also stay them that mought have abused his example to sin the more boldly. Therefore they are furthest from true repentance, that will not confess and acknowledge their sins, nor yet bewail them, but rather do most ungodly glory and rejoice in them. Now, lest any man should think that repentance doth consist in outward weeping and mourning only, he doth rehearse that wherein the chief of the whole matter doth lie, when he said, Rent your hearts, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God.

For the people of the east part of the world will want to rent their garments, if anything had happened unto them that seemed intolerable. This thing did hypocrites sometime counterfeit and follow, as though the whole repentance did stand in such outward gesture. He teacheth, then, that another manner of thing is required, that is, that they must be contrite in their hearts, that they must utterly detest and abhor sins, and, being at defiance with them, return unto the Lord their God, from whom they went away before.

For God hath no pleasure in the outward ceremony, but requireth a contrite and humble heart, which he will never despise, as David doth testify. There is therefore none other use of these outward ceremonies, but as far forth as we are stirred up by them, and do serve to the glory of God, and to the edifying of other. Now doth he add unto this doctrine or exhortation certain goodly reasons, which he doth ground upon the nature and property of God, and whereby he doth teach that true repentance can never be unprofitable or unfruitful.

For, as in all other things, men's hearts do quail and faint, if they once perceive that they travail in vain. Even so, most specially in this matter, must we take heed, and beware, that we suffer not ourselves to be persuaded, that all that we do is but labour lost. For thereof either sudden desperation doth arise, or a licentious boldness to sin, which at length bringeth unto desperation.

Lest any such thing then should happen unto them, he doth certify them of the grace and goodness of God, who is always most ready to receive them into favour again that turns speedily unto him. Which thing he doth prove with the same titles wherewith God doth describe and set forth himself unto Moses speaking on this manner. For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil, that is, such a one as is sorry for your affliction.

First he calleth him gentle and gracious, as he who of his own nature is more prompt and ready to do good than to punish. Whereunto this saying of Esai the prophet seemeth to pertain, where he saith, Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous his own imaginations, and return unto the Lord, and he will have pity on him. And to our God, for he is very ready to forgive.

Secondly he doth attribute unto him mercy, or rather, according to the Hebrew word, the bowels of mercies, whereby are signified the natural affections of parents towards their children. Which thing David doth set forth goodly, saying, As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear him. For he knoweth whereof we be made, he remembereth that we are but dust.

Thirdly he saith that he is slow to anger, that is to say, longsuffering, and which is not lightly provoked to wrath. Fourthly that he is of much kindness, for he is that bottomless well of all goodness, who rejoiceth to do good unto us. Therefore did he create and make men, that he might have whom he should do good unto, and make partakers of his heavenly riches.

Fifthly he repenteth of the evil, that is to say, he doth call back again and revoke the punishment which he had threatened, when he seeth men repent, turn, and amend. Whereupon we do not without a just cause detest and abhor the damnable opinion of them which do most wickedly go about, to persuade the simple and ignorant people, that if we chance after we be once come to God and graft in his Son Jesus Christ, to fall into some horrible sin, repentance shall be unprofitable unto us. There is no more hope of reconciliation, or to be received again into the favour and mercy of God, and that they may give the better colour unto their pestilent and pernicious error.

They do commonly bring in the sixth and tenth chapters of the epistle to the Hebrews, and the second chapter of the second epistle of Peter, not considering that in those places the holy apostles do not speak of the daily falls that we, so long as we carry about this body of sin, are subject unto, but of the final falling away from Christ and his gospel,

which is a sin against the Holy Ghost, that shall never be forgiven. Because that they that do utterly forsake the known truth, do hate Christ and his word, they do crucify and mock him, but to their utter destruction, and therefore fall into desperation, and cannot repent. And that this is the true meaning of the Holy Spirit of God, it appeareth by many other places of the scriptures, which promiseth unto all true repentant sinners, and to them that with their whole heart do return unto the Lord their God, free pardon and remission of their sins.

For the probation hereof we read this, O Israel, saith the holy prophet Hiram, if thou return, return unto me, saith the Lord, and if thou put away thine abominations out of my sight, then shalt thou not be moved. Again, these are Esai's words, let the wicked forsake his own ways, and the unrighteous his own imaginations, and turn again unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he is ready to forgive. And in the prophet Osee, the godly do exhort one another after this manner, Come, and let us turn again unto the Lord, for he hath smitten us, and he will heal us, he hath wounded us, and he will bind us up again.

It is most evident and plain that these things ought to be understood of them that were with the Lord afore, and by their sins and wickedness were gone away from him, for we do not turn again unto him with whom we were never before, but we come unto him. Now unto all them that will return unfeignedly unto the Lord their God, the favour and mercy of God unto forgiveness of sins is liberally offered, whereby it followeth necessarily that although we do, after we be once come to God and graft in his Son Jesus Christ, fall into great sins, for there is no righteous man upon the earth that sinneth not, and if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us, yet if we rise again by repentance, and with a full purpose of amendment of life, do flee unto the mercy of God, taking sure hold thereupon through faith in his Son Jesus Christ, there is an assured and infallible hope of pardon and remission of the same, and that we shall be received again into the favour of our heavenly Father. It is written of David, I have found a man according to mine own heart, or I have found David the son of Jesse, a man according to mine own heart, who will do all things that I will.

This is a godly commendation of David. It is also most certain that he did steadfastly believe the promise that was made him touching the Messiahs, who should come of him touching the flesh, and that by the same faith he was justified and graft in our Saviour Jesus Christ to come, and yet afterwards he fell horribly, committing most detestable adultery and damnable murder, and yet as soon as he cried, Peccavi, I have sinned unto the Lord, his sin being forgiven, he was received into favour again. Now will we come unto Peter, of whom no man can doubt, but that he was graft in our Saviour Jesus Christ long before his denial, which thing may easily be proved by the answer which he did in his name and in the name of his fellow apostles, make unto our Saviour Jesus Christ, when he said unto them, Will ye also go away? Master, saith he, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life, and we believe and know that thou art the Christ, the

Son of the living God.

Whereunto may be added the like confession of Peter, where Christ doth give this most infallible testimony, Thou art blessed, Simon son of Jonas, for neither flesh nor blood hath revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. These words are sufficient to prove that Peter was already justified, through this his lively faith in the only begotten Son of God, whereof he made so notable and so solemn a confession, but did not he afterwards most cowardly deny his master, although he had heard of him, Whosoever denieth me before men, I will deny him before my Father. Nevertheless, as soon as with weeping eyes and with a sobbing heart he did acknowledge his offence, and with earnest repentance did flee unto the mercy of God, taking sure hold thereupon through faith in him whom he had so shamefully denied, his sin was forgiven him, and for a certificate and assurance thereof, the room of his apostleship was not denied unto him.

But now mark what doth follow, After the same holy apostle had on Whitsunday with the rest of the disciples received the gift of the Holy Ghost most abundantly, he committed no small offence in Antiochia by bringing the consciences of the faithful into doubt by his example, so that Paul was feigned to rebuke him to his face, because that he walked not uprightly, or went not the right way in the gospel. Shall we now say that after this grievous offence he was utterly excluded and shut out from the grace and mercy of God, and that this his trespass, whereby he was a stumbling-block unto many, was unpardonable? God forbid we should say so. But as these examples are not brought in to the end that we should thereby take a boldness to sin, presuming on the mercy and goodness of God, but to the end that if through the frailness of our own flesh and the temptation of the devil we fall into the like sins, we should in no wise despair of the mercy and goodness of God, even so must we beware and take heed that we do in no wise think in our hearts, imagine or believe, that we are able to repent aright, or to turn effectually unto the Lord by our own might and strength.

For this must be verified in all men, without me ye can do nothing. Again, of ourselves we are not able as much as to think a good thought. And, in another place, it is God that worketh in us, both the will and the deed.

For this cause, although Hyrum had said before, If thou return, O Israel, return unto me, saith the Lord. Yet afterwards he saith, Turn thou me, O Lord, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God. And therefore that holy writer and ancient father Ambrose doth plainly affirm that the turning of the heart unto God is of God, as the Lord himself doth testify by his prophets, saying, And I will give thee in heart to know me, that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.

These things being considered, let us earnestly pray unto the living God, our heavenly Father, that he will vouchsafe by his Holy Spirit to work a true and unfeigned repentance

in us, that, after the painful labours and travails of this life, we may live eternally with his Son, Jesus Christ, to whom be all praise and glory for ever and ever. Amen. Hitherto have you heard, well beloved, how needful and necessary the doctrine of repentance is, and how earnestly it is, throughout all the scriptures of God, urged and set forth, both by the ancient prophets, by our Saviour Jesus Christ and his apostles, and that, for as much as it is the conversion or turning again of the whole man unto God, from whom we go away by sin, these four points ought to be observed, that is, from whence or from what things we must return, unto whom this our returning must be made, by whose means it ought to be done, that it may be effectual, and last of all, after what sort we ought to behave ourselves in the same, that it may be profitable unto us, and attain unto the thing that we do seek by it.

You have also learned that, as the opinion of them that deny the benefit of repentance unto those that, after they become to God and graft in our Saviour Jesus Christ, do through the frailness of their flesh and the temptation of the devil, fall into some grievous and detestable sin, is most pestilent and pernicious. So we must beware, that we do in no wise think, that we are able of our own selves and of our own strength to return unto the Lord our God, from whom we are gone away by our wickedness and sin. Now it shall be declared unto you, what be the true parts of repentance, and what things ought to move us to repent and to return unto the Lord our God with all speed.

Repentance, as it is said before, is a true returning unto God, whereby men, forsaking utterly their idolatry and wickedness, do with a lively faith, embrace, love, and worship the true living God only, and give themselves to all manner of good works, which by God's word they know to be acceptable unto Him. Now there be four parts of repentance, which being set together may be likened unto an easy and short ladder, whereby we may climb from the bottomless pit of perdition, that we cast ourselves into by our daily offences and grievous sins, up into the castle or tower of eternal and endless salvation. The first is the contrition of the heart, for we must be earnestly sorry for our sins, and unfeignedly lament and bewail that we have by them so grievously offended our most bounteous and merciful God, who so tenderly loved us, that He gave His only begotten Son, to die a most bitter death, and to shed His dear heart-blood for our redemption and deliverance.

And verily this inward sorrow and grief, being conceived in the heart for the heinousness of sin, if it be earnest and unfeigned, is as a sacrifice to God, as the holy prophet David doth testify, saying, A sacrifice to God is a troubled spirit, a contrite and broken heart, O Lord, thou wilt not despise. But that this may take place in us, we must be diligent to read and hear the scriptures and word of God, which most lively do paint out before our eyes our unnatural uncleanness and the enormity of our sinful life, for unless we have a through feeling of our sins, how can it be that we should earnestly be sorry for them? Before David did hear the word of the Lord by the mouth of the prophet Nathan, what heaviness, I pray you, was in him for the adultery and murder that he had committed, so

that it might be said right well that he slept in his own sin? We read in the Acts of the Apostles that when the people had heard the sermon of Peter, they were compunct and pricked in their hearts, which thing would never have been, if they had not heard that wholesome sermon of Peter. They therefore that have no mind at all, neither to read, nor yet to hear God's word, there is but small hope of them, that they will as much as once set their feet or take hold upon the first staff or step of this ladder, but rather will sink deeper and deeper into the bottomless pit of perdition.

For if at any time through the remorse of their conscience which accuseth them, they feel any inward grief, sorrow, or heaviness for their sins, for as much as they want the salve and comfort of God's word, which they do despise, it will be unto them rather a mean to bring them to utter desperation than otherwise. The second is an unfeigned confession, an acknowledging of our sins unto God, whom by them we have so grievously offended, that, if he should deal with us according to his justice, we do deserve a thousand hells, if there could be so many. Yet if we will with a sorrowful and contrite heart make an unfeigned confession of them unto God, he will freely and frankly forgive them, and so put all our wickedness out of remembrance before the sight of his majesty, that they shall no more be thought upon.

Hereunto doth pertain the golden saying of the holy prophet David, where he saith on this manner, Then I acknowledged my sin unto thee, neither did I hide mine iniquity. I said, I will confess against myself my wickedness unto the Lord, and thou forgivest the ungodliness of my sin. These are also the words of John the evangelist.

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to make us clean from all our wickedness. Which ought to be understood of the confession that is made unto God, for these are St. Augustine's words, That confession which is made unto God is required by God's law, whereof John the apostle speaketh, saying, If we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to make us clean from all our wickedness. For without this confession sin is not forgiven.

This is then the chiefest and most principal confession that in the scriptures and word of God we are bidden to make, and without the which we shall never obtain pardon and forgiveness of our sins. Indeed, besides this, there is another kind of confession, which is needful and necessary, and of the same doth St. James speak after this manner, saying, Acknowledge your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be saved. As if he should say, Open that which grieveth you, that a remedy may be found.

And this is commanded both for him that complaineth, and for him that heareth, that the one should show his grief to the other. The true meaning of it is, that the faithful ought their offences, whereby some hatred, rancour, grudge, or malice have risen or grown among them one to another, that a brotherly reconciliation may be had, without the which nothing that we do can be acceptable unto God. As our Saviour Jesus Christ doth

witness himself, saying, When thou offerest thine offering at the altar, if thou rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thine offering, and go and be reconciled, and when thou art reconciled, come and offer thine offering.

It may also be thus taken, that we ought to confess our weakness and infirmities one to another, to the end that, knowing each other's frailness, we may the more earnestly pray together unto Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, that he will vouchsafe to pardon us our infirmities for his Son Jesus Christ's sake, and not to impute them unto us, when he shall render to every man according to his works. And whereas the adversaries go about to wrast this place for to maintain their oracular confession withal, they are greatly deceived themselves, and do shamefully deceive others. For if this text ought to be understood of oracular confession, then the priests are as much bound to confess themselves unto the laypeople, as the laypeople are bound to confess themselves to them.

And if to pray is to absolve, then the laity by this place hath as great authority to absolve the priests, as the priests have to absolve the laity. This did Johannes Scotus, otherwise called Duns, well perceive, who upon this place writeth on this manner. Neither doth it seem unto me that James did give this commandment, or that he did set it forth as being received of Christ.

For first and foremost, whence had he authority to bind the whole church, sith that he was only bishop of the church of Jerusalem? Except thou wilt say, that the same church was at the beginning the head church, and consequently that he was the head bishop, which thing the sea of Rome will never grant. The understanding of it then is, as in these words, confess your sins one to another, a persuasion to humility, whereby he willeth us to confess ourselves generally unto our neighbours, that we are sinners, according to this saying. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

And where that they do allege this saying of our Saviour Jesus Christ unto the leper, to prove oracular confession to stand on God's word, go thy way and show thyself unto the priest, do they not see that the leper was cleansed from his leprosy afore he was by Christ sent unto the priest for to show himself unto him? By the same reason we must be cleansed from our spiritual leprosy, I mean, our sins must be forgiven us, afore that we come to confession. What need we then to tell forth our sins into the ear of the priest, sith that they be already taken away? Therefore holy Ambrose in his second sermon upon the hundred and nineteenth psalm, doth say full well, Go show thyself unto the priest, who is the true priest, but he which is the priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek, whereby this holy Father doth understand that, both the priesthood and the law being changed, we ought to acknowledge none other priest for deliverance from our sins, but our Saviour Jesus Christ, who being our sovereign bishop, doth with the sacrifice of his body and blood, offered once for ever upon the altar of the cross, most effectually cleanse the spiritual leprosy, and wash away the sins, of all those that with true

confession of the same do flee unto him. It is most evident and plain that this auricular confession hath not his warrant of God's word, else it had not been lawful for Nectarius, bishop of Constantinople, upon a just occasion to have put it down.

For when anything ordained of God is by the lewdness of men abused, the abuse ought to be taken away, and the thing itself suffered to remain. Moreover, these are St. Augustine's words, What have I to do with men, that they should hear my confession, as though they were able to heal all my diseases? A curious sort of men to know another man's life, and slothful to correct or amend their own. Why do they seek to hear of me what I am, which will not hear of thee what they are? And how can they tell, when they hear by me of myself, whether I tell the truth or not? Sith that no mortal man knoweth what is in man, but the spirit of man which is in him.

Augustine would not have written thus, if auricular confession had been used in his time. Being therefore not led with the conscience thereof, let us, with fear and trembling, and with the true contrite heart, use that kind of confession that God doth command in his word, and then doubtless as he is faithful and righteous, he will forgive us our sins, and make us clean from all wickedness. I do not say but that, if any do find themselves troubled in conscience, they may repair to their learned curate or pastor, or to some other godly learned man, and show the trouble and doubt of their conscience to them, that they may receive at their hand the comfortable salve of God's word.

But it is against the true Christian liberty that any man should be bound to the numbering of his sins, as it hath been used heretofore in the time of blindness and ignorance. The third part of repentance is faith, whereby we do apprehend and take hold upon the promises of God, touching the free pardon and forgiveness of our sins, which promises are sealed up unto us with the death and bloodshedding of his son Jesus Christ. For what should avail and profit us to be sorry for our sins, to lament and bewail that we have offended our most bounteous and merciful father, or to confess and acknowledge our offences and trespasses, though it be done never so earnestly, unless we do steadfastly believe, and be fully persuaded, that God, for his son Jesus Christ's sake, will forgive us all our sins, and put them out of remembrance and from his sight.

Therefore they that teach repentance without a lively faith in our saviour Jesus Christ, do teach none other but Judas's repentance, as all the schoolmen do, which do only allow these three parts of repentance, the contrition of the heart, the confession of the mouth, and the satisfaction of the work. But all these things we find in Judas's repentance, which in outward appearance did far exceed and pass the repentance of Peter. For first and foremost we read in the gospel that Judas was so sorrowful and heavy, yea, that he was filled with such anguish and vexation of mind for that which he had done, that he could not abide to live any longer.

Did not he also, afore he hanged himself, make an open confession of his fault, when he

said, I have sinned, betraying the innocent blood? And verily this was a very bold confession, which might have brought him to great trouble, for by it he did lay to the high priests and elders charged the shedding of innocent blood, and that they were most abominable murderers. He did also make a certain kind of satisfaction, when he did cast their money unto them again. No such thing do we read of Peter, although he had committed a very heinous sin and most grievous offence in denying of his master.

We find that he went out and wept bitterly, whereof Ambrose speaketh on this manner. Peter was sorry and wept, because he erred as a man. I do not find what he said, I know that he wept.

I read of his tears, but not of his satisfaction. But how chance that the one was received into favour again with God, and the other cast away, but because that the one did by a lively faith in him whom he had denied, take hold upon the mercy of God, and the other wanted faith, whereby he did despair of the goodness and mercy of God. It is evident and plain then, that, although we be never so earnestly sorry for our sins, acknowledge and confess them, yet all these things shall be but means to bring us to utter desperation, except we do steadfastly believe that God our heavenly Father will, for his son Jijū Christ's sake, pardon and forgive us our offences and trespasses, and utterly put them out of remembrance in his sight.

Therefore, as we said before, they that teach repentance without Christ and a lively faith in the mercy of God, do only teach Cain's or Judas' repentance. The fourth is an amendment of life, or a new life, in bringing forth fruits worthy of repentance. For they that do truly repent, must be clean altered and changed, they must become new creatures, they must be no more the same that they were before.

And therefore thus said John Baptist unto the Pharisees and Sadducees that came unto his baptism, O generation of vipers, who hath forewarned you to flee from the anger to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, whereby we do learn, that, if we will have the wrath of God to be pacified, we must in no wise dissemble, but turn unto him again with a true and sound repentance, which may be known and declared by good fruits, as by most sure and infallible signs thereof. They that do from the bottom of their hearts acknowledge their sins, and are unfeignedly sorry for their offences, will cast off all hypocrisy, and put on true humility and lowliness of heart. They will not only receive the physician of the soul, but also with the most fervent desire long for him, they will not only abstain from the sins of their former life and from all other filthy vices, but also flee, eschew, and abhor all the occasions of them.

And as they did before give themselves to uncleanness of life, so will they from hence forwards with all diligence give themselves to innocency, pureness of life, and true godliness. We have the Ninevites for an example, which at the preaching of Jonas did not only proclaim a general fast, and that they should every one put on sackcloth, but they

all did turn from their evil ways and from the wickedness that was in their hands. But above all other, the history of Zacchaeus is most notable, for being calm unto our Saviour Jesus Christ, he did say, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have defrauded any man, or taken ought away by extortional fraud, I do restore him fourfold.

Here we see that after his repentance he was no more the man that he was before, but was clean changed and altered. It was so far off that he would continue and abide still in his insatiable covetousness, or take ought away fraudulently from any man, that rather he was most willing and ready to give away his own, and to make satisfaction unto all them that he had done injury and wrong unto. Here may we right well add the sinful woman, which when she came to our Saviour Jesus Christ, did pour down such abundance of tears out of those wanton eyes of hers, wherewith she had allured many unto folly, that she did with them wash his feet, wiping them with the hairs of her head, which she was wont most gloriously to set out, making of them a net of the devil.

Hereby we do learn what is the satisfaction that God doth require of us, which is, that we cease from evil and do good, and, if we have done any man wrong, to endeavour ourselves to make him true amends to the uttermost of our power, following in this the example of Zacchaeus and of this sinful woman, and also that goodly lesson that John Baptist, Zachary's son, did give unto them that came to ask counsel of him. This was commonly the penance that Christ enjoined sinners, Go thy way, and sin no more, which penance we shall never be able to fulfil without the special grace of him that doth say, Without me ye can do nothing. It is therefore our parts, if at least we be desirous of the health and salvation of our own selves, most earnestly to pray unto our heavenly Father to assist us with his Holy Spirit, that we may be able to hearken unto the voice of the true Shepherd, and with due obedience to follow the same.

Let us hearken to the voice of Almighty God when he calleth us to repentance. Let us not harden our hearts as such infidels do who abuse the time given them of God to repent, and turn it to continue their pride and contempt against God and man, which know not how much they heap God's wrath upon themselves for the hardness of their hearts which cannot repent at the day of vengeance. Where we have offended the law of God, let us repent of our straying from so good a Lord.

Let us confess our unworthiness before him, but yet let us trust in God's free mercy for Christ's sake, for the pardon of the same. And from henceforth let us endeavour ourselves to walk in a new life as newborn babes, whereby we may glorify our Father which is in heaven, and thereby to bear in our consciences a good testimony of our faith, so at the last to obtain the fruition of everlasting life through the merits of our Saviour, to whom be all praise and honour for ever. Amen.

Now, for a further persuasion to move you to those parts of repentance, I will declare

unto you some causes which should the rather move you to repentance. First, the commandment of God, who in so many places of his holy and sacred scriptures doth bid us return unto him. O ye children of Israel, saith he, turn again from your infidelity, wherein ye drowned yourselves.

Again, turn you, turn you from your evil ways, for why will you die, O ye house of Israel? And in another place thus doth he speak by his holy prophet Ose, O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast taken a great fall by thine iniquity. Take unto you these words with you, when ye turn unto the Lord, and say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously, so will we offer the calves of our lips unto thee. In all these places we have an express commandment given unto us of God, for to return unto him.

Therefore we must take good heed unto ourselves, lest, whereas we have already by our manifold sins and transgressions provoked and kindled the wrath of God against us, we do by breaking this his commandment double our offences, and so heap still damnation upon our own heads, by our daily offences and trespasses whereby we provoke the eyes of his majesty, we do well deserve, if he should deal with us according to his justice, to be put away for ever from the fruition of his glory. How much more then are we worthy of the endless torments of hell, if, when we be so gently called again after our rebellion, and commanded to return, we will in no wise hearken unto the voice of our heavenly father, but walk still after the stubbornness of our own hearts. Secondly, the most comfortable and sweet promise that the Lord our God did of his mere mercy and goodness join unto his commandment, for he doth not only say, Return unto me, O Israel, but also, If thou wilt return and put away all thine abominations out of my sight, thou shalt never be moved.

These words also have we in the prophet Ezekiel. At what time soever a sinner doth repent him of his sin from the bottom of his heart, I will put all his wickedness out of my remembrance, saith the Lord, so that they shall no more be thought upon. Thus are we sufficiently instructed that God will, according to his promise, freely pardon, forgive, and forget all our sins, so that we shall never be cast in the teeth with them.

If, obeying his commandment, and allured by his sweet promises, we will unfeignedly return unto him. Third, the filthiness of sin, which is such that, as long as we do abide in it, God cannot but detest and abhor us, neither can there be any hope that we shall enter into the heavenly Jerusalem, except we be first made clean and purged from it. But this will never be, unless, forsaking our former life, we do with our whole heart return unto the Lord our God, and, with a full purpose of amendment of life, flee unto his mercy, taking sure hold thereupon through faith in the blood of his Son, Jijū Christ.

If we should suspect any uncleanness to be in us, wherefore the earthly prince should loathe and abhor the sight of us, what pains would we take to remove and put it away? How much more ought we, with all diligence and speed that may be, to put away that

unclean filthiness that doth separate and make division betwixt us and our God, and that hideth his face from us, that he will not hear us? And verily herein doth appear how filthier thing sin is, sith that it can by no other means be washed away but by the blood of the only begotten Son of God. And shall we not from the bottom of our hearts detest and abhor, and with all earnestness flee from it, sith that it did cost the dear heart-blood of the only begotten Son of God, our Saviour and Redeemer, to purge us from it? Plato doth in a certain place write that, if virtue could be seen with bodily eyes, all men would wonderfully be inflamed and kindled with the love of it. Even so, on the contrary, if we might with our bodily eyes behold the filthiness of sin, and the uncleanness thereof, we could in no wise abide it.

But as most present and deadly poison, hate and eschew it. We have a common experience of the same, in them which, when they have committed any heinous offence, or some filthy and abominable sin, if it once come to light, or if they chance to have a through feeling of it, they be so ashamed, their own conscience putting before their eyes the filthiness of their act, that they dare look no man on the face, much less that they should be able to stand in the sight of God. Fourthly, the uncertainty and brittleness of our own lives, which is such, that we cannot assure ourselves that we shall live one hour or one half quarter of it, which by experience we do find daily to be true in them that, being now merry and lusty, and sometimes feasting and banqueting with their friends, do fall suddenly dead in the streets, and otherwise under the board, when they are yet at meet.

These daily examples, as they are most terrible and dreadful, so ought they to move us to seek for to be at one with our heavenly Judge, that we may with a good conscience appear before him, whensoever it shall please him for to call us, whether it be suddenly or otherwise. For we have no more charter of our life than they have. But as we are most certain that we shall die, so are we most uncertain when we shall die.

For our life doth lie in the hand of God, who will take it away when it pleaseth him, and verily when the highest Sumner of all, which is death, shall come. He will not be said nay, but we must forthwith be packing, to be presented before the Judgement seat of God, as he doth find us, according as it is written, whereas the tree falleth, whether it be toward the south or toward the north, there it shall lie. Whereunto agreeth the saying of the holy martyr of God, Saint Cyprian, saying, As God doth find thee when he doth call, so doth he judge thee.

Let us therefore follow the counsel of the wise man, where he saith, Make no tarrying to turn unto the Lord, and put not off from day to day. For suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord break forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed, and thou shalt perish in time of vengeance. Which words I desire you to mark diligently, because they do most lively put before our eyes the fondness of many men, which, abusing the longsuffering and goodness of God, do never think on repentance or amendment of life.

Follow not, saith he, thine own mind and thy strength, to walk in the ways of thy heart. Neither say thou, Who will bring me under for my works? For God the revenger will revenge the wrong done by thee. And say not, I have sinned, and what evil hath come unto me? For the Almighty is a patient rewarder, but he will not leave thee unpunished.

Because thy sins are forgiven thee, be not without fear to heap sin upon sin. Say not neither, The mercy of God is great, he will forgive my manifold sins. For mercy and wrath come from him, and his indignation cometh upon unrepentant sinners.

As if he should say, Art thou strong and mighty? Art thou lusty and young? Hast thou the wealth and riches of the world? Or, when thou hast sinned, hast thou received no punishment for it? Let none of all these things make thee to be the slower to repent, and to return with speed unto the Lord. For in the day of punishment and of his sudden vengeance, they shall not be able to help thee. And specially, when thou art, either by the preaching of God's word, or by some inward motion of his Holy Spirit, or else by some other means, called unto repentance, neglect not the good occasion that is ministered unto thee, lest when thou wouldst repent, thou have not the grace for to do it.

For to repent is a good gift of God, which he will never grant unto them which, living in carnal security, do make a mark of his threatenings, or seek to rule his spirit as they list, as though his working and gifts were tied unto their will. Fifthly, the avoiding of the plagues of God, and the utter destruction that by his righteous judgment do hang over the heads of them all, that will in no wise return unto the Lord. I will, saith the Lord, give them for a terrible plague to all the kingdoms of the earth, and for a reproach, and for a proverb, and for a curse in all places where I shall cast them, and will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence among them, till they be consumed out of the land.

Wherefore is this? Because they hardened their hearts, and would in no wise return from their evil ways, nor yet forsake the wickedness that was in their own hands, that the fierceness of the Lord's fury might depart from them. But yet this is nothing in comparison of the intolerable and endless torments of hell-fire, which they shall be fain to suffer, who after their hardness of heart, that cannot repent, do heap unto themselves wrath against the day of anger, and of the declaration of the just judgment of God. Whereas if we will repent, and be earnestly sorry for our sins, and with a full purpose of amendment of life, flee unto the mercy of our God, and taking sure hold thereupon through faith in our Saviour Jesus Christ, to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance, He will not only pour His manifold blessings upon us here in this world, but also at the last, after the painful travails of this life, reward us with the inheritance of His children, which is the kingdom of heaven, purchased unto us with the death of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all praise, glory, and honour, world without end.

Amen.