

confession. What sins was our Lord Jesus Christ confessing when he exclaimed, *I confess to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth* (Mt 11:25)? His confession was a paean of praise, not a self-accusation.

17. *Praise his name, for the Lord is sweet.* Never think that you will weary of praising him. Your songs of praise are like eating: the more you praise, the more strength you acquire, and the more delightful does he become whom you are praising. *Praise his name, for the Lord is sweet. His mercy endures for ever,* for he does not cease to be merciful when he has set you free. It is a mark of his mercy that he continues to protect you until you reach eternal life. *His mercy endures for ever, and his truth to generation after generation.* You can understand this last phrase either to mean every generation, or to indicate two generations, one earthly and the other heavenly. Here below there is a work of generation which gives birth to mortals; but there is another which gives birth to beings who are eternal. God's truth is found both here and there beyond. Do not be misled into thinking that his truth is not here. Were it not, we should not have been told in another psalm, *Truth has sprung up from the earth* (Ps 84:12(85:11)), nor would Truth himself have promised, *Lo, I am with you throughout all days, even to the end of the ages* (Mt 28:20).

Exposition of Psalm 100

A Sermon to the People

Verse 1. *The era of mercy will be succeeded by that of judgment*

1. This is the hundredth psalm.¹ The statement in its first verse is a key to what we must look for throughout the whole of it: *I will sing to you of your mercy and judgment, O Lord.* No one should make the assurance of God's mercy a ground for thinking he will escape punishment, for there is judgment to come as well; but neither should anyone who has reformed his life be in terror of God's judgment, for mercy is mentioned first. When human beings have to pass judgment they are sometimes overcome by merciful impulses and act contrary to what right judgment demands.² Thus it seems that although there is mercy in them, judgment is lacking. In other cases they try to maintain unswerving judgment but lose sight of mercy. Not so with God: the goodness that overflows in his mercy does not diminish the severity of his judgment, nor does he lose that merciful goodness in judging severely.

We may perhaps distinguish two different eras: that of mercy and that of judgment. If this is correct, it is no accident that they are mentioned in this order. The psalm does not say, "Judgment and mercy," but *mercy and judgment*. So then, if we take them to refer to two distinct periods of time, we may regard the present time as that of mercy and the future as the occasion for judgment. In what sense does the time of mercy come first? Think about it in God himself to begin with, so that in the measure he grants you, you may imitate the Father. It is no presumption on our part to say we have a duty to imitate our Father, for our Lord himself, the only Son of the Father, exhorted us to do so, saying, *You must be like your Father in heaven.* Having told us, *Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you,* he continued, *so that you may be like your Father in heaven, who causes his sun to rise over the good and the wicked, and sends rain upon just and unjust alike* (Mt 5:48.44-45). In this we acknowledge his mercy. When you notice that just and unjust without distinction see the same sunshine, enjoy the same light, drink from the same springs, are drenched with the same rain, are filled with the same fruits of the earth, breathe this same air, and have all the good things of this world in equal measure, do not conclude that God is acting

1. Augustine omits its title, which is supplied by one codex: "A psalm for David himself."
2. Variant: "...overcome, and exercise mercy contrary to..."

unjustly in giving them to just and unjust people indiscriminately. This is the time for mercy; the time for judgment has not come yet. If God did not first spare us in his mercy, he would not find anyone to reward at his judgment. Now is the time for mercy, during which God's patience leads sinners to repentance.³

2. Listen to the apostle drawing a distinction between the two periods, and then draw it yourself. *You, fellow, he demands, you who judge people who act so, yet do the same yourself, do you suppose that you will escape the judgment of God?* Pay careful attention to this. The person he was speaking to—though to whom was he really speaking? Not just a single individual, but everyone of this kind—the person spoken to was used to seeing that although he committed many evil deeds every day, he went on living, and nothing bad befell him. He therefore believed that God was either asleep, or unconcerned about human affairs, or even pleased with human wrongdoing. The apostle banished that idea from people's hearts, or at any rate from those of sound sense. What does he say? *You, fellow, you who judge people who act so, yet do the same yourself, do you suppose that you will escape the judgment of God?* Then it seems as though the sinner retorts, "But why does nothing bad happen to me when I go on doing such bad things every day?" So Paul goes on to point out to him that this is the time for mercy: *Do you despise his generous kindness and forbearance, and his long restraint?* And indeed the sinner did despise them, but Paul warns him to be careful: *Do you not realize that God is patient only to lead you to repentance?* (Rom 2:3-4). This is the time for mercy, but Paul would not allow the sinner to imagine it would last for ever. How does he continue, how does he terrify sinners? "Watch out," he implies. "You have heard about the time for mercy. Now learn about the time for judgment. Scripture says, *I will sing to you of your mercy and judgment, O Lord.*" Now comes the threat: *But you with your hard and impenitent heart are storing up against yourself anger that will be manifest on the day of God's just judgment, for he will render to each and all as their deeds deserve* (Rom 2:5-6). This is exactly what the psalm has told us: *I will sing to you of your mercy and judgment, O Lord.*

The judgment has been spoken of in menacing terms. Does this mean that God's judgment is only to be feared? Should we not also love the prospect of his judgment? It is a fearful prospect for bad people because it will bring punishment, but lovable for the good because they will receive their crowns. In the text I have just quoted the apostle struck fear into evildoers; but listen now to another passage where he offers hope to good people concerning the judgment. He points to himself as an example, and what he says demonstrates that even in his own life he has experienced the time of mercy. If he had not found an interval of mercy, in what state would the judgment have found him? As a blasphemer and

3. See Rom 2:4.

persecutor, one who injured others. This is what he testifies of himself, and in so doing he makes plain to us that we too are in the era of mercy. *I was originally a persecutor and a blasphemer, and harmed people, he says, but I received mercy.* But perhaps he alone received it? No; listen to him as he rallies our hope too: *I received mercy so that Christ Jesus might give proof in me of his long forbearance, to instruct those who will believe in him unto eternal life* (1 Tm 1:13,16). What does he imply by saying, *That Christ Jesus might give proof in me of his long forbearance?* He wants all sinners, all who are burdened by guilt, to see that since Paul obtained pardon, they need not despair for themselves. He reported on his own case and raised up others.

Where does this apply? In this present period of mercy. But you also need to listen to what he says about the prospects for good people at the time of judgment: and notice that here again his testimony is valid both for himself and for others. At the earlier stage he obtained mercy. What for? Because he was a blasphemer and a persecutor, and he wronged people. The Lord came and conferred on Paul not his just deserts but a free pardon. If he had come to give him what he deserved, what could he have given to such a sinner? Nothing but punishment and torment. The Lord did not want to mete out retribution; he chose to bestow free grace. But now listen further: this man who was freely pardoned holds the Lord to be his debtor. In the time of mercy he found the Lord to be a donor; in the time of judgment he holds him to be a debtor. Look how he makes his point: *Already I am being poured out like a sacrificial libation, and the time for my dissolution is upon me. I have fought the good fight, I have run the whole course, I have kept the faith.* These claims refer to the time of mercy, but now he looks to the time of judgment: *All that remains for me now is the crown of righteousness which the Lord, as a just judge, will award me on that day.* He does not say, "Will freely give me," but *will award me.* When he bestowed free grace on me, he was being merciful, but when he makes his award he will be acting as a judge, for *I will sing to you of your mercy and judgment, O Lord.* By freely forgiving my offenses, he put himself in debt to me; he owes me a crown. At the first stage *I received mercy*, for then the Lord was forbearing; but now the Lord will award me the crown of righteousness. Why is he bound to award it? Because he is a *just judge*. In what respect is he judging justly? In that *I have fought the good fight, I have run the whole course, I have kept the faith.* Being a just judge, he has no option but to crown these achievements. He has found deeds that he must crown. But what did he find at that earlier stage? That *I was originally a persecutor and a blasphemer.* He freely pardoned my former deeds and he will crown my later ones; he freely pardoned the first in the era of mercy and will crown the rest in the era of judgment. And so *I will sing to you of your mercy and judgment, O Lord.*

But is Paul the only one to deserve a reward? No. I have already pointed out that just as he terrified us by another statement, so does he raise our hopes by this

one, for now he says, *The Lord, as a just judge, will award me a crown of righteousness on that day, and not to me alone but to all those who love his coming* (2 Tm 4:6-8).

A warning against complacency, and hope for the members of Christ

3. Well then, brothers and sisters, we have a period of mercy; but we must not lull ourselves into complacency, we must not let ourselves down lightly, we must not say, "It's all right, God always forgives. I did that bad thing yesterday, and God forgave me; I'm doing it today, and he is forgiving me; and I will do it again tomorrow, because God forgives." You are focusing on his mercy and leaving no room for fear of his judgment. If you want to sing to him of his mercy and judgment, be clear about this: he forgives in order that you may amend, not that you may have license to continue in your villainy. Do not store up against yourself anger that will be manifest on the day of God's just judgment. Concerning this same period of mercy another psalm warns, *To the sinner the Lord says, What right have you to expound my just judgments, and take my covenant on your lips? You hate instruction, and have thrown my words behind you. Wherever you saw a thief, you would collude with him, and you threw in your lot with adulterers. You sat down to slander your brother, and put a stumbling-block in the way of your mother's son. All this you did, and I was silent.* It is speaking of the era of mercy, but what can it mean when God says, *I was silent*? It obviously cannot mean, "I did not rebuke you"; it means, "I did not judge." How could he be said to remain silent, when he cries out every day in the scriptures, in the gospel, in his preachers? "I have been silent with regard to punishment," he says, "but not from warnings." But what did the sinner say to himself in his heart when he met this silence of God, God's withholding of punishment? The same psalm tells us: *You were wrong to think that I will be like you.* It is bad enough that you were like that yourself; you went further and thought I was too. And then, after describing the time of mercy, the psalm strikes terror by signaling the time of judgment: *I will rebuke you, and bring you face to face with yourself* (Ps 49(50):16-21). You put yourself out of sight behind your back, but I will bring you round to confront yourself. Anyone who is unwilling to see his sins puts himself behind his back, and closely observes the sins of other people, though out of malice, not because he loves or cares for them. He has no desire to heal others but only to accuse them, and he forgets about himself. This is why the Lord says to people of this kind, *You see the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, but fail to see the timber in your own* (Mt 7:3).

Since the psalm sings to us of mercy and judgment, let us too deal mercifully as in peace we await the judgment. Within Christ's body, let us sing of these things. Christ is singing about them to us. If the head were singing alone, the song would be about the Lord but would not belong to us; but if Christ is a whole,

head and body, you must be among his members and cleave to him by faith and hope and charity. Then you are singing in him, and rejoicing in him, just as he labors in you, and thirsts in you, and hungers in you, and endures tribulations in you. He is still dying in you, as you have already risen in him. If it were not true that he is dying in you, he would not have pleaded in you for a respite from the persecutor: when he cried, *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* (Acts 9:4). This being so, brothers and sisters, we can say also that Christ is singing; and how we can say it, you know. We have spoken to you assiduously about Christ, and I know that these truths are familiar to you. Christ the Lord is the Word of God, through whom all things were made. In order to redeem us this Word was made flesh and dwelt among us;⁴ he who is God above all things, the Son of God who is equal to the Father, became man, so that as God-man he might be the mediator between humankind and God.⁵ He became man to reconcile to God those who were far off, to unite those who were divided, to recall the estranged and to bring back those sojourning away from home. He became the head of the Church; and so he has a body and limbs. Look for his limbs. At present they are groaning throughout the whole world, but at the end they will be full of joy over that crown of righteousness of which Paul says, *The Lord, as a just judge, will award it to me on that day.* Let us then sing in hope, all of us, gathered into one. Having put on Christ we, with our head, are Christ, for we are Abraham's posterity. The apostle tells us so. I have just said, "We are Christ." Let me explain that. The apostle teaches, *You are the seed of Abraham, his heirs according to the promise* (Gal 3:29). So we are Abraham's posterity. Let us go further and see whether Abraham's posterity is Christ. Paul recalls the promise, *In your seed will all nations be blessed* (Gn 12:3; Gal 3:8), and he argues, *Scripture does not say, "To his descendants," as though indicating many, but as to one only, "And to your seed," which is Christ* (Gal 3:10). And to us he says, *You are the seed of Abraham.* It is quite clear from this that we are part of Christ; and since we are his limbs and his members, we form one single person with our head. Let us make this our song, then, *I will sing to you of your mercy and judgment, O Lord.*

Verse 2. Walking in spacious innocence

4. *I will play a psalm, and I shall find understanding in a stainless path when you come to me.* Unless you walk a stainless path, you cannot either play psalms or find understanding. If you hope to understand, play psalms along a stainless way: that means working cheerfully for your God. What is a stainless path? The next line answers your question. *I was wont to walk about in the innocence of my*

4. See Jn 1:3, 14.

5. See 1 Tm 2:5.

heart in the middle of my house.⁶ So this stainless path began from innocence and will reach its goal in innocence. Why seek lengthy explanations? Be innocent, and you have implemented all the demands of righteousness. But what does being innocent mean? We have it in our power to do harm in two ways: either by making someone miserable or by deserting someone who is miserable.⁸ You know this from your own experience, for you do not want either to be made miserable by someone else or to be abandoned by someone when you are in distress. Who makes others wretched? Anyone who inflicts violence or entraps others, seizes other people's property, oppresses the poor, steals, seeks adulterous relationships, is a slanderer, or tries to inflict pain on other people out of deliberate malevolence. Who abandons wretched persons? Anyone who sees a destitute person in need of some help and, even though he has the means to help him, spurns the poor person, despises him, and hardens his own heart. It would be an act of pride to neglect a person in misery even if one were so secure oneself as to have no need whatever of any compassionate aid. But when we are all beset by the frailties of the flesh, and ignorant of what may befall us tomorrow, and yet we scorn the tears of the wretched, we are by no means innocent.

Who then is innocent? One who harms neither anyone else nor himself; for one is not innocent even if the harm is done to no one but oneself. An objector may say, "But look, I have not taken anyone's goods or oppressed anyone. I will make myself comfortable with my own money, for after all I earned it by honest work. I want a well-stocked table, I want to spend as much as I please, I want to drink as much as I feel like with companions of my own choice. How have I defrauded anyone? Whom have I ill-treated? Who has made any complaint about me?" The speaker seems innocent. But if he is corrupting himself, if he is wrecking God's temple within him, can you expect him to be kind to others, or compassionate toward the wretched? If he is cruel to himself, will he be kind to others? So you see, the whole of righteousness comes down to one word: innocence,⁹ for *whoever loves iniquity hates his own soul* (Ps 10:6(11:5)). When he loved iniquity, the sinner thought he was harming other people. But ask that other psalm whether it really was others that he was harming. *Whoever loves iniquity hates his own soul*. Anyone who tries to hurt others hurts himself or herself first; and such a person cannot walk about in the house, because there is

6. The Hebrew imperfect expresses any action that is not complete and "perfect," and it is therefore used for future action. The verbs in verses 2-8 of the psalm should be understood as a declaration of intent with regard to the future: "I will walk . . . I will not set before my eyes. . . ." But the LXX, and Augustine's Latin version which derived from it, translated them into Greek and Latin imperfects, thus referring the actions to the past.

7. *Innocentia*, literally "non-harming" or "harmlessness," which Augustine contrasts in the rest of this section with tendencies that harm others or oneself.

8. Sins of commission and omission, as later writers might say.

9. Non-harming; see note above.

no room. Every kind of wrongdoing hems itself in; only innocence is broad and spacious, and leaves us room to walk about.

I was wont to walk about in the innocence of my heart in the middle of my house. By his house the psalmist may mean either the Church, in which Christ walks about, or his own heart, for our heart is like our interior house. In the latter case he would be explaining the preceding words, *in the innocence of my heart*. What is the innocence of his heart? The middle part of his house. If the center of someone's heart is bad, that person is cast out from it. It is like the situation of one who has a leaking roof in his house, or a smoky atmosphere: he leaves the house because he cannot bear to stay indoors. Similarly a person whose heart is oppressed by a bad conscience suffers from that unquiet heart and cannot easily live within it. Such persons move out from themselves by redirecting their minds and find pleasure in outward circumstances and bodily ease; they seek relief in frivolities, shows, soft living and all kinds of immorality. Why do they hope to find satisfaction outside themselves? Because conditions inside are unfavorable, and they can find no joy in their consciences.¹⁰ This is why, after healing the paralytic, the Lord said to him, *Get up, I tell you, pick up your sleeping mat and go into your house* (Mk 2:11). A soul whose strength is dissipated as though by paralysis must do likewise: it must pull itself together by exercising its limbs in good works and pick up its sleeping mat by taking authority over its body. Then let it enter the house of its conscience, and there it will find plenty of space where it can freely walk about, and play psalms, and understand.

Verses 3-4. On treacherous associates, and on rightness of heart

5. *I did not set before my eyes anything dishonorable.* What does that mean—I did not set before my eyes anything dishonorable? It means, I did not set my heart on it, to love it. As you know, it is commonly said of someone who is loved by another person, "He can't take his eyes off her." Or again, someone who is being scorned complains, "He can't even spare me a glance." So what is it, to keep someone or something before one's eyes? To love. And what is it to withhold love? Not to let one's heart dwell on whatever it is. Thus the psalm declares, *I did not set before my eyes anything dishonorable*, meaning, "I did not love anything base, or set my heart on it."

Then he becomes more explicit about the dishonorable object. *I hate disloyal persons.*¹¹ Pay attention to this point, my brothers and sisters. If you are walking

10. Augustine speaks from experience: compare *Confessions* 10,27,38: "Lo, you were within, but I outside, seeking there for you, and upon the shapely things you have made I rushed headlong, I, misshapen."

11. *Facientes praevaricationem*. In classical Latin *praevaricatio* meant collusion between prosecution and defense to predetermine the outcome of a case, thus perverting the course of justice. It later came to carry the more general meaning of deviation from duty, or transgression.

about with Christ in the middle of his house—resting with a good conscience in your heart, I mean, or enjoying a good journey in the Church by walking a stainless path—your duty is to hate not only the disloyal outside the Church, but also any whom you find inside. Who are these disloyal transgressors? People who hate the law of God, people who hear it but do not put it into practice, are called disloyal. Hate such disloyal persons, and push them away. But it is as disloyal that you must hate them; do not hate the persons themselves. Think of a disloyal man or woman: he or she has two identities: as a human being and as a disloyal one. God made the human being; the transgressor made himself or herself disloyal. Love what God made, and zealously oppose what the transgressor made. When you hunt down the disloyalty, you put to death the human handiwork, and then God's handiwork is set free. *I hate disloyal persons.*

6. *No one of depraved heart was my companion.* What is a depraved heart? A heart that is twisted. And what is a twisted heart? One that is not straightforward, a crooked heart. But what is a heart that is not straight? First understand rectitude of heart and then you will grasp what a crooked heart is. A human heart is said to be straight if it does not refuse to accept anything that God wills.¹² Concentrate on this point. Suppose a person prays that something or other may not happen. He prays, but the calamity is not averted. Let him pray¹³ with all his might, but the thing happens all the same against his will. He must then subordinate himself to the will of God, not resist that omnipotent will.

The Lord himself taught us this lesson, manifesting our weakness in his own prayer before his passion. *My soul is sorrowful to the point of death*, he said (Mt 26:38; Mk 14:34). He who had power to lay down his life, and power to take it up anew,¹⁴ could not truly fear death. Even Paul, Christ's servant, cried out, *I have fought the good fight, I have run the whole course, I have kept the faith. All that remains for me now is the crown of righteousness which the Lord, as a just judge, will award me on that day.* (2 Tm 4:7-8) He leaps with joy because he is going to die, yet his Lord, his Commander-in-Chief, is dismayed as he faces death. Does that suggest that the servant is braver than his Master? If that were true, what would become of the Lord's teaching, *It is enough for a servant to be like his master, and a disciple like his teacher* (Mt 10:25)? Is it possible that Paul is brave when death draws near, and the Lord aghast? *I long to die and to be with Christ* (Phil 1:23), says Paul; he rejoices because his dissolution is upon him, and will bring him into Christ's company; yet is Christ himself dismayed—Christ, with whom Paul is so gladly hoping to be united? No. What was that cry uttered by Christ? It was the lament of our weakness. Many people are very daunted by

12. *Qui omnia quae vult Deus, non ipse non vult.* Some manuscripts amend this to the positive statement, "if it wills all that God wills."

13. Variant: "he prays."

14. See Jn 10:18.

the prospect of death, because they are still weak, but let them keep their hearts straight. Let them avoid death as long as they can, but when they cannot, let them pray the same prayer that the Lord offered on our behalf rather than on his own. What did he say? *Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.* There you have the expression of his human will; now look at the rectitude of his heart: *Yet not what I will, but what you will be done, Father* (Mt 26:39).

If a straight heart follows God, a bent heart resists God. When some kind of misfortune comes the way of a person whose heart is crooked, he protests, "God, what have I done to you? What offense have I committed? How have I sinned?" He tries to make out that he is just, and God unjust. What could be more depraved? It is bad enough to be crooked oneself, but he is trying to prove that the ruler is crooked. Correct yourself and you will find that God is straight, but you have been bent out of shape by departing from him. He has acted justly, you unjustly, and therefore you are perverted in saying that a human being is just, and God unjust. And who is this human being whom you declare just? Yourself; because when you demand, "What have I done to you?" you are reckoning yourself just. But perhaps God may answer you, "You speak the truth there. You have done nothing to me; for all you did, you did to yourself. If you had done anything for me, you would have done something good. Whatever is done well is done for me, because it is done in accordance with my commandment. But whatever evil is committed strikes at you, not at me. A bad person harms himself only, because he acts as I have not ordered."¹⁵

When you see people like this, brothers and sisters, rebuke them, take them to task, correct them. If you cannot reprove or correct them, at least do not collude with them. Then you will be in a position to say, *No one of depraved heart was my companion.*

7. *When someone of ill-will deviated from me, I would refuse to know him.* What does *refuse to know him* imply? I would not approve or praise him, I refused to agree with him. In various texts of the scriptures we find the verb "to know" used where we would say, "find pleasing." Here is an example. Is anything concealed from God, brothers and sisters? Does he know the just only, not the unjust? Surely not. Can you entertain any thought of which he is ignorant? I am not saying, "Can you do anything?" No; can you even think anything without his knowing it? Or I should go further, and say not merely, "Can you even think it?" but, "Is there anything which you are going to think, which he has not already foreseen?" Clearly, then, God knows everything, yet at the end, at the time of judgment which will succeed the age of mercy, it will be said of certain people, *On that day many will come and say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not cast out demons in your name, and in your name work many prodigies? In your*

15. Or: "A bad person acts for his own sake alone, since he acts as I have not ordered."

name we have eaten and drunk. But I will say to them, I never knew you. (Mt 7:22-23; Lk 13:26-27) Is there anyone whom he does not know? How then can he say, *I never knew you*? He means, I do not recognize you in relation to my rule. I know my righteous rule, but you do not conform to it. You have deviated from it, so you are distorted.

In this same sense the psalm here declares, *I would refuse to know* an unrighteous person. *When someone of ill-will deviated from me, I would refuse to know him.* But how can it say, *I would refuse to know him*? It surely cannot mean this in the same way as an ill-disposed person would, who on meeting a just man in a narrow street says to himself in the words of the Wisdom of Solomon, *The very sight of him vexes us* (Wis 2:15), and takes another road to avoid the person he does not wish to see? On the contrary, there are very many ill-disposed persons whom we see, and who see us, who not only do not turn aside from us but run toward us and even sometimes want to make us accomplices in their sins. This is our common experience.¹⁶ How, then, can they be said to deviate from us?

To deviate from you is to be unlike you. What is "deviating" from you? Not following you. And what is "not following you"? Not imitating you. So the psalm declares, *When someone of ill-will deviated from me*—that is to say, when such an ill-disposed person was unlike me, refusing to imitate my way of life, when he or she was too ill-natured to live according to my example, as I set it forth—then *I would refuse to know* him or her. What does *refuse to know* mean? Not that I was simply ignorant but that I did not approve.

Verse 5. How are we to interpret the warning against sharing meals with the proud?

8. *Anyone who was secretly disparaging his neighbor, I would always pursue.* This is a good style of persecution, not of the sinner but of the sin. *With no one of proud eye or insatiable heart would I share meals.* What is meant by saying, "I would not share meals" with such a one? It means, "I never ate with him." But this demands your close concentration, beloved, because you are about to hear something remarkable. If the speaker refused to share meals with the person in question, he obviously did not eat with him; sharing meals with others implies that you eat with them. But then how is it that we find that the Lord himself set the example of eating with the proud? He did not eat with publicans and sinners,¹⁷ because they were humble; they knew their sickness and sought

16. Variants: "Frequently they join us"; "Do they not join us? This frequently happens."

17. This is the literal meaning, and the slight manuscript variants do not soften it: *Cum ergo ipsum primo Dominum invenimus manducasse cum superbis? Non cum publicanis illis et peccatoribus, nam ipsi humiles.* . . . Perhaps we should expand the sentence slightly: "He did not eat only with publicans and sinners," or, "I am not referring to his meals with publicans and sinners, who. . ."

their physician. No, it is with the proud Pharisees that we find him eating. A proud man invired him, that proud man who was displeased because a sinful woman, notorious in the city, approached the Lord's feet. Remember that the Pharisees were so fastidious that no sinner was allowed to touch them. If any unclean person so much as brushed against them, they would shudder, thinking that the unclean contact made them unclean too. Accordingly when the sinful woman, the one with a bad reputation in the city, approached the Lord's feet to weep there, the Pharisee observed her and said in his heart, *If this man were a prophet, he would know who this woman is, who has approached his feet.* How did he know that Christ did not know? He only suspected it from the fact that Christ did not thrust her away, for he would have done so if he had been a prophet, or so the Pharisee thought. But the Lord did know. Not only did he know this sinful woman; as a physician he also saw the incurable wounds of his proud host. Christ heard the man's thoughts, and exposed his pride. *Simon, I have something to say to you, he began. There was a certain creditor to whom two people were in debt. One owed him five hundred denarii, the other fifty. Since neither had the means to pay, he let them both off. Which of them will love him more?* The Pharisee gave the verdict against himself, for Truth elicited the confession from him: *I suppose, sir, the one to whom he remitted the larger debt.* Then, turning to the woman, Jesus said to Simon, *You see this woman? I entered your house, and you offered me no water for my feet; but she has washed my feet with her tears* (Lk 7:39-44), and so on; you know the rest. There is no need to dwell at length on the other elements in the story; we have cited it only to make the point that although the Pharisee was a proud man, the Lord was sharing a meal with him. What then are we to make of the psalm's testimony, *With no one of proud eye or insatiable heart would I share meals*? What does sharing meals with him imply? Eating with him, obviously. How then can the Lord recommend to us a line of conduct which he did not follow himself? He exhorts us to imitate him, and we see him accepting table fellowship with the proud; so how can he forbid us to have the same fellowship with them?

In our own case, brothers and sisters, we hold back even from our own brethren as a kind of reproof; we refuse to accept their hospitality for the sake of their correction. It is better for us to engage socially with outsiders, with pagans, than with those who belong to our number¹⁸ if we see that they are living bad lives. In this way they may be embarrassed and correct themselves; as the apostle says, *If anyone disobeys our command conveyed in this letter, take note of such a one, and avoid his company. But do not regard him as an enemy. Correct him as a brother.* (2 Th 3:14.15) We customarily pursue this policy to

18. Variant: "than with those who used to be with us and still retain their connection with us."

promote their healing, although we often share meals with various outsiders and unbelievers.

9. We must examine further the meaning of the declaration, *With no one of proud eye or insatiable heart would I share meals*. A God-fearing heart has its banquets, certainly; but a proud heart has its banquets too, for it was with reference to the food of the proud that the psalm spoke of an *insatiable heart*. On what does a proud heart feed? A person who is proud is also envious and cannot be otherwise. Pride is the mother of envy; it can bear no other offspring and must always be accompanied by envy. Every proud person is therefore full of spiritual envy, and if he is envious he feeds on the woes of others. This is why the apostle warns, *If you bite and try to eat each other, take care that you are not gobbled up by one another* (Gal 5:15). You are aware of such eaters, but do not share their meals, flee from that kind of feast, for they are never satisfied in their enjoyment of other people's misfortunes, having insatiable hearts. Be careful not to be caught in the devil's snare at their banquets. The Jews were eating that sort of food when they crucified the Lord. (I mean, of course, that they were feeding on the Lord's pain. We too are fed from the Lord's cross, but in a different way, when we eat his body.) When the Jews saw him hanging on the cross they mocked him, because their hearts were insatiable. *If he is the Son of God, let him come down from the cross*, they said. *He saved others, but he cannot save himself*. (Mt 27:40,42) They were feeding on the food of their cruelty, he on the food of his mercy. *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing* (Lk 23:34), he prayed. They had one kind of feast, he another. Consider also what is said elsewhere about the table of the proud: *May their table become a trap for them, let it be for them retribution and a stumbling-block* (Ps 68:23(69:22)). They were fed and captured. Just as birds go to feed at a trap, and fishes at a hook, and are snared, so too are the proud.

The impious have their feasts, then, but the God-fearing have theirs. Listen to what the devout feast on. *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied* (Mt 5:6). If the faithful person is nourished on the food of righteousness, and the godless on the food of pride, it is no wonder that the proud person has an insatiable heart. Iniquity is his food. Do not nourish yourself on the food of iniquity and then no person of proud eye or insatiable heart will be your table companion.

Verses 6-7. The choice of good companions

10. On what were you feeding? What delicious food were you enjoying at the table where the proud did not join you? *My eyes were on the faithful in the land, that they might sit down with me*. This is the Lord speaking. He tells us, *My eyes were on the faithful in the land, that they might sit down with me*. How were they to sit down? *You will sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*

(Mt 19:28). They judge the faithful of the earth,¹⁹ those to whom it is said, *Do you not realize that we shall judge angels?* (1 Cor 6:3) *My eyes were on the faithful in the land, that they might sit down with me*.

It continues, *One who walked a stainless path served me*. Served me, it says, not "served himself." Many who work in the service of the gospel are serving themselves, because they are furthering their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.²⁰ What does it mean, to serve Christ? To pursue Christ's interests. When bad people proclaim the gospel, others are saved, but the preachers are punished, for of them it was said, *Do what they tell you, but do not imitate what they do* (Mt 23:3). Do not worry, then, if you hear the good news from a bad person. Woe betide him who serves himself by seeking his own advancement; but you, for your part, receive what is Christ's. *One who walked a stainless path served me*.

11. *No one who behaved arrogantly lived in my house*.²¹ Refer this statement to the house we mentioned earlier, that is, the heart. No one who behaves arrogantly ever dwelt in my heart. Anyone of that kind would not live there but always leapt away again. No one was accustomed to live in my heart except a gentle, quiet guest; no proud person dwelt there, for the unjust do not live in the hearts of the just. However, a righteous person may be countless miles and many days' journey away from you, but if you are one in heart you are living together. *No one who behaved arrogantly lived in my house; no one who spoke wickedly continued in my presence*. This is a description of the stainless path, in which we shall find understanding when the Lord comes to us.

Verse 8: We are still in the night of temptations, but day will dawn

12. *In the morning I put to death all sinners on earth*. This is an obscure verse. Please concentrate; we are getting near the end of the psalm. *In the morning I put to death all sinners on earth*. Why? *To rid the Lord's city of all who commit iniquity*. There are people who commit iniquity in the Lord's city, then, and it seems that for the present they are spared. Why is that? Because this is the era of mercy; but the time of judgment will come, as the psalm indicated in its opening verse: *I will sing to you of your mercy and judgment, O Lord*. The psalmist has spelled out in the preceding lines the ways in which he made sure only good people would be close to him. He did not keep company with bad ones or enjoy the sinful feasts of people who ministered to themselves instead of to the Lord, by furthering their own interests. But now someone might ask him, "Why then did you put up with people like that in your city for so long?" He replies, "Because this is the time for mercy." Time for mercy? What is that? Judgment has not yet

¹⁹ Or "the land," as in the quoted psalm verse.

²⁰ See Psa 2:21.

²¹ So the best codices. Some read "shall live."

been revealed. It is still night-time; day will dawn later, and with it, judgment. Listen to the words of the apostle: *Pass no judgment prematurely*. What does he mean by *prematurely*? Before daybreak. He was speaking of the hours before dawn; listen: *Pass no judgment prematurely, before the coming of the Lord, for he will light up the dark, hidden places, and reveal the purposes of our hearts, and then there will be commendation from God for each one* (1 Cor 4:5). As things are now, as long as you do not see my heart, nor I yours, it is still night. Suppose you make a request of some fellow-human and you do not get what you want. You think you are scorned. But perhaps you are not scorned at all. You do not see the other's heart, so you are quick with your curses. You are wrong, but pardon is granted to you as to one who has gone astray in the night. Or perhaps someone loves you, and you think he hates you; or again, he hates you, but you imagine he loves you: whichever way round it is, it is night still. Do not be afraid. Trust in Christ before the time, and be certain that you will see daylight in him. You can have no misgivings in his regard, because we are completely safe and certain that he cannot be deceived; and he loves us. We cannot yet have the same certainty with regard to one another. God knows what love we have for each other; but for our part, even though we do cherish mutual love, who knows what our motives are in doing so? Why does no one see our hearts? Because it is still night.

In the night temptations abound. Another psalm might almost have been speaking of this night when it said, *You spread the darkness and night fell. All the beasts of the forest will take advantage of it and come forth: lion cubs roaring and ready to seize their prey, seeking their food from God*. (Ps 103(104):20-21) Lion cubs hunt for food at night. Who are these lion cubs? The lackeys of the rulers and powers of the air,²² the demons and angels who serve the devil. But how do they hunt their food? By tempting us. But they cannot approach unless God has given them the power, which is why scripture spoke of them as *seeking their food from God*. The devil asked for Job in order to tempt him. What sort of food was he begging for? Rich, succulent fare, a righteous man of God, one to whom God himself bore witness, calling him *a blameless man, honest, and a worshipper of God* (Jb 1:8, LXX). So the devil, hunting for food from God, begged for Job in order to tempt him. Job was handed over to be tempted but not crushed, to be purified but not ruined; or perhaps not even to be purified but simply to be proved. Others who are tempted are sometimes delivered into the tempter's hands through their own concealed fault, because, perhaps, they had already yielded to their own lusts. Certainly the devil harms no one, unless he has been authorized by God. But when does it happen? In the night. What does that mean—what night? In this present age. Once the night has

22. See Eph 2:2.

passed and day has dawned, the wicked will be cast into eternal fire along with the devil, but the just will be ushered into eternal life. There no tempter will be at work, because no lion cubs will be prowling, for the night will be over and done with. The Lord indicated all this when he said to his disciples, *This very night Satan has asked to sift all of you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith may not fail* (Lk 22:31-32). What do those words evoke—*sift you like wheat*? Just as we do not eat the wheat unless it has first been threshed to make bread, so the devil cannot eat anyone unless he has first pounded his victim with tribulation. He grinds the person down to prepare his food. But when you suffer tribulation do not be anxious; as long as you are still grain, nothing bad will happen to you. How are oxen used for threshing? Are they led into a place containing nothing but grain? No; they are taken with their sharp-studded sledge into the threshing-floor. But has the grain cause to be frightened? Not at all. Nothing is chopped up except the straw. The grain is divested of superfluous material;²³ then comes the winnowing, which will isolate a pure hoard. What the winnower finds as grain he will put into his barn, and the pile of straw he will burn with unquenchable fire.

13. Why did I say that? Because the day is ours already, in hope. In Christ it must be day for us. As long as we are beset by temptations, it is still night. God spares sinners during this night, not doing away with them but whipping them with temptations that they may be corrected; he tolerates their presence in his city. Can we think he will tolerate them for ever? If mercy is to last indefinitely there is no place for judgment; but if we are right to declare that *I will sing to you of your mercy and judgment, O Lord*, we must conclude that he spares us now but will judge us later. When will he judge? When night has passed.

This is the reason for the statement in our psalm, *In the morning I put to death all sinners on earth*. What can *in the morning* mean? When day has dawned and night is over. *In the morning I put to death all sinners on earth*. Why does he spare them until morning? Because until then it was night. What does that imply—it was night? Forbearance was appropriate then, because people's hearts were hidden. Even you tolerate someone who lives a bad life, because you do not know how he will turn out, for it is night. You cannot tell whether someone whose life is wicked today may improve tomorrow, any more than you can tell whether a person whose life is commendable today may tomorrow be wicked. It is night still, and God tolerates all of us, because he is very forbearing. He puts up with sinners so that they may be converted to him. If, however, they do not correct themselves during this interlude of mercy, they will be put to death. Why? That they may be cleared out from the Lord's city, from the

23. Variants: "It is not chopped up. Unless the straw is stripped away from the grain, it will be useless, and the winnowing will come. . . ."; "...except the straw. This is stripped from the grain, and is superfluous. Then the winnowing will come. . . ."

community of Jerusalem, from the society of the saints, from the fellowship of the Church. When will they be put to death? *In the morning*. What does that signify? When night has finally passed. And why does God spare them now? Because this is still the time for mercy. Why will he not spare them always? Because *I will sing to you of your mercy and judgment, O Lord*.

We must not deceive ourselves about this, brothers and sisters. All who commit iniquity will be slain. Christ will put them to death in the morning and exclude them from his city. But now, while the time for mercy is still with us, let them hearken to him. He shouts to them in every place, through the law, through the prophets, through the psalms, through the apostolic letters, through the gospels. Observe for yourselves that he is not silent, and that he is sparing us because he is dispensing mercy. But beware: judgment is coming.

Exposition 1 of Psalm 101

First Sermon¹

Verse 1. *Can the poor man who is praying here be the Word?*

1. A poor man, one single poor man, is praying in this psalm, and he does not pray silently. We have the opportunity to listen to him and find out who he is; and perhaps we shall find that he is none other than the one of whom the apostle wrote: *Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might be enriched* (2 Cor 8:9). But if Christ is praying here, how can he be called poor? Surely everyone knows how rich he is. After all, what counts as wealth among us humans? Gold, I would say, and silver, and well-staffed households and land; yet *everything was made through him* (Jn 1:3). How then could there be any riches greater than his, since he made all that is reckoned as wealth, even those things which are not true riches? Furthermore, through him riches of a different order were made too: intelligence, the powers of the mind,² our ideas of right and wrong, our bodily life and health, our senses and the coordination of our limbs. As long as these are in sound condition, even the poor are rich. Through the Word were made also greater riches still: faith and loyal fidelity,³ justice, charity, chastity, and good character, for no one enjoys these either, except through him who justifies the ungodly.⁴ Look how rich he is; for which of these two is richer: the one who has what he wants, though it is made by another, or the one who makes whatever he wants, for another to possess? In my opinion he who made what you have is the richer, for you do not have at your command the power he has. Clearly he is wealthy. How then are we to attribute to someone so rich these words: *The bread I ate was ashes, and my drink I would dilute with weeping*?⁵ Has his vast wealth been reduced to this? So high was his fortune, so low his abasement. What are we to make of it? The two states are far apart.

1. Preached at Hippo, possibly in paschal time 395; others prefer a date between 403 and 408.
2. *Memoria*, but for Augustine this means something vaster than the faculty we call "memory," though it includes this. *Memoria* is the mind engaged in particular activities, the focus of personal identity, our link with past, present, and future. It is the storehouse of images that can be creatively combined in new ways, and the place of self-awareness. Book 10 of his *Confessions* deals at length with "the fields of *memoria*."

3. *Pietas*.

4. See Rom 4:5.

5. Verse 10 below.