

resolved indeed to 'Fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life' (I Tim. 6, 12), that eternal life to which each and everyone of us here now, is, by God's mercy, called.



ST AUGUSTINES SERMON ON PSALM XXXIII—II

TRANSLATED BY EDMUND HILL, O.P.

HAPPY the man who hopes in him.' No need to explain that, is there? Whoever does not hope in the Lord is miserable. And who doesn't? Why, whoever hopes in himself. Sometimes it's even worse, my dear brothers; listen, sometimes men don't even want to hope in themselves, but in other men. 'While Jack Robinson's safe, you can't touch me'—and Jack Robinson may even be dead already. Here in this town the man says 'As long as So-and-so is safe and sound', and So-and-so is already dead somewhere else. And how ready people are to say this sort of thing, instead of saying 'I trust in God, he won't let you harm me'; instead of saying 'I trust in my God, even if he does let you touch something, everything even that belongs to me, he won't let you touch my soul'. But when they talk about 'While So-and-so is safe and sound' it shows that they don't want to have real security themselves, while burdening someone else with the bother of maintaining them in a false one.

'Fear the Lord, all you his saints, because there is nothing lacking to those who fear him'. Many people don't want to fear the Lord precisely for that reason, in case they go hungry. They are told they mustn't cheat. And they say 'What am I to live on then? No trade is possible without deceit, no business can succeed without cheating'. But God punishes cheating; listen to God.—But if I fear God like that, I won't get my living.—Fear the Lord, all you his saints, because there is nothing lacking to those who fear him. The timid man who has misgivings his little luxuries will vanish if he starts fearing God, is being promised he will have plenty enough. God used to feed you when you ignored him, do you think he will desert you once you start fearing him? Listen man to the psalm's words, and don't start saying 'He's rich, I'm poor; I fear the Lord, but look what a pile he has made by not fearing

him, while I fear him and go in rags'. Notice how the psalm goes on; 'The rich have lacked and gone hungry, but those who look for the Lord shall not be deprived of any good'. If you take it literally, it appears to be misleading you. You look round at all the wicked rich men who die in their wealth, never having known poverty while they lived. You see them growing old, coming to the end of their days fabulously wealthy; you see the sumptuous funeral procession held, the dead man carried out on an ivory bier to a magnificent tomb, his family weeping round him; and you say to yourself, if you happen to know about his crimes and his sins, 'I know what that man has done; and look how he has grown old and died in his bed, and has been laid to rest by his own people, and given a splendid funeral. But I know the sort of things he's done. The Bible has deceived me, all this stuff I've heard and sung myself about the rich lacking and going hungry. I bet that fellow never went without a meal. Yes, and those who look for the Lord shall not be deprived of any good. I get up and go to Church every day, I look for the Lord every day, I kneel there every day, and I've got nothing good at all. This man never looked for the Lord in his life, and he died with a fortune like that'. A man who lets his thoughts run like that is letting himself be put off by scandal, and it's choking him like a noose. He is looking for a perishable livelihood on earth and not looking for true earnings in heaven, and he puts his head in the devil's noose, and the ends are pulled tight on him, and the devil has got him, all set for evil-doing in imitation of that rich man he saw dying with such a fortune.

No, you mustn't take the words like that.—How am I to take them?—Of spiritual goods.—Where are *they*?—They cannot be seen with the eyes, only with the mind.—Well *I* can't see them.—The man who loves justice can.—Well *I* can't. After all they aren't gold or silver. So, if it was gold you would see it, but because it is faith you don't see it, eh? And if you can't see faith, why do you love a faithful slave? Ask yourself what sort of slave you like. Perhaps you have got a handsome slave, a tall strapping fellow, but he is a pilferer, a rotter, a cheat; and you've another slave, let's say, an undersized runt with a hideous face and a filthy complexion, but he is faithful, thrifty, sober; consider, I beg you, which of these two you prefer. If you follow your bodily eyes, the bad handsome one wins the day; but if you take your mind's view of the matter,

the faithful ugly one has it. There you are then, what you want someone else to show to you, namely good faith, show him yourself in return. Why are you delighted with his faithful service, why do you praise good things in him which only the eyes of the mind can see? Will you really be poor if you are full of spiritual riches? That man was rich, was he, because he had an ivory couch, and you are poor, are you, even if you have a room in your heart full of such jewels of virtue as justice, truth, charity, faith, patience, forbearance? Exhibit your riches, if you have got them, and compare them with the rich man's riches. He finds some expensive mules on the market and buys them; if you found faith up for sale, how much wouldn't you give for it! Yet God wants you to have it for nothing, gratis, and you are not in the least grateful. No, those rich people do go without, they do lack something, and what makes it worse they lack bread; in case you think I meant they lack gold and silver—though as a matter of fact they lack that too. How much old So-and-so had, yet was he satisfied? So he died in want you see, because he wanted more than he had. But lack bread? Perhaps you don't understand the bread I mean; remember he said 'I am the living bread, who came down from heaven' (John 6, 41); and 'Happy are those who are hungry and thirsty for justice, because they shall be satisfied' (Matt. 5, 6). Those who look for the Lord shall not be deprived of any good. I think I have made it clear what sort of good is meant.

'Come, sons, listen to me, and I shall teach you the fear of the Lord'. I can see you are thinking, brothers, that it is *me* speaking. Think of it rather as David or Paul speaking; better still, think of it as our Lord Jesus Christ himself speaking. 'Come sons listen to me'. Let us all listen to him together, you listen to him through me. He wants to teach us, he the humble one, affecting and drumming at the gate, wants to teach us. 'Come sons, he says, listen to me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord'. Let's let him teach us then, let's be all ears and all attention. Don't let us open the ears of the body and shut the ears of our minds. As he himself said in the gospel, 'Whoever has ears to hear with, let him hear' (Matt. 11, 15). Who wouldn't want to listen to Christ teaching us through the prophet?

'Who is the man who wants life and loves to see good days?' He is asking you a question. Doesn't everyone of you answer 'Me'? Which of you doesn't love life, doesn't want to see good

days? Don't you grumble every day and say, 'How long have we got to put up with this? Things get worse and worse every day. Our parents had much happier times, they knew better days'. O if you only asked those parents of yours, they would grumble to you in exactly the same way about their times. 'Our fathers, they would say, were happy and we are miserable, we live in bad days. Old So-and-so ruled the roost, we thought things would ease up a little when he went; instead they only get worse. O God, show us good days'. But it is no use looking for them here. You are looking for a good thing, but in the wrong place. Suppose you were looking for some just man or other in a country he didn't live in, they would tell you 'It's a good man you are looking for, a great man, go on looking for him, but not here. You are wasting your time looking for him here, because you won't find him'. You are looking for good times; let's look for them together, but not here. But our ancestors had them. That's where you are wrong. They *all* had a hard time of it here. Read the Bible, that is why God had it written, to be a comfort to us. In the time of Elias¹ (IV (II) Kings 6, 26) there was a famine—our ancestors endured it. The heads of animals were being sold for huge prices, they were killing their own people and eating them. Two women agreed to kill their own sons and eat them. So one of them killed her son and they both ate him. The other one didn't want to kill her son, and the one who had already killed hers insisted. And they took their quarrel to the king, wrangling over the killing of their children. God preserve *us* from such food! But there you are, that's what we read about happening in the past. All days are bad in the world, and all days are good in God. Abraham had good days, but they were inside in his heart; he had bad days too, when famine made him change his abode in search of food (Gen. 12, 26)—the same search that troubled them all. Paul had good days—but he says 'in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness' (II Cor. 11, 27). But we servants must not be discontented; our master didn't have good days in this world either; think of the evils he endured, insults, injuries, the cross.

So the Christian should not grumble, but think instead in whose steps he is following. And he must listen to his teaching, if he loves good days. 'Come sons, listen to me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord'. What do you want? Life and good days.

¹ Actually it was in the time of Eliseus.

Listen then. 'Restrain your tongue from evil'. Do that.—I don't want to, says the wretched man. I don't want to restrain my tongue from evil, and I want life and good days. If a workman of yours said 'I will first ruin your vineyard for you, and then demand my wages from you. You hired me to prune this vineyard, and thin it out; but I am going to hack it to pieces and cut out the good wood, so that you will get no more grapes from it, and when I have done this, you are going to pay me for my work'; you would say he was off his head, wouldn't you, you would throw him out of your place before he could get his hands on a bill-hook. That is what men are like who want to do wrong, swear to falsehoods, blaspheme God, and grumble and cheat and get drunk, commit adultery, use lucky charms, go to fortune tellers—and see good days. He has told you you can't do wrong and look for good in return. If you are unjust, do you think God is going to be unjust too?—So what must I do?—Well what do you want?—I want life, I want good days.—Then restrain your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking trickery, no cheating anyone, that is, no deceiving anyone.

'Turn away from evil'—that's all very well, doing no one any harm, not killing anyone, or committing adultery, or cheating or giving false evidence. Turn away from evil—and when you have turned away, I suppose you will say 'I'm safe, I've done everything, I shall have life and see good days'. But that is *not* all; 'Turn away from evil, *and*, he adds, do good'. It is not enough not to take the shirt off a man's back, you must also clothe the ragged. If you don't strip him, you have turned away from evil; but you won't be doing good until you have taken the stranger into your house. Turn away from evil then, in such a way that you do good. 'Look for peace and follow it.' He doesn't say you will have peace here, he tells you to look for it and follow it. Where must I follow it to? Where it has gone on ahead. The Lord is our peace, and he rose again and went up to heaven (Eph. 2, 14). Follow peace then, because when you too have risen, this mortality will be changed and you will take peace in your arms where there will be no one to disturb you. Since you will never be hungry, there will be perfect peace there. Here bread brings you peace. Remove the bread, and just see what a war breaks out in your stomach! How much there is that good people have to put up with here brothers, just to show that all we can do here is look for peace, and that we

can only expect to find it at the end. But let us have partial peace here too, in order to earn complete peace there. What do I mean by partial peace? Let us be good companions here, loving our neighbours like ourselves. Love your brother like yourself, be at peace with him. I know we cannot help having some quarrels, such as have arisen among brothers and among saints; between Paul and Barnabas, for example (Acts 15, 29); but not the sort that kills good fellowship, that wipes out charity. After all, you are sometimes at odds with yourself, yet you don't hate yourself. Everyone who regrets something he has done, quarrels with himself. He sins, he comes to himself, he is angry with himself for doing it. So he has a quarrel with himself, but this sort of quarrel makes for good fellowship. Here is an excellent example of a good man quarrelling with himself. 'Why are you sad, my soul, and why do you upset me? Hope in the Lord, for I will still confess to him' (Psalm 42, 5). Perhaps he wanted to suffer for Christ, and the thought of it made his soul sad and depressed, and it started upsetting him. He was aware of the situation, he wasn't at peace with himself, but he went on clinging with his mind to Christ, whom his soul, he knew, could follow really without upsetting him. Look for peace then brothers. Our Lord said 'I am telling you these things, so that you can have peace in me. I am not promising you peace on earth'. (John 16, 33). There is no true peace, no quietness in this life. It is the joy of immortality and the angels' company that is promised us. But anyone who doesn't look for it while he is here, won't have it when he gets there.

(To be concluded)



EXTRACTS

DOCTRINE AND LIFE, the bi-monthly review of the Irish Dominican Fathers, August-September 1957, reprints Dr Mary Ryan's translation of a thirteenth-century Bolognese Dominican's account of St Dominic's *Nine Ways of Praying*. The author obtained his knowledge from contemporaries of our Holy Father and in particular from Blessed Cecilia. The translation reproduces the nine altogether charming miniatures illustrating the nine ways of St Dominic's prayer. These are from a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century Spanish manuscript copy of the original.