

MY  
BURDEN  
IS LIGHT



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IS LIGHT

SUFFERING AND CONSOLATION  
IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

SAINT JOHN OF AVILA

*Compiled and Translated by  
Brandon Otto*

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# Introduction

*Prayer is warfare to the last breath.*

—Abba Agathon<sup>1</sup>

THE yoke of the Christian life is easy, for it is not borne alone: God Himself bears it with us and for us, so that He can carry us up the mountain of holiness like a little child, in St. Thérèse's image. Yet this yoke is Jesus's yoke, and so it must needs have splinters and thorns.

Despite God's aid, the Christian life is still always a struggle, always suffering. We, like Jesus, must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him.<sup>2</sup> It is a pilgrimage, and a pilgrimage, although joyful, is never easy. A pilgrim is a stranger in a strange land,<sup>3</sup> without a roof to call his own, for here he has no lasting city, but he looks for the one to come.<sup>4</sup> As he hikes the star-way to Heaven, he encounters battles, ambushes, and enemy warriors and tricksters, and he wages a war for his soul against them. Warfare is tiring work, and the pilgrim grows drowsy, so he needs the aid and example of fellows to keep him awake, to keep him on watch, to keep him vigilant. With their aid, he shall come to the Jerusalem on high, and even the suffering his pilgrimage gave him will be celebrated with joy, because of where it led him.

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<sup>1</sup> Agathon #9 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, tr. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1975), 22.

<sup>2</sup> See Mt 16:24.

<sup>3</sup> See Ex 2:22.

<sup>4</sup> See Heb 13:14.

These are the things St. John of Ávila preaches to us in the sermons translated here: the Doctor of the Church becomes a Doctor of our souls, binding us up when robbers befall us on our pilgrimage. And this skill, of course, is not his own: he is merely an apprentice of the true Soul-Doctor, Christ.

Jesus, our Doctor, is also our Captain, our *avant-garde*, who went forth and suffered these things before us, for our example. St. John first tells us of this war against “the world, the flesh, and the devil,” this war in which we labor as soldiers in the vineyard; then he tells us of our Captain, who bested the devil in the desert, yet, through His love for mankind, was bested by a woman’s prayers. Next, he tells us of our Captain’s processions, His sorrowful pilgrimage on earth, followed by the triumphal procession of His Eucharistic Body, when “the Unarmed makes war, / And the Slain hath the gain.”<sup>5</sup> Finally, St. John shows us other veterans of this war, to inspire us: Mary, who conquered God in prayer even as a child; St. Francis of Assisi; and St. Catherine of Alexandria.

“Great is the struggle of prayer, when one strives to always keep his mind fixed on God with a stable intention, despite the enemies opposing him and snatching the sense of prayer away to [chase after] various things.”<sup>6</sup> Great is this struggle, and great the sweat and blood we shed in it, yet “the clods of battlefields are red / with immortality.”<sup>7</sup> The Christian’s struggle in this life leads him along the bloody footsteps of Christ, which bring him to the eternal rest Christ won for us.

The Christian’s life is “a fight to the death in everything and even in all trifles,”<sup>8</sup> and it is to this fight that St. John calls us here. But

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<sup>5</sup> Francis Thompson, “The Veteran of Heaven,” in *Complete Poetical Works of Francis Thompson* (New York: Boni and Liveright, Inc., n.d. [1918]), 117.

<sup>6</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* X.15 (PG 14:1277B).

<sup>7</sup> Charles Dalmon, “Stanzas from ‘Elegy for Edward Thomas,’” in *Poems of Our Time: 1900–1960*, ed. Richard Church, Mildred Bozman, Edith Sitwell (London: Dent, 1967), 108.

<sup>8</sup> Elder Michael of Valaam, qtd. in Maria Stakhovich and Sergius Bolshakoff, *Interior Silence: Elder Michael: The Last Great Mystic of Valaam*, ed. Abbot

though we must put in our own struggles, like the martyrs—whom the Coptic Church calls “struggle-bearers”<sup>9</sup>—we are not alone and unaided. Our Captain has not gone on to His rest and abandoned us: He is still with us in the trenches of life. So, though “only for manly warfare are crowns given,” our manly effort is only our little offering, for it is Christ who is the true warrior of light: “Arm yourself and wage war, and everything else will be given you by the Lord.”<sup>10</sup>

St. John’s sermons show us the example of our Captain and of His brave warriors, and they call us on to zeal and hope in the struggle of the Christian life. They call us to wake for war, a war we have already won, for Christ has won it for us.

*Wake now, wake now!*

*War is kindled.*

*Now helm to head,  
to hand the sword.*

*Wake now, warriors,  
wielding glory!*<sup>11</sup>

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Herman (Ouzinkie, AL: New Valaam Monastery, 1992), 108.

<sup>9</sup> The Greek term is ἀθλοφόρος (*athlophoros*). The first half of the word can either mean “prize” (ἄθλον, *athlon*) or “struggle, contest” (ἄθλος, *athlos*). Most dictionaries follow the first option, making the full term mean “prize-bearer” or “prize-winner,” while the Copts opt for the second option, yielding “struggle-bearer.” See, for instance, the Coptic common hymns for male martyrs in *Service of the Deacons: Rites and Hymns of the Liturgies and Services of the Coptic Orthodox Church* ([Houston, TX]: Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States, 2010), 222–226.

<sup>10</sup> Elder Michael of Valaam, qtd. in *Interior Silence*, 122.

<sup>11</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, “The Lay of Gudrun” §99, in J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Legend of Sigurd & Gudrún*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 286.



## Translator's Note on the Text

THE source I have used for this text is the compilation of sermons found in the 1953 critical edition of St. John's works: *Obras Sermones del B. Mtro. Juan de Ávila : edición crítica*, Tomo II : *Sermones. Pláticas espirituales*, ed. Luis Sala Balust, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos (Madrid : La Editorial Católica, S.A., 1953). Sala Balust gathered the sermons from various sources, sometimes previous publications, sometimes manuscripts, collecting eighty-two sermons in all, though St. John certainly wrote many more, now lost.<sup>12</sup>

For the sermons translated in this volume, Sermons 8, 9, 10, and 16 were first printed in Ricardo García-Villoslada, "Colección de sermones inéditos del Beato Juan de Ávila," *Miscelánea Comillas* VII (1947), 76–92, 39–49, 64–75, and 285–291. Sermons 37 and 63 were originally labelled as "treatises" or "tractates" (*tratados*) when they were published in an early edition of St. John's works. Sermon 37 was the second in a series of twenty-seven "Treatises on the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist," found in *Tercera parte de las obras del P. Mtro Juan de Ávila . . .*, ed. Juan Díaz (Madrid: P. Madrigal, 1596), I:45–94; Sermon 63 was the fourth in a series of eleven "treatises" on Mary and Joseph, found in the same

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<sup>12</sup> During St. John's process of beatification in the 1700s, many volumes of his manuscripts were sent to the Vatican and then disappeared. A 1746 list of the writings in those manuscripts, prepared by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, is reprinted in *Obras completas del B. Mtro Juan de Ávila: edición crítica*, Tomo I: *Epistolario. Escritos menores*, ed. Luis Sala Balust (Madrid: La Editorial Católica, S.A., 1952), xxxiii–xxxv.

publication, II:269–294. Sermons 78 and 80 were newly edited by Sala Balust from manuscripts.

All sermon titles and sub-headings are provided by Sala Balust, not myself.<sup>13</sup>

Page numbers for the Spanish text of the sermons in Sala Balust's edition are as follows:

Sermon 8: 155–173

Sermon 9: 173–184

Sermon 10: 185–197

Sermon 16: 275–281

Sermon 37: 575–603

Sermon 63: 981–995

Sermon 78: 1210–1232

Sermon 80: 1243–1253

For Scriptural quotations, I have provided my own translations of whatever text St. John uses, be it the Vulgate, be it a Spanish translation or paraphrase. I have often consulted the Douay-Rheims for suggestions in translating texts from the Vulgate. For ease of reference, chapter-and-verse citations are based on the modern RSVCE rather than the Vulgate's or Douay-Rheims's numbering.

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<sup>13</sup> The editor of the Spanish edition also italicized certain words and phrases throughout the text. This seems to have been done in instances where St. John was quoting directly from Scripture and when he wrote in Latin. The intentional italicization of words and phrases is retained in this translation.

Part 1

**“Waging a War  
Which Regards Our Souls”**



## Sermon 8

# Motives for Laboring in the Vineyard of the Lord

(Septuagesima Sunday, 1 Cor 9:24–27, 10:1–5; Mt 20:1–16)

*“Voca operarios.”*  
*“Call the workers.”<sup>14</sup>*

### Exordium: Laying Out the Parable

**T**HE office of father of the household: he who has a house and estate and brings workers to labor *at it* has to—very much—pay the laborers the day’s pay that he agreed to with them; he has to not defraud them in paying for their work. *He who spills the blood of his neighbor and he who does not pay the day’s pay to him who has labored in his estate sin equally, they are brothers,*<sup>15</sup> the sacred Scripture makes them equal.<sup>16</sup> He who has an estate, in order to bring to it him who will take care of it and plow it, let him be ready to pay him his day’s pay and labor. The burden of him who comes to labor is to faithfully do all that he can and to labor with diligence and care. The office of the wife, the office of the lady of the house, is to make very good stew to eat for those who come to labor

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<sup>14</sup> Mt 20:8.

<sup>15</sup> This phrase is only found in the Vulgate’s form of this verse, and only in certain manuscripts at that.

<sup>16</sup> Sir 34:27 (DR).

on the estate of their husbands, so that, when they come tired, they might be refreshed and rest and laze about.

You see it, then, well laid out here. The lord of the vineyard is God; He is a very good, a marvelous employer.<sup>17</sup> *The seed of Jacob, no?*<sup>18</sup> *Did I speak in vain to the sons of Israel that they might serve Me?*<sup>19</sup> The interlinear gloss says: No, for He promises the kingdom of the heavens.<sup>20</sup> Complain about that employer over there. Does He pay you poorly for the labor you did for Him? The laborers are us. Such ones we are! May God make us better through His goodness and mercy. She who has to make stew is the Virgin, the bride of God. If we commend ourselves to her, doubtless she will hear us, for most great is the care she continually has for us. And thus the introit of the Mass says it: *They surrounded me*, etc.<sup>21</sup>

To call upon God is to distrust oneself and to trust in God, declaring one's tribulation. Call upon Him, for it will not be in vain, because He says in the temple<sup>22</sup> that He will hear you in the holy temple.<sup>23</sup> This temple is the Virgin, Our Lady; here He sat when He became man; here He dwells now by grace. Let us call upon Him in her, so that we might be good laborers, and that we might receive

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<sup>17</sup> More literally, "payer," or "one who pays."

<sup>18</sup> *Numquid semini Jacob?*

<sup>19</sup> Is 45:19.

<sup>20</sup> *Non, quia promisit regnum caelorum. See Biblia sacra cum glossis interlineari et ordinaria, Nicolai Lyrani Postilla...* (Lyons, 1545), IV:79v.

<sup>21</sup> *Circumdederunt me.* This sermon was given on Septuagesima Sunday, the third Sunday before Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the Pre-Lenten season. The introit of the Mass is based on Psalm 18:4–6: "Surrounded me the groans of death, the sorrows of hell surrounded me, and in my tribulation I called upon the Lord, and He heard my voice from His holy temple." See Gaspar Lefebvre, *The Saint Andrew Daily Missal With Vespers for Sundays and Feasts and Kyriale* (Great Falls, MT: St. Bonaventure Publications, 1999), 241, for the Latin I have translated here.

<sup>22</sup> *In templo.*

<sup>23</sup> Ps 18:6.

the denarius.<sup>24</sup> Let us beseech the sacred Virgin that she might gain us grace, and, so that she might so do this, let us say to her, with devotion, the Ave Maria.

## The Epistle and the Gospels Invite Us to Labor

*Call the workers . . . where aforementioned.*<sup>25</sup> The words that, with the favor of the Holy Spirit, will give the foundation for our sermon, Jesus Christ said them in the Gospel which was chanted<sup>26</sup> in today's Mass. They say, in our tongue:<sup>27</sup> *Call the laborers and pay them the day's pay.*

It seems that the Gospel and the Epistle for today joined in harmony in order to tell us the one saying that we wouldn't want to hear. It seems they throw verjuice<sup>28</sup> in our eyes. The Gospel says that we have to labor in the vineyard; you already see what there is to do in it: it has to be pruned, broken open, dug, planted with vines, watered; there's much to do in it. The Epistle tells us another labor: that we have to fight and run. See by your limbs how new you are! And not however you want, but better than others. *I run.*<sup>29</sup> Not this way, stopping and starting, here and there, but you have to run without ceasing. "Thus," he says, "do I fight and fence, thus do

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<sup>24</sup> A Roman silver coin. In the Gospels, it is used to represent a worker's daily wage.

<sup>25</sup> *Voca operarios . . . ubi supra.* See Mt 20:8.

<sup>26</sup> In the Tridentine Mass, the Epistle and Gospel were always chanted instead of simply read. The practice of chanting the Scripture readings continues today in the Eastern Rite Liturgies and occasionally at Masses, particularly large Masses at the Vatican.

<sup>27</sup> Literally, "in a Romance language" (*en romance*), which typically means "in Spanish." A Romance language is one derived from Latin (the Roman tongue), such as Spanish, French, Italian, Romanian, etc. Recall that, in St. John's time, the Mass and its readings were recited entirely in Latin.

<sup>28</sup> An acidic juice pressed from unripe grapes or other fruit; in St. John's time, it was often used in cooking in the same ways vinegar is used today.

<sup>29</sup> *Ego curro.* 1 Cor 9:26.

I fight, *not as if punching the air.*<sup>30</sup> The Gospel puts the sickle in our hands, and the billhook<sup>31</sup> and the hoe. The Epistle commands us to go forth to run, to fight, and to fence. The Gospel commands labor; we laze about. The Epistle [commands us] to fight; we want to be at peace. See how far it is from what He tells us to what we want, from what they command us to what we do!

*Call the laborers,* says the Lord; *to the laborers of the vineyard, give their day's pay.*<sup>32</sup> And he who has not labored? *None shall be crowned except he who has legitimately struggled.*<sup>33</sup> What remedy is there, so that we won't be so lazy? What remedy is there, so that we won't be as idle as we are and won't abhor labor as we abhor it? So the intent of our mother, the holy Church, is, this day, to invite us to labor and to advise us to not rest. Why such lazing about, brothers? Why such idleness?

The father of the household goes out. God is given many names: father of the household, lion, lamb, angel, heaven, water, fire, and many, innumerable other names. *Every name, both long and short,* said St. Bartholomew, according to what Dionysius recounts.<sup>34</sup> And He who has the vineyard, who has slaves, is called lamb, king, stone, fire, river. All that there is in creatures is affirmed of Him,

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<sup>30</sup> *Non quasi aërem verberans.* 1 Cor 9:26.

<sup>31</sup> A curved blade on a small handle, used as a pruning tool.

<sup>32</sup> Mt 20:8.

<sup>33</sup> *Non coronabitur nisi qui legitime certaverit.* 2 Tm 2:5.

<sup>34</sup> *Totum nomen, et longum et concisum.* This “Dionysius” is known by the lengthy name of “Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.” Modern scholars estimate the author is from the late fifth century or early sixth, though he claims to be Dionysius the Areopagite, one of Paul’s converts (See Acts 17:34), and thus he claims to have known St. Bartholomew and to have been present at Mary’s Assumption. His writings—both for their claim of antiquity and for their blending of Christianity and Neo-Platonism—were incredibly influential. Though he wrote a famous work entitled *On the Divine Names*, the quote here is actually derived from *The Mystical Theology* I.3: “Thus, then, the holy Bartholomew says that theology is much and least, and that the Gospel is wide and large, and, again, concise” (PG 3:1000B–C).

because in Him is the perfection of all of them, much more excellently than in themselves. On the one hand, the name of God Our Lord is *long*, and, on the other, *short*. There, they give Him the name of every servant, and, here, they find no name that fits Him. There, you give Him the being of all things, through the greater eminence that there is in Him; here, you deny it of Him: He is lamb, but not like that lamb; He is fire, but not like that fire. Then what [name] will you give Him, so that He might properly be the Lord, *He who is*? It cannot be said.<sup>35</sup> You see how short, you see how long and how wide, [God is].

In the Gospel, He is spoken of as the lord of the household. He comes at such an hour: “go out to my vineyard.”<sup>36</sup> (Here he recounts the story of the Gospel until they came to paying the laborers.)<sup>37</sup> You see him, thus far, cautious in sending people out to labor in his vineyard; at night, you’ll see him cautious in paying. (*He told the rest of the Gospel, how he made them all recline at table*,<sup>38</sup> and how he had them paid equally, and how those who had come first to the vineyard grumbled, and what the father of the household responded.)

In regards to this theme, I say: it is extreme goodness to draw good from evil; and, on the contrary, it is great evil to draw evil from good and goodness; the art and condition of the devil is to draw evil from good. God is, contrary to him, He who draws good from evil; His art and His property is to draw good from evil. *Is your eye vile because I am*

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<sup>35</sup> St. John is here using the arguments of “apophatic theology” or “negative theology,” a specialty of Pseudo-Dionysius. Per apophatic theology, God is so great, so beyond our ken, that we come to know Him better by denying His relation to things we know than by making analogies and comparisons; as Dionysius himself puts it (*Mystical Theology* I.3), we can by “knowing nothing of Him, know Him beyond mind” (PG 3:1001A), Him Who is the “darkness beyond light” (*Mystical Theology* II.1, PG 3:1025A).

<sup>36</sup> Mt 20:4.

<sup>37</sup> This sermon was recorded by one of St. John’s listeners, and here, as well as later in this paragraph, he simply summarized a few portions of the sermon.

<sup>38</sup> *Dixit residuum evangelii, quomodo fecit omnes discumbere.*

*good?*<sup>39</sup> Your eye is evil, because I am good; in you is evilness, because I do good; to him I do mercy, and, to you, justice; *to no one do I do injury; I want to give him just the same as you. I will be equal with you, for I will give you a denarius; take it and go joyfully.*<sup>40</sup> What is it to you if I give as much to him who came at the end as to those who came in the morning? You are evil, for you are weighed down by the good I do, and I am good for doing it. Why can't I do good for whom I will?

*So it shall be that the last shall be first and the first, last . . . many are called, and few chosen.*<sup>41</sup> The Lord said this to him first, in order to let him understand that many who begin to serve God—because you do not take care—that many of these first ones are last: they will be thin and tepid and they will remain outside, and others, who began later, will go on ahead with the approval of devotion, although they came at the end.

“Lord,<sup>42</sup> since one works more than another, why do they give him an equal day's pay?” Those are the judgments of God. Those latecomers needed to labor with some quality with which the others did not labor; for approval in the service of God, knowledge in the School, does not come from a heap of years and works, but from living love, from that which is like mustard that burns, that has force and power within, in the fervor with which you act, in the intention with which you go aright, in the taste with which you appease Him. Thus He will recount how, by the grace of God, one who gives a

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<sup>39</sup> *An oculus tuus nequam est quia ego bonus sum?* Mt 20:15.

<sup>40</sup> Mt 20:13–14.

<sup>41</sup> Mt 20:16, 22:14.

<sup>42</sup> St. John's sermons abound in these questions that he puts into the mouths of his listeners, or of a character he is discussing. The typical address these questions use is *Señor*. The word can mean “lord,” both as in “the Lord” and as in “my lord”; it can also mean “Sir” or “Mister” (similar to the German *Herr*). It is not always clear whether St. John intends these questions to be directed towards him or towards Christ. For consistency, in these questions, I have always simply translated it “Lord,” but one should keep in mind that it can mean either “Oh Lord” (addressed to Christ) or “my lord” (addressed to the preacher).

mite for God gives more than another who gives a great number of ducats;<sup>43</sup> a sigh that one gave in a corner [does more] than however many fasts and disciplines another does, day and night.<sup>44</sup>

It is a saying by Jesus Christ that Our Lord does not so much look on the gift as on the will and love with which it is given. Did He not say, when the old woman tossed a cornado<sup>45</sup> into the treasury, that *she had tossed in more than any of the rich?*<sup>46</sup> Our Lord looks more at the love with which you give, that difficulty you find in doing something and the labor you put into completing it and obeying Our Lord, that anxiety you have for fulfilling what He commands of you, that zeal for the honor of God that you desire to give Him—that is what God looks at, more than at another who, without love or liveliness, as if by custom, does it, without any further feeling, as if he were doing nothing; that one is not as acceptable to the Lord, nor does He pay him as much in abundance. The latecomers who came to labor had to repent, because they came late to the vineyard of the Lord, and they had to sorrow over how little they labored, and they had to labor with great anxiety and with a desire that the day would not end, in order to labor more, and [they had] to not look to what the Lord was to give them, but rather to preparing His estate and to contenting its Lord. And to these was given as much as to the others, and even, perhaps, more. The Lord says: *The last will be first and the first last, because many will be called and few chosen.*<sup>47</sup>

## Many Are Called, Few Chosen

This is a difficult step. How is it to be understood? All those called today were called by the Church, and no one was cast out. How,

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<sup>43</sup> See Lk 21:1–4.

<sup>44</sup> See Lk 18:9–14.

<sup>45</sup> A small copper coin of St. John's time.

<sup>46</sup> Lk 21:3.

<sup>47</sup> *Erunt novissimi primi et primi novissimi.* Mt 20:16, 22:14.

then, does He say that *few* were chosen? All those who were called were chosen, and the called were many; later, the chosen were many. How, then, does He say, *Many are called and few chosen?* Those two words—*called* and *chosen*—must, necessarily, be mixed up.

The *called* are considered in the Scripture in two ways: *First*, those who are preached to, and whom God inspires so that they would amend themselves, and whom He invites so that they might come, and they neither come nor respond to the call of God. Thus, over there, on the borders, many were called and did not come; they are also called to whom God speaks, in their heart, about the evil life in which they walk and about what hinders them from the good, for their salvation, but they come to Him and know Him and remain here and ever dispose themselves so that God might help them and so that they might leave their evil life. There are *others* called, whom God inspires so that they would come at His call, and convert from their evil life, and walk on the way of God, and embrace, with love, that which fulfills them, and the Lord allows them to work and effect what befits their salvation.

God sends you a preacher who tells you what fulfills you, a good and holy proposition and a good thought; God has already done what is owed on His part.

“Father, what will I do, since I do not make use of this, since all that God has done for me has not caused any more cleanness in me than if He had not done it?” With this, God has already worked His justice, and when He comes to judgment with you, you will not blame Him for not having done His duty and all that was necessary to save you, if your evilness had not hindered it. There, He will ask you how you acted in regard to what was in your hand, how you made use of what you could do, and how you responded to Him, and if He finds some fault in you, He will severely punish you.

“Lord, if You do not give me another grace, it will be justice to condemn me; let Your Majesty grant me favors<sup>48</sup> in advance; in what has, unto now, done me wrong, I find myself wronged.”

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<sup>48</sup> The word *merced* typically means “mercy,” though it can, confusingly, also refer to a royal grant, a gratuitous benefit, and even a rental payment. The

By your evilness, what God has done unto now becomes justice and condemnation and burden and obligation for you. Step forward and ask God that He be more lavish with you in favors and mercies. Say to Him: “Lord, do more for me, give me more, multiply Your mercy towards me. How? May You, Lord, open this heart and give me, Lord, the strength to want to do what You command of me and say that I must do; may You make me want what You want, and may I, although it be difficult, do what You want me to do. Give me, Lord, that second grace, which not only invites, but gives me to understand, gives me to eat, and makes me eat.” That is what you have to desire, ask, and plead for, groaning and crying and laboring, although it cost you your life.

“Since it has to do with my will, how do you say that God will do it?”

That is God’s wisdom and the love He has. He knows how to surround this in such a way that you will want it, because He acts so that you might want it and want it freely; this is called a call with effect, with execution, with building off of that *call* with which God calls you in the first calling. This is what Saint Paul signifies when he says: *Paul, called an apostle*.<sup>49</sup> Why do you say *called an apostle*? Because God inspired you so that you might exercise the office of the apostolate? This is not merely calling “come here,” but saying and doing. *Called a saint*<sup>50</sup> is the same thing; *already made saints*, sanctified and justified and workers of goodness. More clearly: He called the wheat, the stars, the sun, *as is found in the first chapter of Genesis*.<sup>51</sup> And Saint Paul says that He calls that which is not as if it were, because He gives it being in His calling it; in God, to say is to do; God calls “just” those whom He makes justified and “holy” those whom He sanctifies and purifies.

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Latin cognate—*mercedem*—is used to mean “wage” in Matthew 20:8. To keep the terms distinct, I am here translating *merced* as “favor” and *miser cordia* as “mercy;” St. John likes to pair them, as in the next paragraph.

<sup>49</sup> *Paulus vocatus apostolus*. Rom 1:1.

<sup>50</sup> *Vocatus sanctus*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ut invenitur Genesis primo*.

But there is a man who spent so much time flaying faces, hardened and forgotten. God says: “Here I want to do mercies for the exaltation of My Name and for My honor and so that My marvels be known, because [I will do them] to this man without owing it to Him, before He has made Me enraged, irate, and moved to do justice to him;” for God seeks the most wounded, the most sickened.

“Why, Lord, to this man more than to another? Look, Lord, at how exhausted he is from doing You affronts and injuries. Why this man?”

So that they may know that God is the Lord of what He has, and that they may know that what He gives is grace, and that the favor and mercy are what He wants to do, and what He gives and what He pays and all that He does for men is not a debt or a day’s pay, and that He gives it to whom He holds as good, and, from whom He wills, He takes it away. That calling is a choosing as privilege, as by absolute power, in order to convert a dogged and hardened heart. He is lavish and very abundant in mercy and favors. This is the choosing that the Gospel speaks of. And so that we aren’t careless about ourselves, and so we don’t say to ourselves, “If we don’t work at this hour of the morning, it’ll be done at noon; if not, in the afternoon, and, if not then, then when the sun is setting”—this is not a good story; don’t console yourselves with this—God says, “*Of them, few are chosen*; the called are many, but, from those, these ones are chosen.” This manner of choosing is not done with everyone; there are few chosen in this manner. There are many who go along this way when God favors them, just as, by the second call of which we have spoken, many are those who are thus saved; but few are those to whom, by other particular privileges—they being of poor lineage, some being sinners—He gives better goods, does them mercies and greater favors; but *they are few*,<sup>52</sup> outside of the common way—we might say, “supernaturally.” This happens very few times, this happens with very few, those thus called are very rare.

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<sup>52</sup> *Sunt pauci.*

So that you are not dismayed, brother, if you have badly wasted your life, ask God for mercy, and labor with diligence and with fervent desire and love; that little bit of time that remains for you, spend it in laboring towards God's coming to you, and in working in His Church, in your neighbors, in amending yourself, so that God will do you favors by choosing you among those few. You do not have to be so careless that you wait until the end, nor so dismayed that you never labor.

### First Motive: We Will Avoid the Biting of the Conscience

Let's return to the theme. What will we do in order to not be careless, so lazy, so that this lazing about, this strolling through streets and sitting in chairs and being like slouchers, won't feel too good to us, being always idle, with no memory of labors, nor of discontent, nor of displeasure? What detours God takes to make us laborers, to entice us and draw us to the field to do something, to focus on some task! How many things stop us from laboring! What obstacles, what setbacks, what bitterness fall upon us in labor so that, in tasting it, we feel bad, and we throw it away! I said: Why don't you labor? "Because it is a pain and a labor to labor." And if you don't labor, will you be without pain and labor? Do you think that you'll laze about and that you'll rest? You've thus been called to the vineyard of the Lord, and are your hands folded? The vineyard is you yourselves, your soul, for God wants you to labor in it and to work it: *The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the man of Judah, its delightful seed.*<sup>53</sup> *The vineyard was peaceful.*<sup>54</sup> *In the Song of Songs, it is shown how every man is the vineyard of the Lord.*<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Vinea Domini exercituum domus Israel est; et vir Iuda germen eius delectabile.* Is 5:7.

<sup>54</sup> *Vinea fuit pacific.* Sg 8:11.

<sup>55</sup> *In Cantica Canticorum probant quando quisque homo sit vinea Domini.*

What are you trying to say *when you say: My beloved, let us go to the field?*<sup>56</sup> Saint John said to Saint Paul: “Let us go out from among the Hebrews—since we make so little fruit—unto the Gentiles.” Let us go out from ourselves, and let us go to the field of our vineyard, which is the Church, for everyone in this Church is her member, and she the body; because of that, they call you a part of the vineyard and the vineyard [as a whole]. You are the vineyard; come to labor in it; come to yourself if you want to know yourself. What are you trying to say? Come to your soul and do in it what is wont to be done in a vineyard, what a diligent man ought to do in one: prune it, plant vines in it, dig it.

“I already know what a vineyard’s like; it’s a labor to labor, father; I’ll sweat, I’ll have to rest, it’s very hot in the summer, it’ll make me have callouses on my hands and blisters.”

Because of this, you carry your soul about as you carry it, sluggish in praying and giving alms; because of this, your vineyard remains fruitless, without a farm; because of this, it’s become a dump and a compost heap; because of this, you think you’ll remain without labor? Take it as certain that the greatest labor that can come to a Christian is to not labor, and the greatest disgust and discontent, the greatest torment and fatigue one can have, is this. That one, to obey his flesh, does not want to be chaste, this will be the greatest labor of labors and the greatest torment and pain of torments, and a greater hell than that of the damned, or as great. Question: what is the greatest labor there is? Everyone will say: the one I have. The one who has poverty will say that that is the greatest of evils. Another will say that it’s not having children. Another will say that it’s dishonor; another, that it’s sickness; and others will say that it’s many other faults. Let us leave them aside, for they are friends of themselves and passionate for their own flesh.

Let one who is passionless and one of good judgment and reason say it. What is the greatest of the labors that there is in the

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<sup>56</sup> Sg 7:12.

world?—It is, certainly, to not labor in your soul, in your vineyard; to do evil, to be tepid, to feel that you're not acting as the law of God commands; there is a hell, God died for me, I am obligated to serve Him. The knowledge of him who sees that he is obligated to do this and sees how he does not do it, this is like a woodworm for him who has reason, and like a worm that gnaws his entrails with sorrow. Thus Zechariah calls it *a hundredweight of lead*,<sup>57</sup> because it is a weight that burdens and weighs more than all weights. There's nothing that weighs one down more than having a sin on one's soul, a conscience burdened with remorse and with feeling, so that you say to yourself, seeing yourself lost in sin: "O sinner! You go about wickedly, hell is yours, you've been lost; God has justice, for He will condemn you for what you have done against Him. How can you suffer yourself? How can you fit within yourself? How do you not explode?"

Although this is no more than thinking "God called me to serve Him in this way," in thinking that, according to the diverse talents that God gives men, they are obligated to spend them, barter them, and multiply them in His holy service<sup>58</sup>—if, in this, he feels he's not fulfilling what he's called to, the tepid man, because he does what he ought not, has a great torment within himself. What unrest and disquiet, what nausea the soul bears! What will he do, then, he who acts and goes against what is commanded of him, or stops before doing all of it? If, then, there is labor in sinning and in not knowing how to serve God, stop and think about how you are as you are through not knowing how to labor; think about which will be a greater labor in the service of God: to have a temptation come to you and to conquer it, or to consent to it and suffer what one suffers through having sinned.

You say: "I want to take a rest. Why should I wear myself out by resisting? Doing what my flesh invites me to do seems better to

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<sup>57</sup> Zec 5:7.

<sup>58</sup> See Mt 25:14–30.

me than the pain I get from not doing it.” Do you know why you deceived yourself? Because you weighed the pain of the temptation against the pleasure of doing your will. Those aren’t good balances, nor are you certain of weighing them rightly. You have to weigh pain against pain and pleasure against pleasure. It doesn’t go well. Weigh pain against pain, and you’ll see which pain is more, and the one that weighs more, toss it out. Weigh the pain that you’ll suffer, which is resisting temptation, against the pain you’ll suffer if you don’t resist, because having offended Our Lord, and see which weighs more. And weigh the pleasure of conquering temptation against the pleasure that delight could give you, if you consent, and you’ll find that of conquest much greater, beyond compare, and much happier and more delightful. Setting them side-by-side like this, tossing out the greater pain, choosing the lesser, and of the pleasures, take the greater.

You cannot, brother, be without labor. If you do not labor for God, you’ll suffer a thousand discontents, anguishes, and fatigues, changing your thoughts, getting angry at others. There’s nothing so changeable as this. A weathervane’s not so turnable, nor so fought by the winds, as is he who does not exercise himself in some labor that would fulfill the service and honor of God. If it’s a labor that comes, then it thins you out; if a temptation, then it destroys you. He who serves God, then says, no matter what comes to him: “God will be with me, the Lord will help me.” What contentment he has! Then he says, “For God, I did what I did; evil, pain, and labor came upon me, but God will send the remedy for it; and, if not, He will be served by whatever happens.” In the end, there is nothing that changes him, since, of the two labors, he takes the lesser. You feel labor in not playing, labor in not talking as you’re wont to, labor in fasting and praying, in being alone in your house or cell; then I tell you for certain that you’ll have a greater labor in the sorrow that the worm of bad conscience will give you and in the contortions it will give you in your heart, seeing what you are obliged to do and what you do not do.

## Second Motive: Thinking of Reward

Lord, is there another remedy for laboring, so that we would not be so loose and so lazy? A philosopher boasted that he had found a remedy so to not feel labors. Being asked what [it was, he responded]: “thinking of the prize that they’ll give you after having labored by means of the labors and by way of not resting.” Certainly, applied to Christianity, this is very good, reasonable, and worthy of being noted and acted upon. This was what made the martyrs pass through such hard torments, and enter, with joy, into the fire and martyrdom, and lose their lives, saying: “This life that I have and lose here will give me another, forever, in heaven; this labor of an hour, which I pass through, will give me a rest that never ends, in the company of God.” *They were looking to the rewards.*<sup>59</sup>

Tell me: What difference is there between the man who was good in this world and he who wasn’t—when those ears hear God say, “*Call the workers here, on the day of judgment, and give them their day’s pay,*”<sup>60</sup> and when God says, “Let the dead arise in their bodies and let each be given what he labored for in the other life”?<sup>61</sup> If you, then, have not worked, nor have been chaste, nor been obedient to God, nor done anything for love of Him, what will you feel when He says, “*Call the workers and pay them,*” and you see that you remain without a day’s pay, and that, because of not having labored, you are being sent to the unbearable labors of hell, where you will labor forever? Say it: what pleasure will you feel then, when they tell you that, because of the *jar of water* that you gave,<sup>62</sup> God will say, “Give him his day’s pay”? And the day’s pay will be the kingdom of God forever, where you will delight with Him and live in rest, without thought of the labor that never comes to you, nor fear that you

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<sup>59</sup> *Aspieciebant in remunerations.* Heb 11:26.

<sup>60</sup> Mt 20:8.

<sup>61</sup> Mt 16:27.

<sup>62</sup> Mk 9:41.

will lose that highest good that has once been given to you. Which will be worth more than the jar of water, or the sum of money that you left in a chest? Who is he who will not reach for his belt and dress himself for labor and embrace it willingly, since the day's pay that he is to receive in heaven for his labor is so advantageous?

## What Matters Is to Labor in Order to Please God

“Lord, what do I have to do? Do I have to go to the wasteland? I'm tired: do I have to thin myself out by fasting? Do I have to give away my whole estate for love of God, so that I have nothing left for my wife and for my children?”

Oh, holy God! Saint Paul says: *If I speak with the tongues of men, etc.*<sup>63</sup> Elsewhere, Christ says that if you give *a jar of cold water* for love of Him,<sup>64</sup> that you will not remain without reward. How, then, are these strings tuned? How will we make this vihuela<sup>65</sup>—which sounds good—harmonize with what they say? Charity does it. *If you do not have charity* with which to love God and neighbor, *nothing avails you at all*,<sup>66</sup> even if you sell yourself in the land of the Moors<sup>67</sup> and give away, for God's sake, the price they gave for you, it avails

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<sup>63</sup> *Si linguis hominum loquar.* 1 Cor 13:1.

<sup>64</sup> Mk 9:41.

<sup>65</sup> A type of twelve-stringed instrument popular in Spain in St. John's time, with the shape of a guitar but the tuning of a lute.

<sup>66</sup> 1 Cor 13:3.

<sup>67</sup> “Moor” was a term for a North African Muslim, hailing, roughly, from modern Tunisia, Algeria, or Morocco. There was a long history of wars between southern Europe and North Africa, most famously resulting in the Muslim conquest of much of Spain (renamed Al-Andalus) for centuries. These frequent wars, as well as assaults by pirates, resulted in many Europeans being enslaved in North Africa. Many organizations—most famously the religious order of Mercedarians, founded by St. Peter Nolasco in 1218—were founded in order to raise funds to redeem enslaved Christians. Possibly the “selling oneself in the land of the Moors” that St. John mentions here meant selling oneself into slavery in order to redeem other slaves.

nothing; and *a jar of water that you give with charity and love will not go without reward*,<sup>68</sup> if you give it with the intention of serving and pleasing God.

What is “laboring in the vineyard of God”? In the plaza, you can be digging in the field, and another person can be offering God His Son in sacrifice on the altar, and you laboring in the vineyard of God, and the other in that of the devil; that is, if you do it to provide for your children and wife, and the other does it for the stipend or because he wants to seem holy. Hearts are what please God, what God receives, not the matter of the work. So too here, if one does not go about clothed or wrapped up in this intention of serving and loving Him. If you’re cane-jousting<sup>69</sup> for the honor of God, and you’re going to church in order to see some woman, the places are different, but, because you’re at the latter with a wicked heart and at the former with a healthy intention, for you, the church is the vineyard of the demon, and on the other hand, the plaza, the windows, the canes, the bets, and silks are the vineyard of God, when you’re working in it.

Let no one deceive himself by saying, “I’m tired, I’m busy; I can’t, and I don’t have to, and I can’t find a place where to listen to the things of God; I have enough to do in providing for my household.” Go to the plaza for love of God; love your wife and children for love of God; listen to your Office and an approved tract, making gains

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<sup>68</sup> Mk 9:41.

<sup>69</sup> Literally, “playing at canes.” This was a game introduced by the Moors of Al-Andalus (see previous note), which involved two contestants on horseback galloping towards each other with sharpened lengths of cane, then throwing the sticks at each other when they drew near, with the goal being to catch the opponents cane and toss it back. I take this description from Joseph R. Svinth’s *Kronos: A Chronological History of the Martial Arts and Combative Sports 1350–1699* (2004), at <https://ejmas.com/kronos/NewHist1350-1699.htm> (accessed August 10, 2023). Confusingly, the same phrase (*jugar a las cañas*) also referred to torturing someone with sharpened sticks of cane, which does not seem to be what St. John intends here.

with which you'll sustain what God has given you as a charge, and take yourself for a day laborer. What God asks is this, a difference in the heart, not a difference in the deed. One and the same work can mean working for God or for the devil, according to the intention with which one does it, because, if you do it with the intention of pleasing God and providing for your neighbor, this is to labor in the vineyard of your soul, rented from God; this is to be His day laborer. He who labors in this manner hopes to receive the day's wage from the father of the household, who is God.

If there were some good laborers, well-lunched in the vineyard, and they were promised that at night, if they had labored well and did good work nonstop during the day, they would be given an abundance of supper and their day's wage, much increased, and they would be well-paid—if they, upon arriving at the vineyard, dropped the hoes from their hands and stopped to play and jump around, to see who could go higher and who farther than the other, and all day long they did nothing but play and laze about and trample the vineyard, at night, when they came, what supper, what day's wage would they merit to be given by the Lord for the day they had thus wasted?

I said: how is your vineyard? Has your soul flourished and shot off vine shoots? Does it have very fresh leaves and very copious bunches of grapes? "Lord, I was sent to dig." And you, what do you think? (Although I believe that there will be someone here who doesn't know why he came into the world, if he was sent to dig or to laze about.) I said: Who created you, now seventy years ago? Did your parents suffice to beget you? There are married folk who don't have children. God created you, because your parents did not suffice to give you the being you have. He ordained that you be born from them in this city, and that you be created in this manner, and that you live in such a house. In all that has happened to you, God took you by the hand and He worked it, not you, nor them. Why did He send you here? To dig in His vineyard. When He says, "Love God with all your might, give alms," that is God sending you

to His vineyard so that you might labor on His behalf and in His law. That's what is preached to us every day. We were told, but we abandoned our hoes and played at who could jump higher. Look about those plazas. Doesn't one say, "Is that man rich? I hope I'll go farther; I have to get richer. Do they honor that man? I hope I'll make myself more honored. Does that girl over there have a skirt? I'll get a better one. Does that man have some office? I have measly power, or I'd have a better one." What are you doing all day long? Why aren't you laboring for God? For all of that is just lazing about in order to labor later, without hope of rest.

"Father, we haven't been idle; I'm worn out from labors at home; I go through poverty and sickness, I'm affronted, I live very tired." I know it well, but to be laboring at this is to be idle. "The other day, I had such an estate, and, when I didn't savor it, it was lost to me. The other day, I had such an office, and now they've taken it from me. The other day, I had a good reputation, and they no longer trust me at all." During all the time you're complaining about this, while you're saying that you're more belabored than you are, I tell you, you are being even more idle. Put your hand on your breast: how much of this did you do for God? How much did you bear with patience? In how much of it did you glorify and honor Him? How much did you offend Him? Oh! What liars we are, for we want to deceive God, since you say that you did it for God, and that you say it for God, and, instead, you do it because you can't do more, and for your own interests. Where is that estate that you have? Where is the patience? Where is the love of humility? Where is the memory of God when you did all this? Where did you meet Him in your labors and ask counsel of Him?

Certainly, it is a great shame to see your own blindness, like boys who were sent to their chores, and *instead* were making mud huts and looking at whatever it is that they met on the road, and they forgot why they came and who sent them. Their father says to them: "Kid, where did I send you? What's the answer you're bringing back?

That's the care you took? Where were you? Get up! To pay for your carelessness and tardiness: lashes that pain the boy in his heart." Thus he's paid back for watching the shrews and forgetting what he had to do and who had sent them.

Where did they send you, brother? Where did you go, or to whom? What were you kept and occupied by? This life that you have, what do you think it is? Why did they send you? Wasn't it to work in your vineyard with zealous and timely works? Where's the holiness of your life? Where's the charity you have, that would throw out a scent to make the serpents flee you, so sweet and so comforting? What have you done? Why have you abandoned the hoe you brought for digging and set yourself to playing at who can jump higher? Give alms at that door over there; confess, make your evil known once a year; it's hard to pardon you, like saying it to a stone; sermons annoy you. God give you eyes to see yourself. If you come, what will you say? "I've labored, but I wasn't in the right vineyard."

*Spiderwebs they wove for themselves.*<sup>70</sup> They labored in vain like spiders, since, for all their labors, however many nights they kept awake, weaving their web, a fly comes and breaks it all and flies right through it. Another wanders around, raving about how he'll rise up, and God says, "What are you weaving?" He wanders around drinking the wind, because they take off their hats and honor him, and [God] says: "What are you weaving?—Spiderwebs." When the fly of death comes and takes you from this life, we'll see what web you made, if it's a spider's or no. Will you not be paid back for the steps you took wandering around, for how you labored in this? Will you not be sharply chastised for how you labored in this way, how you were idle, and will they not ask you for the labor that you were obliged to do?

It was labor to spend the whole night playing without sleeping; it was labor to wander around the plazas in the moonlight and in the

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<sup>70</sup> *Telas araneae sibi texuerunt.* Is 59:5.

cold and in the serenity of the night, in order to talk to a woman, but spiderwebs were what you schemed and plotted and wove.

Brothers, where are we going? We're walking to heaven. What do you see? What games hold you back? What bird are you looking at? What returning noise? In what vanities do you employ yourself? May that walking turn your heart to God and not to something else, and everything else is stopping and resting, or being idle, or laboring in vain. It is a great evil to be hired for the vineyard, and to leave your hoe. All that time you had for laboring, not for wasting time and playing and laughing and lazing about and playing cards and playing at who's bigger and who's taller.

### Third Motive: Seeing the Labors of Christ

The third [motive] that invites us to labor is putting the Lord before us. And He labors so that we might labor. Christ comes into the world and becomes man, and, in being born, He is cold and He cries and spills His blood and walks and sweats, and they seize Him and they beat Him and they crown Him and they nail Him to the Cross. What does Jesus Christ do? He takes some nails in His hands, and, although He took them of His own will, they held Him fixed there, giving Him greatest pains, making Him expend excessive labors. Christ is hung on a Cross, breaking His hands in labor, and you are lazing about, resting and regaling your body; Christ is suffering, and you are viciously delighting in your flesh; Christ is given blows, and you are honored. How can your soul suffer this? You see your Lord lowered to kiss the feet of His disciples, and they come to you with a slave who takes off his hat to another who didn't take his as low as him, and you won't be finished with him, even if they put him on a cross. Ah, sinner! You see your Lord lowered to the dust of the earth, and you want to rise above the air? Being given blows, He is silent, and they're not twenty leagues away from you when you cringe. You see your God despised, and do you not despise yourself

for that great excess you see in Him? Can there be a thing that better convinces you to labor than seeing your Lord tired, fatigued, and dying, and suffering a thousand torments and wounds for you?

## How Is the Vineyard of the Lord So Ruined?

Oh wicked vineyard! How bold, for he knew what God has done. “Woe is me! For . . .”

“What are You doing, Lord?” *“Woe is me, for I am a man who gleans! I am a man who gathers the clusters that the grape-harvesters left behind.”*<sup>71</sup>

“Then what’s happening? Why aren’t You gathering?”

“There’s nothing to eat, not even food that another left behind. I wanted to eat grapes. See how little there is, for I don’t even find unripe ones to eat.”

“Lord, what are You trying to say, *there is no holy one on earth?*”<sup>72</sup> What do You have, Lord?”

“The grapes that I desired are your holy justice, the keeping of My law, not however you want, on the outside [only]; and it is kept for purpose other than I command.”

“Why did another harvest the grapes?” In order to fill up his lunacies, his banquets, and jousts, vanities, all that is necessary so that he might act the craziest he can and as abundantly as he wants. They are workers—congratulations!—in the vineyard of the devil, good laborers who will work it very well. Give me the vineyard of God, give me it for an orphan, give me it for a captive, give me it for a mantle for a woman who doesn’t have one, so she can go to Mass. They don’t know You nor do they care to hear You, and will they do this without punishment? It’s a tough thing, to see the overgrowth that’s there in the vineyard of the Lord. The vine is full

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<sup>71</sup> *“Vae mihi qui factus sum sicut qui colligit in autumno racemos vendimiae.”* Mi 7:1.

<sup>72</sup> *Non est sanctus in terra.* Mi 7:2.

of thistles, everything's become a wasteland, without any work, dry, without any watering—what can we do with it?—full of pits and all uprooted.

Solomon had a vineyard. *He handed it over to the guards. They appointed me as guard, etc.*<sup>73</sup> *He handed it over to the guards.* Guards are the vineyard's pontiffs, preachers, priests, rulers, dukes, and counts, marquises, judges. Then what is the vineyard like? One of two things: either the guards do what they ought and the vineyard is as evil as them, so that they do not make use of any of it, however much they labor and keep watch over it, or the guards are laze-about and dangerous men, and the vineyard goes well from being ploughed. What happens to the thousands that the pontiff produces for the king or prince? How is such abundance consumed? Where is the multiplication of fruit? What is that great abundance and the peak of power—which he has among his Church and his subordinates during the time that he reigns—going to do? Do we think that the whole office of the prelate is just for getting up here and preaching about how you have to work? There are enough who will tell you that. But there has to be more than this. The prelate has to be so holy, his prayer so powerful before God, that the mother's water will be worth more than the milk that the lady of the house gives. But if we do not know how to importune God or to weep for our faults and for the labors that souls suffer, and so he has no strength for remedies, how much worse than him is the vineyard, dry and lost, without fruit, destroyed, without leaves, without fruit and even without wood, all chopped down and desolate? What's with the guards? The guards of this vineyard—which God entrusted to them—slept, and thieves snuck into it and left not a thing to harvest. The worst of the evils that's in the towns is due to the negligence of the pastors, of the magistrates, and of the clergymen, and of the parish priests, who are careless about the good government and labor that they are obligated to have in their offices.

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<sup>73</sup> *Tradidit eam custodibus . . . Posuerunt me custodem.* Sg 8:11; 1:6.

See how the Gospel noted this: *the men were sleeping*.<sup>74</sup> Through the carelessness of their heads, the vineyard is so ruined that, if the fire of God were in them—which, knowing that there was sin, would break their hearts with sorrow, and they [would not be] consoled until they had repaired it—if this happened, and they repaired it with charity and love, and if they could not do this, with fear and chastisement, another fruit would be given. This being so, we should take up slings and wander about, keeping an eye on the birds and the livestock, so that none should enter into the vineyard. Brother, if you do not labor in the vineyard of God, you have to labor in the vineyard of the devil, for you cannot escape one of the two. Your master and lord, God, is laboring, and you do not want to help Him; aren't you ashamed to see Him laboring, and you abandoning your hoe and sitting down to watch Him as He sweats? Why do you labor with the devil? His prize is his dinner table. Why are you paid with such miserable food, and why are you moved by such an unfortunate day's wage and price?

Be merciful with God, be humble with God, so that you might delight with Him. But if you walk in the works of the devil, you want what you do not want; you will dine with him at night, you will take part in his condemnation and in his torments and in his fires and in the unfortunate life that he is made to suffer in hell.

The Lord of this vineyard is God, and, of the other, the devil. The denarius of this one will be glory, and that of the other, hell. What greater good do you find in serving the demon than [in serving] God? What greater interest do you hope for from hell than from the glory of God? Speak: Why do you prefer to labor with the demon rather than laboring with God? You won't answer me this? What madness is this that you're doing, so confused and so far from good sense! For two lords go out to that plaza to hire laborers, and the one says, "Walk over here, to my vineyard, and I'll abundantly provide for you, and I'll give you gifts, and I'll refresh you, and, at the end

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<sup>74</sup> *Dormierunt homines*. See Mt 13:25.

of your labor, I'll give you the glory that the blessed have in heaven, in the company of God, seeing Him and delighting in Him"; and the demon says, "Walk over here, to my vineyard, and I'll make you labor, and I'll kill you with hunger and thirst, and, as your day's pay, I'll give you death . . ." What's the reason for going straight after the one who invited you with hell, and turning your back on God, who invites and entices you with heaven, knowing how excessive are the goods that God gives to His own there?

"Don't be astonished if we fall and we're blind and we're deceived. Lord, we are flimsy." Weep and cry out to God and ask Him to show you what you ought to do and to give you the strength to do it, and to make you know that He will help you do it.

### Cultivate the Vineyard of Your Soul. Do Not Rest.

What's going on with this vineyard? Certainly you're not saying what the other said: *My vineyard is before my eyes*.<sup>75</sup> Certainly you don't have *your soul before you*, like a mirror into which you gaze. Hold this mirror before you: see what's lacking in your soul; clean it, for it's dirty; take away what harms you, all the rust and gunk that hinder you. Look at yourself.

Take a good plow and turn over the earth and take out the roots, so that the evil can no longer grow, and so that the sun might dry the grass and all the weeds that harm it. Take up the plow, for it's made of wood and iron; take up the Cross, that holiest wood and iron (the nails), set it firm in your soul, so that the evil root might leave, although it pains you greatly. Rip out what's deep in it, what's well-rooted, malevolence and enmity and the desire to win honor from another, although it reaches your soul—the restitution of what belongs to another, which *in another way*<sup>76</sup> takes the defect away—for if you do not rip out the root, later, when the occasion

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<sup>75</sup> *Vinea mea coram oculis meis est.* Sg 8:12.

<sup>76</sup> *Aliter.*

comes, you will fall, since the root of what did you wrong and what hindered your good labor is still green and well-rooted. Now, you walk upon the earth; after death, you will be below the earth, and they will turn you over, as with a plow, from top to bottom and from out to in.

Follow Christ, labor as He labored, hope that He will give you the price of your labors, consider the labor that you're exerting for God here as lazing about, and give it to Him as time well-spent.

"Lord, the vineyard's already turning green again; guard it from frost!" You have begun to serve God; guard yourself from tepidity; don't throw away the devotion given to you, for it scorches and parches it worse than the north-west wind.<sup>77</sup> Guard it from frost, preserve it in heat with prayer, with fasting, with almsgiving, with supplications and importuning to God, with recollection and humiliation. But, ay! Let there be no little worms born on the inner leaves that are the same color as them, for they rot and eat the leaf and make it lose its greenness and freshness that it had before. "Who put this little worm there?" They say it is born from the leaf itself. Doing good works, you have to look out so that there doesn't emerge, from the work itself, someone who will eat it and waste it and consume it away from you. This is the reason why you do this. If it is for your own interest and so that they would consider you good, what danger you have! Whether you rob another or whether you give alms, you do not lack danger; there is danger when you pray and danger when you don't pray, when you fast and when you don't fast.

If you are vain about your good work, a little worm has been born from it, which will make it lose its beauty and freshness, which will make you lose it all. If your crazy little heart says, "I'm already devoted, God already consoles me, He already gives me

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<sup>77</sup> In Spanish, *cierzo*, describing a specific wind that sometimes blows through the Ebro Valley in northeast Spain in autumn or winter. Interestingly, though it is a very dry wind, which would "parch" a vineyard, it is usually cold, so it wouldn't "scorch" one.

some of His delights, I ought to do something good, it'll be good, since God's already well-pleased with me"; if you already lean on this, you'll lose what is from God. Perhaps the worm is born more from the leaves than from the fruit, from speaking rather than from acting. Keep quiet if you have something good, if you receive some mercy from God; for there is great danger in taking it out in the plaza. Keep doing what you were doing whenever God gives you mercy, shut your mouth, receive the mercies, and know how to please and serve Him.

"Sir, my vineyard already has grapes. What do I have to do until I harvest them, in order to give God their fruit?" See how you haven't labored, and how another bears the fruit away. You did good works for vainglory, for men; others will gather and bear away the fruit of your vineyard. You labored for them if you worked in order to appear good in their eyes. Those who do not labor in the vineyard will not bear away the reward; and those that have, they will delight in their works, and they shall not remain without fruit to satisfy others.

"Then who will suffer these labors, Lord, if they have to spend [their lives] in this toil?" You will go away very well lunched, and they will give you much to eat, and, at night, they will have dinner all set up for you, and all the day they will give you very good company, by which you will be stoked for labor.

"Lord, I cannot labor, for, later, I'll get tired." You haven't lunched, brother. This is the grazing of the glory, of the word of God. Read good books, listen to sermons. Are you thin? Go to the altar. Badly shall it go for him who approaches it without having labored. How many steal this bread, those who go there without sorrow for their sins! To lunch is to listen to the word of God in His holy church; but, if you do not want to eat, putting the food aside, you will die of hunger, and you will grow thin.

"Lord, the company?" If you knew who accompanies you when you labor in good works! Jesus Christ, the Virgin, the angels. With

such companions, are you tired? With such aid, are you not happy? Be assured that Jesus Christ was there the whole night *and the whole night He kept vigil in prayer.*<sup>78</sup>

“Lord, how tired I am! And what will dinner be?” So you are the vineyard of God, and God will give you great aid so that you will labor; and, after you are a good vineyard, what will He give you? May you have strength to work for Him, who hired you, and may you approach Him with all your fruit, so that you might attain glory when you leave this life, and so that you might say, “Lord, I come here now, to praise You and to glorify You.” No tongue could tell this dinner, *nor understanding understand,*<sup>79</sup> nor reason imagine. Blessed labor, which hopes for such a reward, which awaits such and so good a dinner, here of grace, and later of glory! *To which may He lead us.*<sup>80</sup> Amen.

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<sup>78</sup> *Et totam noctem pernoctavit in oration.* Lk 6:12.

<sup>79</sup> 1 Cor 2:9.

<sup>80</sup> *Ad quam nos perducat.*