

to keep unless we have reached such heroic sanctity that we are constantly aware of divine goodness suffusing our every interest. We make a good beginning in this present life if our mind tells us that he alone is good of himself and if our will is prepared never to act against him.³⁵ Let our sensations and emotions tag along as best they may: we will be grateful if they are granted devotion, loyal if it be withheld.

See how we have come to the same conclusion that God is not to be used. But this time, not by insisting on the awe he should inspire, but by meditating on what lies at the heart of friendship. Even in human relationships we know that happy stage when no advantage is sought and there is no thought of approbation and all is unquestioning and actively still in joy. And who can compare with God and who is more accessible?



ST AUGUSTINE'S SERMON ON PSALM XXXIII: I

Translated by EDMUND HILL, O.P.

After recapitulating his previous day's sermon on the title of the psalm, he proceeds:

SO much for the psalm's title. Now let us listen to the actual words of him who is affecting and drumming at the city gate. 'I shall bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall be always in my mouth.' Christ says it, let the Christian say it too, because the Christian is part of Christ's body. When will you bless the Lord? When he makes things easy for you? When you enjoy worldly wealth, and plenty of corn, oil, wine, gold, silver, slaves, cattle, and the best of health besides; when your crops and herds flourish, and nothing dies or dwindles out of time, when your house is filled to overflowing with prosperity, is that when you are going to bless the Lord? No, no, but at all times. Even then, therefore, when bad times come, and you get a taste of the whip of the Lord our God, when all these things are turned upside

³⁵ 2a-2ae. xliv, 1, ad 3.

down and taken away, and your crops and herds begin to fail and die off. These things do happen after all, and bring poverty and want, pain and toil and testing times in their wake. But you there have just been singing, 'I will bless the Lord at all times, and his praise shall be always in my mouth'; so bless him when he gives you these good things, and bless him too when he takes them away. Because it is he who gives and he who takes away; but he never takes himself away from those who bless him.

But then who does bless the Lord at all times except the humble of heart? We have been taught this humility by our Lord himself in his body and blood; when he sets his body and blood before us, it is his humility he is setting before us, as in that passage from the story of David's pretence of madness which I forgot to mention just now, 'and spittle was running down over his beard'. You heard about that spittle running down the beard when St Paul was read a moment ago.—What spittle? We never heard him mention spittle.—It has just been read this minute; 'The Jews look for signs, and the Greeks want wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified (Christ drumming on the city gates), to the Jews a scandal, a put-off, to the Greeks foolishness; but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God; because God's folly is wiser than men, and God's weakness is stronger than men.'¹ Spittle stands for foolishness and weakness. But if God's folly is wiser than men and his weakness stronger than men, don't be disgusted with them as with spittle, but notice that they are running down the beard. The beard stands for power and strength. So he covered up his strength in the body of his weakness. His weakness showed up outwardly like the spittle; but inside there was his divine strength, covered up like the beard. This is the way then he sets humility before us. Be humble if you want to bless God at all times. Job didn't only bless God when he was doing well with all the riches we read about his enjoying, the herds and the servants, the house and the children and everything. They were all taken away at a stroke, and yet he carried out what is written in this psalm, and said:² 'The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away; it has happened as it pleased the Lord;

¹ 1 Cor. i, 22.

² Job i, 21.

may the Lord's name be blessed'. There's an example for you of someone blessing the Lord at all times.

Now why, once more, does a man bless the Lord at all times? Because he is humble. And what does being humble mean? Not wanting to be praised in oneself. The man who wants to be praised in himself is proud. You don't want to be proud, do you? To become humble, then, say what the psalm goes on to say: 'My soul shall be praised in the Lord; let the gentle hear and be glad'. So those who don't want to be praised in the Lord are not gentle, but ferocious, rough, stuck-up, proud. The Lord wants to have gentle, tame animals. You be the Lord's animal, that is, be gentle. Then he will sit on you and control you, and you need not be afraid of stumbling and coming a cropper. Certainly you are weak and wobbly, but remember who is riding you. You are only the foal of an ass, a baby donkey, but you are carrying Christ. You remember how he came into the city riding on an ass's foal, and it was a gentle animal. Was the donkey cheered, do you think, was the donkey greeted with 'Hosanna, son of David, blessed who comes in the name of the Lord?'³ The donkey was only carrying him, it was the rider who was being praised by those who went in front and followed behind. Perhaps the donkey was saying: 'My soul shall be praised in the Lord, let the gentle hear and be glad'. No, of course, brothers, I know very well the donkey never said that; but the people the donkey stands for should say it, if it wants to carry its Lord. Perhaps the people is annoyed at being compared to the donkey the Lord sat on; and some proud and stuck-up people will say to me: 'Look here, he has called us donkeys'. I hope you will be the Lord's donkey if you feel like that, and don't become instead the horse and mule who have no understanding. You know that psalm, don't you, which says: 'Don't be like the horse and mule which have no understanding'.⁴ Horses and mules, you see, stiffen their necks sometimes, and buck off their riders, they are so wild. Then they are tamed and broken in with bits and bridles and whips, until they learn to be submissive and carry their masters. You be gentle, then, and carry your Lord before you get your mouth all bruised with the bit; don't try and be praised in yourself; let your

3 Matt. xxi, 9.

4 Psalm xxxi, 9.

rider get the praise, and you be content to say: 'My soul shall be praised in the Lord, let the gentle hear and be glad'. When those who are not gentle hear they are not glad but annoyed; and they are the ones who say indignantly I have called them donkeys. Those who are gentle must not mind hearing that and being what they hear.

It goes on: 'Magnify the Lord with me'. Who is it exhorting us to magnify the Lord with him? Anyone who belongs to the body of Christ, brothers, ought to make an effort to get others to magnify the Lord with him. Because this man, whoever he is, loves the Lord, and he loves him too in such a way that he isn't jealous of his fellow lover. Anyone who loves in a carnal fleshly fashion cannot help his love being wretchedly jealous. For example, if a man has the chance of seeing the woman he has long had this wretched sort of love for naked, do you suppose he wants anyone else to come and see her too? If another man did, he couldn't help being furiously jealous. And indeed the only way to safeguard chastity is for no one to see her so except the man who has the right to—or not even him. But it isn't like that with the Wisdom of God. We shall see her face to face, and we shall all see her and there will be no jealousy. She shows herself to all, she gives herself to all chaste and unimpaired. They are changed into her, she is not changed into them. She is truth, she is God. You never heard, did you, brothers, of our God being changed? Towering above all things, is truth, is the Word of God,⁵ the Wisdom of God, through whom all things were made. She has her lovers; and what does a lover of hers say? 'Magnify the Lord with me.' 'I don't want to magnify him alone, I don't want to love him and take him in my arms all by myself. Don't imagine that if I put my arms round, there won't be room for anyone else to get a hand in. There is so much room, such ample space in this Wisdom, that all souls can embrace and enjoy her together.' And I will go further, brothers, and say that people who love God in such a way that they are jealous of others, ought to be downright ashamed of themselves. Look at the way dissolute men, when they are crazy about some charioteer or bull-fighter, want the whole population to be crazy about them too. A man will press you and cajole you to share his craze for some comedian,

⁵ John i, 3.

or for this or that low entertainment. He clamours in the street to get others to share his passion for some low entertainment, and is the Christian not going to clamour in the Church to get others to share his passion for God's truth? Stir up the love in you then, brothers, start yelling and clamouring at each other and saying: 'Magnify the Lord with me'. Let this ardour, this enthusiasm infect you. Why do you think these things are recited and explained to you? If you love God, drag everyone you know along to love him, too—everyone in your families. If you love the body of Christ, which is the unity of the Church, drag them along to enjoy it, too, and say: 'Come and magnify the Lord with me'.

'And let us exalt his name in the selfsame.' 'In the self-same' means all together. So drag along everyone you can, urging, pressing, pleading, pulling, arguing, and pushing, but gently and with good humour. Whirl them off their feet into love, so that if they magnify the Lord, they will magnify him all together. The Donatists of course imagine that they are magnifying the Lord. But in what way has the rest of the world offended them? Let us say to them, brothers, 'Magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name all together. Why do you want to magnify the Lord separately? There is one God; why do you want to provide him with two peoples? Why do you want to scatter the body of Christ?' When he was hanging on the cross, you remember how his executioners came and found that he was dead, and so they did not break his legs. But they broke the legs of the two thieves who were still alive on their crosses, so that the shock would kill them sooner and put them out of their agony—as used to be the custom with criminals who were being crucified. So the executioner comes and finds our Lord has quietly breathed his last already—because, as he said himself, 'I have power to lay down my life'.⁶ And who did he lay down his life for? For his whole people, his whole body. The executioners came and did not break Christ's legs; Donatus came and broke up Christ's Church. Christ's body stays whole and unbroken on the cross among his executioners, while Christ's Church is not left whole and unbroken among Christians. Let us clamour then, brothers, with all the earnestness we can muster, and say: 'Magnify the Lord with me, and let us

⁶ John x, 18.

exalt his name all together'. It is the Church that is clamouring to them, the Church's voice clamouring to those who have cut themselves off from her. And how were they broken off? By pride. But Christ teaches humility when he sets his body and blood before us. And that is what this psalm is all about, as I have told you already; it is setting Christ's body and blood before us, presenting us with his humility, which he did not disdain to clothe himself in for our sakes.

'I looked for the Lord and he heard me out.' Where did he hear me out? Inside. Where does he do his granting of requests? Inside. That is the place to pray and to be heard out, and to be made happy. You have been praying, you have been heard and made happy; and the man standing next to you does not know a thing about it. It has all happened in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will pay you back, just as our Lord says in the gospel: 'Go into your room and shut the door and pray in secret'.⁷ Going into your room involves going into your mind. Lucky are the ones who enjoy going into their own minds, and do not find anything wrong there. Listen carefully, please, all of you. Just as men who have nagging wives don't want to go home, just as they go out into the street with relief; then the time comes for them to go home, and their spirits droop because they are going back to dreariness, to grumbling, to scolding, to ructions; it is a badly managed household where there is no peace between husband and wife, and it is better for the poor man to wander round outside. Well, then, if it's wretched for men who cannot return to their own four walls without being afraid of getting turned upside down in a family row, how much more wretched must it be for people who don't want to go back into their own consciences for fear of being turned upside down by a squabbling pack of sins! So then, to be able to go back willingly into your own mind, clean it up. Happy are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.⁸ Take away the dirt of your lusts, remove the shabbiness of meanness and greed, get rid of the scabbiness of superstition, out with your sacrileges, your bad thoughts, your hatreds. Get rid of all this, and you can go into your mind and enjoy it. When you begin to enjoy yourself there, the cleanliness

⁷ Matt. vi, 6.

⁸ Matt. v, 8.

of your mind will delight you and start you praying. Just as if you come to some quiet and peaceful place, all clean and fresh, and you say, 'Let's pray here'; the suitability of the place pleases you, and you fancy God will listen to you there. Well, if you get such satisfaction out of finding a visible place all spick and span, why are you not disgusted at finding your own mind filthy and untidy? Go in and clean it up, and then lift up your eyes to God and he will listen to you. 'I looked for the Lord and he heard me out, he pulled me out of all my troubles.' You see, even when you have been given light and have put your conscience in order, you are still left with troubles because there is still plenty of weakness in you, until death is swallowed up in victory, and this mortality has put on immortality.⁹ You cannot avoid getting a flick of the whip in this world, you cannot avoid undergoing temptations and bad suggestions. God will clean it all up at the end and pull you out of every trouble; look for him. 'I looked for the Lord and he heard me out.' So those who are not heard out do not look for the Lord. Notice, please, exactly what he says. It is not 'I looked for money from the Lord and he heard me out, I looked for a ripe old age from the Lord, I looked for this thing or that from the Lord and he heard me out.' It is one thing to look for some advantage from the Lord, it is quite another to look for the Lord himself. I looked for the Lord, he says, and he heard me. But when *you* pray and say, 'Please kill my enemy for me', you are not looking for the Lord at all; you are making yourself your enemy's judge, and making God your hangman. How do you know he isn't a better man than you are, this man whose blood you are after? He probably is, by the very fact indeed that he isn't out for yours. Don't look then for anything extra from the Lord, look for the Lord himself and he will hear you out, and while you are still speaking he will say: 'Look, here I am'.¹⁰ 'Here I am myself; what do you want, what are you hoping to get from me? Whatever I give you, it is less worth having than I am. Take *me*, enjoy *me*, embrace *me*. You cannot yet put your arms all round me. But only touch me by faith and you will stick to me'—this is what God says to you, remember—and I will relieve you of all your other burdens, so that you can

⁹ I Cor xv, 54.

¹⁰ Isaias lviii, 9.

stick to me completely when I have turned this mortality of yours into immortality; so that you can be the equal of my angels and always see my face, and rejoice, and your joy no one will take away from you.'¹¹ Because you have looked for the Lord, and he has heard you out, and pulled you out of all your troubles.

Now he goes on to say, this lover who does not want his love all to himself, but is pressing us to share it with him, 'Approach him and be enlightened'. He is speaking from his own experience. He is a spiritual man in the body of Christ, or he is even our Lord Jesus Christ himself according to the flesh, the head urging on the rest of the body and saying: 'Approach him and be enlightened'. But no, it is better to take it after all as some spiritual Christian inviting the rest of us to approach our Lord. But let us be sure to approach him and be enlightened, not like the Jews who approached him and were darkened. They approached him to crucify him; we should approach him to receive his body and blood. They were all in the dark about the one they crucified; we by eating and drinking the one they crucified are enlightened, 'Approach him and be enlightened', it is said to the Gentiles. When Christ was crucified he was among the Jews, who saw it happen with savage satisfaction; the Gentiles were absent from the scene. That's how those who were in the dark approached him, and those who did not see him were enlightened. And how do the Gentiles approach? They follow along by faith, they puff and pant out of eagerness, they run by charity. Charity is your feet. See that you have two feet; don't be a peg-leg. Charity's two feet are the two commandments of love, to love God and our neighbour. Run to God, approach him on those two feet. Besides urging you on, he has poured out his light on you so that you can follow him in divine splendour. 'Approach him and be enlightened, and your countenance will not be put to shame.' It is only the proud man whose countenance is put to shame. Why? Because he always wants to be on top, and when he is affronted or disgraced, or suffers a setback or a loss in his affairs, he feels ashamed. But don't you be afraid; approach him and you will not be ashamed. Whatever your enemy has done to you, however much he seems in men's eyes to have got the better of you, with

¹¹ John xvi, 22.

God it is you who have got the better of him. 'I caught him, I tied him up, I finished him off.' Men who can talk like that fancy themselves to be top dogs. The Jews thought they were on top when they knocked our Lord about, when they spat in his face, and beat him on the head with a cane, when they crowned him with thorns and dressed him in clothes of ridicule. And he, apparently, was the under-dog, falling down at the doors of the gate. But he was not ashamed, because he was the true light which enlightens every man who comes into this world.¹² Just as the light then cannot be put to confusion, so he does not let anyone he has enlightened be put to confusion. Approach him then and be enlightened, and your countenance will not be put to shame.

But how, someone will say, how can I approach him loaded with so much evil, so many sins clamouring in my conscience? How could I dare approach God?—How? If you humble yourself by repenting.—But I am ashamed to repent.—But approach him and your countenance will not be ashamed. Don't you see that if fear of being put to shame holds you back from repenting, while repenting makes you approach God, you are in fact carrying your punishment on your countenance, because the reason your countenance is put to shame is that it has not approached him; and the reason it hasn't approached him is that it does not want to repent. As the psalmist goes on to point out, 'This poor man clamoured and the Lord heard him out'. He is teaching you how to get yourself listened to. The reason that you are not listened to is that you are rich. Clamour in poverty and the Lord listens.—And how am I to clamour in poverty?—By not trusting to your own resources, even if you have any; by understanding how needy you are as long as you haven't got him who makes you rich. And how did the Lord hear him? 'He brought him safe out of all his troubles.' And how does he do that? 'The angel of the Lord will put in round those who fear him, and pull them out.' That's what is written, but some faulty copies have 'The Lord will put in an angel round those who fear him', but that is wrong. Who is being called the angel of the Lord? Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, who is called angel of great counsel, that is messenger of great counsel, in a prophecy of

¹² John i, 9.

Isaias.¹³ This is the angel, the messenger of great counsel, who will put in round those who fear him and pull them out. So don't be afraid of being overlooked. Wherever you are, fearing the Lord, this angel knows about you, and will put in round you and pull you out.

And now he wants to speak openly about that mysterious, that sacramental riddle, in which he was being carried in his own hands. 'Taste and see that the Lord is lovely.' The psalm is opening itself out, isn't it, and showing what that steady craziness means, that sane madness, that sober drunkenness which that other David indulged in when he was telling them of a sign, a pattern of something or other, and when they said to him in the character of king Achis: 'How can it be?'; the time our Lord was saying: 'Unless a man eats my flesh and drinks my blood he will not have life in himself'.¹⁴ And they who were dominated by king Achis, that is by error and ignorance, what did they say? 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' If you don't know how, taste and see that the Lord is lovely. And if you still don't understand, you are king Achis, and David will change his features and leave you, and send you away and go off.

To be concluded

¹³ Isaias ix, 6.

¹⁴ John vi, 53.



COMMENT

I. THE MASS AS A DRAMA

AS A LAYMAN who is worried about the place of the Church in the life of the laity I write this open letter to all priests, begging their understanding of my seeming impertinence and requesting their blessing for myself and my family. Today, more than ever, it is necessary that we laymen attend Mass frequently. Yet few of us do. What is the reason? Is it because the Mass is said in Latin, as some have stated? Is it