

0329-0390 – Gregorius Nazianzenus – In laudem sororis Gorgoniae

Oration VIII

On his Sister Gorgonia.

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24. Yea, would that what we hope for might be, according to the great kindness of our bountiful God, Who asks for little and bestows great things, both in the present and in the future, upon those who truly love Him;²⁹⁹⁶ bearing all things, enduring all things²⁹⁹⁷ for their love and hope of Him, giving thanks for all things²⁹⁹⁸ favourable and unfavourable alike: I mean pleasant and painful, for reason knows that even these are often instruments of salvation; commending to Him our own souls²⁹⁹⁹ and the souls of those fellow wayfarers who, being more ready, have gained their rest before us. And, now that we have done this, let us cease from our discourse, and you too from your tears, hastening, as you now are, to your tomb, which as a sad abiding gift you have given to Cæsarius, seasonably prepared as it was for his parents in their old age, and now unexpectedly bestowed on their son in his youth, though not without reason in His eyes Who disposes our affairs. O Lord and Maker of all things, and specially of this our frame! O God and Father and Pilot of men who are Thine! O Lord of life and death! O Judge and Benefactor of our souls! O Maker and Transformer in due time of all things³⁰⁰⁰ by Thy designing Word,³⁰⁰¹ according to the knowledge of the depth of Thy wisdom and providence! do Thou now receive Cæsarius, the firstfruits of our pilgrimage; and if he who was last is first, we bow before Thy Word, by which the universe is ruled; yet do Thou receive us also afterwards, in a time when Thou mayest be found,³⁰⁰² having ordered us in the flesh as long as is for our profit; yea, receive us, prepared and not troubled³⁰⁰³ by Thy fear, not departing from Thee in our last day, nor violently borne away from things here, like souls fond of the world and the flesh, but filled with eagerness for that blessed and enduring life which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord, to whom be glory, world without end. Amen.

Oration VIII.

On his Sister Gorgonia.

The exact date of this Oration is uncertain. It is certainly (§23) later than the death of Cæsarius, A.D. 369, and previous to the death of their father, A.D. 374. So much we gather from the Oration

²⁹⁹⁶ 1 Cor. ii. 9.
²⁹⁹⁷ Ib. xiii. 7.
²⁹⁹⁸ 1 Thess. v. 18.
²⁹⁹⁹ 1 Pet. iv. 19.
³⁰⁰⁰ Amos v. 8 (LXX.).
³⁰⁰¹ Ps. xxxiii. 6.
³⁰⁰² Ib. xxxii. 6.
³⁰⁰³ Ib. cxix. 60 (LXX.).

itself, and the references made by some authors to a poem of S. Gregory do not add anything certain to our knowledge (Poem. Hist. I. 1. v.v. 108, 227). The place in which it was delivered is, almost without doubt, the city in which her married life had been spent. The public details of that life are familiar to the audience. Gorgonia's parents, and the speaker himself, although known to them, are not spoken of in terms implying intimacy such as we find in Orations known to have been delivered at Nazianzus. The spiritual father and confidant of Gorgonia is present, certainly in a position of authority, probably seated in the Episcopal throne. The husband of Gorgonia (Epitaph. 24) was named Alypius. His home, as Clémencet and Benoît agree, on the authority of Elias, was at Iconium, of which city, at the time, Faustinus was bishop. The names of Gorgonia's two sons are unknown. Elias states that they both became bishops. S. Gregory mentions her three daughters, Alypiana, Eugenia, and Nonna, in his will. The oration is marked by an eloquence, piety, and tender feeling which make it a worthy companion of that on Cæsarius.

Funeral Oration on his Sister Gorgonia.

1. IN praising my sister, I shall pay honour to one of my own family; yet my praise will not be false, because it is given to a relation, but, because it is true, will be worthy of commendation, and its truth is based not only upon its justice, but upon well-known facts. For, even if I wished, I should not be permitted to be partial; since everyone who hears me stands, like a skilful critic, between my oration and the truth, to discountenance exaggeration, yet, if he be a man of justice, demanding what is really due. So that my fear is not of outrunning the truth, but, on the contrary, of falling short of it, and lessening her just repute by the extreme inadequacy of my panegyric; for it is a hard task to match her excellences with suitable action and words. Let us not then be so unjust as to praise every characteristic of other folk, and disparage really valuable qualities because they are our own, so as to make some men gain by their absence of kindred with us, while others suffer for their relationship. For justice would be violated alike by the praise of the one and the neglect of the other, whereas if we make the truth our standard and rule, and look to her alone, disregarding all the objects of the vulgar and the mean, we shall praise or pass over everything according to its merits.

2. Yet it would be most unreasonable of all, if, while we refuse to regard it as a righteous thing to defraud, insult, accuse, or treat unjustly in any way, great or small, those who are our kindred, and consider wrong done to those nearest to us the worst of all; we were yet to imagine that it would be an act of justice to deprive them of such an oration as is due most of all to the good, and spend more words upon those who are evil, and beg for indulgent treatment, than on those who are excellent and merely claim their due. For if we are not prevented, as would be far more just, from praising men who have lived outside our own circle, because we do not know and cannot personally testify to their merits, shall we be prevented from praising those whom we do know, because of our friendship, or the envy of the multitude, and especially those who have departed hence, whom it is too late to ingratiate ourselves with, since they have escaped, amongst all other things, from the reach of praise or blame.

3. Having now made a sufficient defence on these points, and shown how necessary it is for me to be the speaker, come, let me proceed with my eulogy, rejecting all daintiness and elegance of style (for she whom we are praising was unadorned and the absence of ornament was to her, beauty), and yet performing, as a most indispensable debt, all those funeral rites which are her due, and further instructing everyone in a zealous imitation of the same virtue, since it is my object in every word and action to promote the perfection of those committed to my charge. The task of praising the country and family of our departed one I leave to another, more scrupulous in adhering to the rules of eulogy; nor will he lack many fair topics, if he wish to deck her with external ornaments, as men deck a splendid and beautiful form with gold and precious stones, and the artistic devices of the craftsman; which, while they accentuate ugliness by their contrast, can add no attractiveness to the beauty which surpasses them. For my part, I will only conform to such rules so far as to allude to our common parents, for it would not be reverent to pass unnoticed the great blessing of having such parents and teachers, and then speedily direct my attention to herself, without further taxing the patience of those who are eager to learn what manner of woman she was.

4. Who is there who knows not the Abraham and Sarah of these our latter days, Gregory and Nonna his wife? For it is not well to omit the incitement to virtue of mentioning their names. He has been justified by faith, she has dwelt with him who is faithful; he beyond all hope has been the father of many nations,³⁰⁰⁴ she has spiritually travailed in their birth; he escaped from the bondage of his father's gods,³⁰⁰⁵ she is the daughter as well as the mother of the free; he went out from kindred and home for the sake of the land of promise,³⁰⁰⁶ she was the occasion of his exile; for on this head alone I venture to claim for her an honour higher than that of Sarah; he set forth on so noble a pilgrimage, she readily shared with him in its toils; he gave himself to the Lord, she both called her husband lord and regarded him as such, and in part was thereby justified; whose was the promise, from whom, as far as in them lay, was born Isaac, and whose was the gift.

5. This good shepherd was the result of his wife's prayers and guidance, and it was from her that he learned his ideal of a good shepherd's life. He generously fled from his idols, and afterwards even put demons to flight; he never consented to eat salt with idolators: united together with a bond of one honour, of one mind, of one soul, concerned as much with virtue and fellowship with God as with the flesh; equal in length of life and hoary hairs, equal in prudence and brilliancy,

³⁰⁰⁴ Rom. iv. 18.

³⁰⁰⁵ *His father's gods.* These words, together with the reference to idols and idolators in § 5 and the lines (Poem, Hist. I. i. 123–4, tome 2. p. 636) ὅτ' εἰδῶλοις πάρος ἦεν ζώων have led some writers (esp. Ullmann and Clericus) to attribute the worship of idols to the Hysistarii, and Clémencet points out that ζώων is only the Ep. and Ion. partic. of ζάω, and does not mean "of animals." The weakness of a reliance on a poetical expression is shown in Dict. Christ. Biog. Here the words are the mystical application of the actual experience of Abraham, and εἰδῶλον does not necessarily connote material idols. It is applied by S. Greg. Nyssen, Orat. funebr. de Placilla, p. 965. B (ed. 1615) to the worship of Jesus Christ by the Arians. Cf. Introd. to Orat. xviii.

³⁰⁰⁶ Gen. xii. 1; Heb. xi. 8.

rivals of each other, soaring beyond all the rest, possessed in few respects by the flesh, and translated in spirit, even before dissolution: possessing not the world, and yet possessing it, by at once despising and rightly valuing it: forsaking riches and yet being rich through their noble pursuits; rejecting things here, and purchasing instead the things yonder: possessed of a scanty remnant of this life, left over from their piety, but of an abundant and long life for which they have laboured. I will say but one word more about them: they have been rightly and fairly assigned, each to either sex; he is the ornament of men, she of women, and not only the ornament but the pattern of virtue.

6. From them Gorgonia derived both her existence and her reputation; they sowed in her the seeds of piety, they were the source of her fair life, and of her happy departure with better hopes. Fair privileges these, and such as are not easily attained by many of those who plume themselves highly upon their noble birth, and are proud of their ancestry. But, if I must treat of her case in a more philosophic and lofty strain, Gorgonia's native land was Jerusalem above,³⁰⁰⁷ the object, not of sight but of contemplation, wherein is our commonwealth, and whereto we are pressing on: whose citizen Christ is, and whose fellow-citizens are the assembly and church of the first born who are written in heaven, and feast around its great Founder in contemplation of His glory, and take part in the endless festival; her nobility consisted in the preservation of the Image, and the perfect likeness to the Archetype, which is produced by reason and virtue and pure desire, ever more and more conforming, in things pertaining to God, to those truly initiated into the heavenly mysteries; and in knowing whence, and of what character, and for what end we came into being.

7. This is what I know upon these points: and therefore it is that I both am aware and assert that her soul was more noble than those of the East,³⁰⁰⁸ according to a better than the ordinary rule of noble or ignoble birth, whose distinctions depend not on blood but on character; nor does it classify those whom it praises or blames according to their families, but as individuals. But speaking as I do of her excellences among those who know her, let each one join in contributing some particular and aid me in my speech: for it is impossible for one man to take in every point, however gifted with observation and intelligence.

8. In modesty she so greatly excelled, and so far surpassed, those of her own day, to say nothing of those of old time who have been illustrious for modesty, that, in regard to the two divisions of the life of all, that is, the married and the unmarried state, the latter being higher and more divine, though more difficult and dangerous, while the former is more humble and more safe, she was able to avoid the disadvantages of each, and to select and combine all that is best in both, namely, the elevation of the one and the security of the other, thus becoming modest without pride, blending the excellence of the married with that of the unmarried state, and proving that neither of them absolutely binds us to, or separates us from, God or the world (so that the one from its own nature must be utterly avoided, and the other altogether praised): but that it is mind which nobly presides over wedlock and maidenhood, and arranges and works upon them as the raw material of virtue

³⁰⁰⁷ Heb. xii. 22, 23.

³⁰⁰⁸ Job i. 3.

under the master-hand of reason. For though she had entered upon a carnal union, she was not therefore separated from the spirit, nor, because her husband was her head, did she ignore her first Head: but, performing those few ministrations due to the world and nature, according to the will of the law of the flesh, or rather of Him who gave to the flesh these laws, she consecrated herself entirely to God. But what is most excellent and honourable, she also won over her husband to her side, and made of him a good fellow-servant, instead of an unreasonable master. And not only so, but she further made the fruit of her body, her children and her children's children, to be the fruit of her spirit, dedicating to God not her single soul, but the whole family and household, and making wedlock illustrious through her own acceptability in wedlock, and the fair harvest she had reaped thereby; presenting herself, as long as she lived, as an example to her offspring of all that was good, and when summoned hence, leaving her will behind her, as a silent exhortation to her house.

9. The divine Solomon, in his instructive wisdom, I mean his Proverbs, praises the woman³⁰⁹ who looks to her household and loves her husband, contrasting her with one who roams abroad, and is uncontrolled and dishonourable, and hunts for precious souls with wanton words and ways, while she manages well at home and bravely sets about her woman's duties, as her hands hold the distaff, and she prepares two coats for her husband, buying a field in due season, and makes good provision for the food of her servants, and welcomes her friends at a liberal table; with all the other details in which he sings the praises of the modest and industrious woman. Now, to praise my sister in these points would be to praise a statue for its shadow, or a lion for its claws, without allusion to its greatest perfections. Who was more deserving of renown, and yet who avoided it so much and made herself inaccessible to the eyes of man? Who knew better the due proportions of sobriety and cheerfulness, so that her sobriety should not seem inhuman, nor her tenderness immodest, but prudent in one, gentle in the other, her discretion was marked by a combination of sympathy and dignity? Listen, ye women addicted to ease and display, who despise the veil of shamefastness. Who ever so kept her eyes under control? Who so derided laughter, that the ripple of a smile seemed a great thing to her? Who more steadfastly closed her ears? And who opened them more to the Divine words, or rather, who installed the mind as ruler of the tongue in uttering the judgments of God? Who, as she, regulated her lips?

10. Here, if you will, is another point of her excellence: one of which neither she nor any truly modest and decorous woman thinks anything: but which we have been made to think much of, by those who are too fond of ornament and display, and refuse to listen to instruction on such matters. She was never adorned with gold wrought into artistic forms of surpassing beauty, nor flaxen tresses, fully or partially displayed, nor spiral curls, nor dishonouring designs of men who construct erections on the honourable head, nor costly folds of flowing and transparent robes, nor graces of brilliant stones, which color the neighbouring air, and cast a glow upon the form; nor the arts and witcheries of the painter, nor that cheap beauty of the infernal creator who works against the Divine, hiding with his treacherous pigments the creation of God, and putting it to shame with his honour,



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³⁰⁹ Prov. xxxi. 10.

and setting before eager eyes the imitation of an harlot instead of the form of God, so that this bastard beauty may steal away that image which should be kept for God and for the world to come. But though she was aware of the many and various external ornaments of women, yet none of them was more precious to her than her own character, and the brilliancy stored up within. One red tint was dear to her, the blush of modesty; one white one, the sign of temperance: but pigments and pencillings, and living pictures, and flowing lines of beauty, she left to women of the stage and of the streets, and to all who think it a shame and a reproach to be ashamed.

11. Enough of such topics. Of her prudence and piety no adequate account can be given, nor many examples found besides those of her natural and spiritual parents, who were her only models, and of whose virtue she in no wise fell short, with this single exception most readily admitted, that they, as she both knew and acknowledged, were the source of her goodness, and the root of her own illumination. What could be keener than the intellect of her who was recognized as a common adviser not only by those of her family, those of the same people and of the one fold, but even by all men round about, who treated her counsels and advice as a law not to be broken? What more sagacious than her words? What more prudent than her silence? Having mentioned silence, I will proceed to that which was most characteristic of her, most becoming to women, and most serviceable to these times. Who had a fuller knowledge of the things of God, both from the Divine oracles, and from her own understanding? But who was less ready to speak, confining herself within the due limits of women? Moreover, as was the bounden duty of a woman who has learned true piety, and that which is the only honourable object of insatiate desire, who, as she, adorned temples with offerings, both others and this one, which will hardly, now she is gone, be so adorned again? Or rather, who so presented herself to God as a living temple? Who again paid such honor to Priests, especially to him who was her fellow soldier and teacher of piety, whose are the good seeds, and the pair of children consecrated to God.

12. Who opened her house to those who live according to God with a more graceful and bountiful welcome? And, which is greater than this, who bade them welcome with such modesty and godly greetings? Further, who showed a mind more unmoved in sufferings? Whose soul was more sympathetic to those in trouble? Whose hand more liberal to those in want? I should not hesitate to honour her with the words of Job: Her door was opened to all comers; the stranger did not lodge in the street. She was eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, a mother to the orphan.³⁰¹⁰ Why should I say more of her compassion to widows, than that its fruit which she obtained was, never to be called a widow herself? Her house was a common abode to all the needy of her family; and her goods no less common to all in need than their own belonged to each. She hath dispersed abroad and given to the poor,³⁰¹¹ and according to the infallible truth of the Gospel, she laid up much store in the wine-presses above, and oftentimes entertained Christ in the person of those whose benefactress she was. And, best of all, there was in her no unreal profession, but in secret

³⁰¹⁰ Job xxix. 15; xxxi. 32.

³⁰¹¹ Ps. cxii. 9.

she cultivated piety before Him who seeth secret things. Everything she rescued from the ruler of this world, everything she transferred to the safe garners. Nothing did she leave behind to earth, save her body. She bartered everything for the hopes above: the sole wealth she left to her children was the imitation of her example, and emulation of her merits.

13. But amid these tokens of incredible magnanimity, she did not surrender her body to luxury, and unrestrained pleasures of the appetite, that raging and tearing dog, as though presuming upon her acts of benevolence, as most men do, who redeem their luxury by compassion to the poor, and instead of healing evil with good, receive evil as a recompense for their good deeds. Nor did she, while subduing her dust³⁰¹² by fasting, leave to another the medicine of hard lying; nor, while she found this of spiritual service, was she less restrained in sleep than anyone else; nor, while regulating her life on this point as if freed from the body, did she lie upon the ground, when others were passing the night erect, as the most mortified men struggle to do. Nay in this respect she was seen to surpass not only women, but the most devoted of men, by her intelligent chanting of the psalter, her converse with, and unfolding and apposite recollection of, the Divine oracles, her bending of her knees which had grown hard and almost taken root in the ground, her tears to cleanse her stains with contrite heart and spirit of lowliness, her prayer rising heavenward, her mind freed from wandering in rapture; in all these, or in any one of them, is there man or woman who can boast of having surpassed her? Besides, it is a great thing to say, but it is true, that while she was zealous in her endeavour after some points of excellence, of others she was the paragon: of some she was the discoverer, in others she excelled. And if in some single particular she was rivalled, her superiority consists in her complete grasp of all. Such was her success in all points, as none else attained even in a moderate degree in one: to such perfection did she attain in each particular, that any one might of itself have supplied the place of all.

14. O untended body, and squalid garments, whose only flower is virtue! O soul, clinging to the body, when reduced almost to an immaterial state through lack of food; or rather, when the body had been mortified by force, even before dissolution, that the soul might attain to freedom, and escape the entanglements of the senses! O nights of vigil, and psalmody, and standing which lasts from one day to another! O David, whose strains never seem tedious to faithful souls! O tender limbs, flung upon the earth and, contrary to nature, growing hard! O fountains of tears, sowing in affliction that they might reap in joy.³⁰¹³ O cry in the night, piercing the clouds and reaching unto Him that dwelleth in the heavens! O fervour of spirit, waxing bold in prayerful longings against the dogs of night, and frosts and rain, and thunders, and hail, and darkness! O nature of woman overcoming that of man in the common struggle for salvation, and demonstrating that the distinction between male and female is one of body not of soul! O Baptismal purity, O soul, in the pure chamber of thy body, the bride of Christ! O bitter eating! O Eve mother of our

³⁰¹² *Her dust*, i.e. her body.

³⁰¹³ Ps. cxxvi. 5.

race and of our sin! O subtle serpent, and death, overcome by her self-discipline! O self-emptying of Christ, and form of a servant, and sufferings, honoured by her mortification!

15. Oh! how am I to count up all her traits, or pass over most of them without injury to those who know them not? Here however it is right to subjoin the rewards of her piety, for indeed I take it that you, who knew her life well, have long been eager and desirous to find in my speech not only things present, or her joys yonder, beyond the conception and hearing and sight of man, but also those which the righteous Rewarder bestowed upon her here: a matter which often tends to the edification of unbelievers, who from small things attain to faith in those which are great, and from things which are seen to those which are not seen. I will mention then some facts which are generally notorious, others which have been from most men kept secret; and that because her Christian principle made a point of not making a display of her [Divine] favours. You know how her maddened mules ran away with her carriage, and unfortunately overturned it, how horribly she was dragged along, and seriously injured, to the scandal of unbelievers at the permission of such accidents to the righteous, and how quickly their unbelief was corrected: for, all crushed and bruised as she was, in bones and limbs, alike in those exposed and in those out of sight, she would have none of any physician, except Him Who had permitted it; both because she shrunk from the inspection and the hands of men, preserving, even in suffering, her modesty, and also awaiting her justification from Him Who allowed this to happen, so that she owed her preservation to none other than to Him: with the result that men were no less struck by her un hoped-for recovery than by her misfortune, and concluded that the tragedy had happened for her glorification through sufferings, the suffering being human, the recovery superhuman, and giving a lesson to those who come after, exhibiting in a high degree faith in the midst of suffering, and patience under calamity, but in a still higher degree the kindness of God to them that are such as she. For to the beautiful promise to the righteous “though he fall, he shall not be utterly broken,”³⁰¹⁴ has been added one more recent, “though he be utterly broken, he shall speedily be raised up and glorified.”³⁰¹⁵ For if her misfortune was unreasonable, her recovery was extraordinary, so that health soon stole away the injury, and the cure became more celebrated than the blow.

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16. O remarkable and wonderful disaster! O injury more noble than security! O prophecy, “He hath smitten, and He will bind us up, and revive us, and after three days He will raise us up,”³⁰¹⁶ portending indeed, as it did, a greater and more sublime event, yet no less applicable to Gorgonia’s sufferings! This then, notorious to all, even to those afar off, for the wonder spread to all, and the lesson was stored up in the tongues and ears of all, with the other wonderful works and powers of God. But the following incident, hitherto unknown and concealed from most men by the Christian principle I spoke of, and her pious shrinking from vanity and display, dost thou bid me tell, O

³⁰¹⁴ Ps. xxxvii. 24.

³⁰¹⁵ Ib. cxlvi. 8 (LXX.).

³⁰¹⁶ Hos. vi. 1, 2.

best³⁰¹⁷ and most perfect of shepherds, pastor of this holy sheep, and dost thou further give thy assent to it, since to us alone has this secret been entrusted, and we were mutual witnesses of the marvel, or are we still to keep our faith to her who is gone? Yet I do think, that as that was the time to be silent, this is the time to manifest it, not only for the glory of God, but also for the consolation of those in affliction.

17. She was sick in body, and dangerously ill of an extraordinary and malignant disease, her whole frame was incessantly fevered, her blood at one time agitated and boiling, then curdling with coma, incredible pallor, and paralysis of mind and limbs: and this not at long intervals, but sometimes very frequently. Its virulence seemed beyond human aid; the skill of physicians, who carefully examined the case, both singly and in consultation, was of no avail; nor the tears of her parents, which often have great power, nor public supplications and intercessions, in which all the people joined as earnestly as if for their own preservation: for her safety was the safety of all, as, on the contrary, her suffering and sickness was a common misfortune.

18. What then did this great soul, worthy offspring of the greatest, and what was the medicine for her disorder, for we have now come to the great secret? Despairing of all other aid, she betook herself to the Physician of all, and awaiting the silent hours of night, during a slight intermission of the disease, she approached the altar with faith, and, calling upon Him Who is honoured thereon, with a mighty cry, and every kind of invocation, calling to mind all His former works of power, and well she knew those both of ancient and of later days, at last she ventured on an act of pious and splendid effrontery: she imitated the woman whose fountain of blood was dried up by the hem of Christ's garment.³⁰¹⁸ What did she do? Resting her head with another cry upon the altar, and with a wealth of tears, as she who once bedewed the feet of Christ,³⁰¹⁹ and declaring that she would not loose her hold until she was made whole, she then applied her medicine to her whole body, viz., such a portion of the antitypes³⁰²⁰ of the Precious Body and Blood as she treasured in her hand, mingling therewith her tears, and, O the wonder, she went away feeling at once that she was saved, and with the lightness of health in body, soul, and mind, having received, as the reward of her hope, that which she hoped for, and having gained bodily by means of spiritual strength. Great though these things be, they are not untrue. Believe them all of you, whether sick or sound, that ye may either keep or regain your health. And that my story is no mere boastfulness is plain from the silence in which she kept, while alive, what I have revealed. Nor should I now have published it, be well assured, had I not feared that so great a marvel would have been utterly hidden from the faithful and unbelieving of these and later days.

³⁰¹⁷ *O best, &c.* Faustinus, bishop of Iconium, must have been present, and S. Gregory, having asked his permission to relate the incident, looks towards him awaiting some sign of his assent.

³⁰¹⁸ S. Matt. ix. 20.

³⁰¹⁹ S. Luke vii. 38.

³⁰²⁰ *Antitypes*, i.e. the reserved Sacrament.

19. Such was her life. Most of its details I have left untold, lest my speech should grow to undue proportions, and lest I should seem to be too greedy for her fair fame: but perhaps we should be wronging her holy and illustrious death, did we not mention some of its excellences; especially as she so longed for and desired it. I will do so therefore, as concisely as I can. She longed for her dissolution, for indeed she had great boldness towards Him who called her, and preferred to be with Christ, beyond all things on earth.³⁰²¹ And there is none of the most amorous and unrestrained, who has such love for his body, as she had to fling away these fetters, and escape from the mire in which we spend our lives, and to associate in purity with Him Who is Fair, and entirely to hold her Beloved, Who is I will even say it, her Lover, by Whose rays, feeble though they now are, we are enlightened, and Whom, though separated from Him, we are able to know. Nor did she fail even of this desire, divine and sublime though it was, and, what is still greater, she had a foretaste of His Beauty through her forecast and constant watching. Her only sleep transferred her to exceeding joys, and her one vision embraced her departure at the foreappointed time, having been made aware of this day, so that according to the decision of God she might be prepared and yet not disturbed.

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20. She had recently obtained the blessing of cleansing and perfection, which we have all received from God as a common gift and foundation of our *new*³⁰²² life. Or rather all her life was a cleansing and perfecting: and while she received regeneration from the Holy Spirit, its security was hers by virtue of her former life. And in her case almost alone, I will venture to say, the mystery was a seal rather than a gift of grace. And when her husband's perfection was her one remaining desire (and if you wish me briefly to describe the man, I do not know what more to say of him than that he was her husband) in order that she might be consecrated to God in her whole body, and not depart half-perfected, or leave behind her imperfect anything that was hers; she did not even fail of this petition, from Him Who fulfils the desire of them that fear Him,³⁰²³ and accomplishes their requests.

21. And now when she had all things to her mind, and nothing was lacking of her desires, and the appointed time drew nigh, being thus prepared for death and departure, she fulfilled the law which prevails in such matters, and took to her bed. After many injunctions to her husband, her children, and her friends, as was to be expected from one who was full of conjugal, maternal, and brotherly love, and after making her last day a day of solemn festival with brilliant discourse upon the things above, she fell asleep, full not of the days of man, for which she had no desire, knowing them to be evil for her, and mainly occupied with our dust and wanderings, but more exceedingly full of the days of God, than I imagine any one even of those who have departed in a wealth of hoary hairs, and have numbered many terms of years. Thus she was set free, or, it is better to say, taken to God, or flew away, or changed her abode, or anticipated by a little the departure of her body.

³⁰²¹ Phil. i. 23.

³⁰²² δευτέρον, lit. "second."

³⁰²³ Ps. cxlv. 19.

22. Yet what was I on the point of omitting? But perhaps thou, who art her spiritual father, wouldst not have allowed me, and hast carefully concealed the wonder, and made it known to me. It is a great point for her distinction, and in our memory of her virtue, and regret for her departure. But trembling and tears have seized upon me, at the recollection of the wonder. She was just passing away, and at her last breath, surrounded by a group of relatives and friends performing the last offices of kindness, while her aged mother bent over her, with her soul convulsed with envy of her departure, anguish and affection being blended in the minds of all. Some longed to hear some burning word to be branded in their recollection; others were eager to speak, yet no one dared; for tears were mute and the pangs of grief unconsolated, since it seemed sacrilegious, to think that mourning could be an honour to one who was thus passing away. So there was solemn silence, as if her death had been a religious ceremony. There she lay, to all appearance, breathless, motionless, speechless; the stillness of her body seemed paralysis, as though the organs of speech were dead, after that which could move them was gone. But as her pastor, who in this wonderful scene, was carefully watching her, perceived that her lips were gently moving, and placed his ear to them, which his disposition and sympathy emboldened him to do,—but do you expound the meaning of this mysterious calm, for no one can disbelieve it on your word! Under her breath she was repeating a psalm—the last words of a psalm—to say the truth, a testimony to the boldness with which she was departing, and blessed is he who can fall asleep with these words, “I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest.”³⁰²⁴ Thus wert thou singing, fairest of women, and thus it fell out unto thee; and the song became a reality, and attended on thy departure as a memorial of thee, who hast entered upon sweet peace after suffering, and received (over and above the rest which comes to all), that sleep which is due to the beloved,³⁰²⁵ as befitted one who lived and died amid the words of piety.

23. Better, I know well, and far more precious than eye can see, is thy present lot, the song of them that keep holy-day,³⁰²⁶ the throng of angels, the heavenly host, the vision of glory, and that splendour, pure and perfect beyond all other, of the Trinity Most High, no longer beyond the ken of the captive mind, dissipated by the senses, but entirely contemplated and possessed by the undivided mind, and flashing upon our souls with the whole light of Godhead: Mayest thou enjoy to the full all those things whose crumbs thou didst, while still upon earth, possess through the reality of thine inclination towards them. And if thou takest any account of our affairs, and holy souls receive from God this privilege, do thou accept these words of mine, in place of, and in preference to many panegyrics, which I have bestowed upon Cæsarius before thee, and upon thee after him—since I have been preserved to pronounce panegyrics upon my brethren. If any one will, after you, pay me the like honour, I cannot say. Yet may my only honour be that which is in God, and may my pilgrimage and my home be in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory for ever. Amen.


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³⁰²⁴ Ps. iv. 8.

³⁰²⁵ Ib. cxxvii. 2.

³⁰²⁶ Ib. xlii. 4.