

PSEUDO-MACARIUS

The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and The Great Letter translated, edited and with an Introduction by George A. Maloney, S.J.

HOMILY 11

The power of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man is like fire. And things we need in order to discern the thoughts that flow out of the heart. And concerning the dead serpent that was fixed by Moses on top of the pole which was a type of Christ. The homily also contains two dialogues, one between Christ and the evil Satan; the other between sinners and Christ.

1. That heavenly fire of the Godhead which Christians receive interiorly in their hearts now in this life, that same fire which now interiorly directs their hearts, bursts forth upon the dissolution of the body. It again pulls together the members of the body and brings about a resurrection of the dismembered body. For just as the fire which ministered on the altar of Jerusalem in the time of the captivity was buried in a hole, and that same fire, when peace came and the captives returned to their homeland, was, as it were, renewed and again functioned as it did before, so too the heavenly fire refashions and renews this familiar body, which after its dissolution turns to dust and raises up the decayed bodies. For that interior fire, inhabiting our hearts, emerges then and brings about the resurrection of the bodies.

2. In the time of Nabuchodonosor the fire that powerfully burned in the furnace was not divine but was a creature. But those three youths, because of their righteousness, while they were in the visible fire, had in their hearts the divine and heavenly fire which ministered within their thoughts and worked powerfully in the youths. That same fire appeared outside them. For it stood in their midst and prevented the visible fire from burning or injuring any part of the three just ones. Similarly also in the times of the Israelites when their minds and thoughts were bent on turning away from the living God and were turned toward idolatry, Aaron was forced to tell them to bring together their golden and ornamented vessels. After a while the gold and the vessels which they cast into the fire were transformed into an idol. The fire, as it were, fashioned an image of their intention.

This is worthy of our serious attention. According to their secret intention and in their thoughts, they wanted to practice idolatry, so the fire in a similar way converted the vessels that had been cast upon it into an idol. And then they openly worshiped the idols. But just as the three young men, bent on doing righteous deeds, received within themselves the fire of God and adored the Lord in truth, so

also now faithful souls receive in an interior way that divine and heavenly fire in this present life, and that fire fashions a heavenly image upon their human nature.

3. As the fire fashioned the golden vessels and they were made into an idol, so too the Lord, who fashions the intentions of faithful and good persons and even now forms an image in the soul which will be manifested exteriorly in the resurrection, glorifies their bodies interiorly and exteriorly. Indeed, just as the bodies of certain persons at that time of death decay, so also their thoughts are corrupted by Satan and are dead to any life. They are buried in earthly mud. For their soul has perished. For just as the Israelites threw the golden vessels into the fire and they became an idol, so now such a person has surrendered his pure and good thoughts to evil and they have become buried in the mud of sin and have become an idol.

But how can anyone discover them, discern and lead them out of one's own fire? Here the soul has need of a divine lamp, namely, the Holy Spirit, who puts in order and beautifies the darkened house. The soul needs the shining Sun of justice which illumines and shines upon the heart. It also has need of weapons by which it can conquer in war.

4. For in that place where the widow had lost the drachma (Lk 15:8), she first lit a lamp, then swept the house. And thus, she found the drachma, once the house was swept and the lamp lit. It was found covered with dirt and impurity and earth. Truly the soul is incapable by itself of studying its own thoughts and discerning them. But with the divine lamp lit, the light dispels the darkness from the house. Then a person sees his own thoughts, how they have been covered by impurity and the mud of sin. The sun rises and then the soul sees its loss and begins to call out the thoughts that had been so mixed with dirt and squalor. For the soul had lost its image when it had transgressed the commandment.

5. Take the example of a king who has goods and servants under him ministering to him. However, it happens that he is taken captive by enemies. When he is captured and led out of his country, his servants and ministers must want to follow after him. So also Adam was created pure by God for his service. All these creatures were given to him to serve him. He was destined to be the lord and king of all creatures. But when the evil word came to him and conversed with him, he first received it through an external hearing. Then it penetrated into his heart and took charge of his whole being. When he was thus captured, creation, which ministered and served him, was captured with him. Through him death gained power over every soul and completely destroyed the image of Adam because of his disobedience so that as a result men were sidetracked and fell to worshiping demons. Yes, the fruits of the earth, created good by God, are now offered to the demons.

Bread, wine, and oil are offered on their altars along with animals. But not only these things, but they sacrifice even their sons and daughters to the demons (Ps 136–37).

6. Then, at this time, he who fashioned the body and soul comes and undoes all the cunning of the wicked devil and all that he has wrought in the thoughts of men. He renews and forms a heavenly image and recreates the soul anew so that Adam again may be king over death and lord over all creatures. In the shadow of the law Moses was called the savior of Israel, for he led the Israelites out of Egypt. So also now the true Redeemer, Christ, enters into the depths of the soul and leads it out of dark Egypt with its burdensome yoke and bitter slavery. He commands us to leave the world and take on poverty and to give up all tangible possessions. We are to have no earthly care, but night and day we are to stand at the door waiting for the time when the Lord will open the closed hearts and pour into us the gift of the Holy Spirit.

7. He commanded us, therefore, to give up gold, silver, and relatives. We are to sell all our goods and distribute them to the poor (Mt 19:20). Our treasure is to be sought in Heaven: “For where your treasure is, there also is your heart” (Mt 6:21). For the Lord knew that in this matter Satan gains the upper hand over thoughts in order to turn them toward anxieties about material, earthly concerns. For this reason God, in his concern for your soul, ordered you to renounce all things so that, even if you would be unwilling, you would still seek after heavenly riches and center your heart on God. For even if you should wish to go back to creatures, you would not find any tangible possessions around you. Whether you wish it or not, you are forced to raise your mind to Heaven where you have put your whole treasure: “For where your treasure is, there also is your heart.”

8. In the law God commanded Moses to fashion a bronze serpent and to lift it up high and place it on the top of a pole (Nm 21:8). Whoever would be bitten by serpents, they would be healed. This was done as a part of God’s salvific economy whereby all those who were bound to Satan by earthly cares and idolatry and passions and all sorts of ungodliness might in this way at least look up to some degree to the things above. They might breathe, freed from the things below, and attend to more transcendent things from above. They might pass from these things to what is the highest and so, advancing little by little to the more sublime and superior type, they might come to know that there is the One, Most High, supreme over all creatures.

So also God ordered you to become poor and to sell all to give to the poor so that thereafter, even if you would wish again to crawl on the earth, you could not.

Searching, therefore, in your heart, begin to dialogue with your thoughts: “Since we possess nothing on earth, let us pass over to Heaven where we have our treasure and where we do all our business.” Your mind begins to rise above to sublime things and to seek the higher things and in doing so you make progress.

9. But what is the meaning of that dead serpent that was fixed on top of the pole and healed those that had been bitten? The dead serpent conquered over the living serpents, as a type of the body of the Lord. The body which he took from Mary he raised it up on the cross. He hung it and fastened it to the tree. And so the dead body conquered and slew the serpent, living and creeping in the hearts of men. Here is an amazing miracle! How the dead serpent slew the living serpent! But just as Moses made a new thing when he fashioned a likeness of a living serpent, so also the Lord created a new thing from Mary and put this on. He did not, however, assume a body brought from Heaven. The heavenly Spirit touched humanity and brought it to divinity. He took up human flesh and fashioned it in the womb. As, therefore, there never was a bronze serpent commanded by God to be fashioned in the world until the time of Moses, so a new and sinless body never appeared in the world until the time of the Lord. For ever since the first Adam transgressed the commandment of God, death reigned over all of his children. Thus a dead body overcame the live serpent.

10. And this marvelous event is to the Jews, indeed, a stumbling block and to Greeks foolishness. For what does the Apostle say? “But we preach Jesus Christ crucified; to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but, to us who are saved, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24). In the dead body there is life. Here is redemption, here is light. Here the Lord comes to death and argues with death. He orders that death release, from hell and death, the souls and give them back to him.

Behold, death is shaken by these words and approaches his servants and gathers together into a group all his powers and princes of evil. And the prince of evil bears forth the signed documents of indentured slaves and declares: “Look, these people have obeyed my word! See how they, mortal men, have bowed down in adoration to us!” But God, who is a just judge, shows then his justice and says to him: “Adam obeyed you and you did then through him capture all hearts. Humanity obeyed you. But my body, what is it doing here? It is sinless. That body of the first Adam was in bondage to you and you legally held the writ of indenture. But all bear witness to me that I have not sinned. I owe you nothing. And that I am the Son of God all universally bear witness. “For from above out of the heavens there came upon earth a voice bearing testimony: 'This is my beloved Son; hear him' (Mt 3:17). John gives witness: 'Behold, the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the

world' (Jn 1:29). And again Scripture says: 'He who sinned not, nor was there any guile found in him' (1 Pt 2:22). And again: 'The prince of this world comes and in me finds nothing' (Jn 14:30). And, moreover, you yourself, Satan, witness to me in saying: 'I know you, that you are the Son of God' (Mk 1:24). And again: 'What do we have to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come here to torment us before the time?' (Mt 8:29). There are, therefore, three who bear witness to me: he that sends down from the heavens a voice; and those who are on earth; and you yourself. I, therefore, bought back the body that was sold to you by the first Adam. I tore up the contract that enslaved mankind to you. Indeed, I satisfied Adam's debts when I was crucified and I descended into hell. And I command you, O Hell, O Darkness, O Death, release the imprisoned souls of the children of Adam." And so, at last, the wicked powers, struck with fear, restore the imprisoned children of Adam.

11. Really, when you hear that at that time the Lord freed the souls from hell and the regions of darkness and that he descended into hell and did an amazing work, do not think that this does not have any personal meaning for you. Man, indeed, can readily accept the evil one. Death has its grip on the children of Adam and their thoughts are imprisoned in darkness. And when you hear mention made of tombs, do not at once think only of visible ones. For your heart is a tomb and a sepulcher. When the prince of evil and his angels have built their nest there and have built roads and highways on which the powers of Satan walk about inside your mind and in your thoughts, then, really, are you not a hell and a sepulcher and a tomb dead to God?

For there it was that Satan stamped out counterfeit coins of silver. In such a soul he sowed bitter seeds. He leavened it with old leaven. There is where a murky, muddy fountain flows. But the Lord descends into the souls of those who seek him. He goes into the depths of the hellish heart and there he commands death, saying: "Release those captive souls that seek after me, those that you hold by force in bondage." He breaks through the heavy stones that cover the soul. He opens the tombs. He truly raises to life the dead person and leads that captive soul forth out of the dark prison.

12. Take the example of a man bound with chains, hand and foot, and someone comes to remove his shackles and to set him free so he may walk unencumbered. In a similar way the Lord removes the chains of death strangling the soul and he releases it and sets the mind free so that it may amble without disturbance, but in tranquillity before God. It is similar to a man in the middle of a raging river, covered by water. He lies lifeless, drowning in the midst of horrible, dreadful monsters. If a man who does not know how to swim wishes to save the drowning per-

son, he likewise will perish and be drowned. Certainly, what is needed is an expert swimmer to dive into the deep water, swim out, and save him who was drowning with wild monsters all around him. The very water itself, in the case of an expert swimmer, aids such a one and holds him up on the surface of the water. In a similar way, man has been plunged into the abyss of darkness and the depths of death. He is suffocating and has lost God's life within himself, surrounded by ferocious beasts. Who is able to penetrate into those depths of hell and death except that very Workman himself, who fashioned the human body? He himself penetrates into two parts, namely, the depths of hell and the deepest region of the human heart where the soul with all its thoughts is held captive by death. And he leads out of the dark depths the dead Adam. Even death itself through training is a help to man, like water to the swimmer.

13. But what is so difficult for God to enter into death and into the depths of the human heart and there call the dead Adam forth to life? In our present world around us there are houses and mansions where human beings dwell. There are also places where wild animals, lions, dragons, and other poisonous beasts dwell. If, then, the sun, which is a mere creature, can equally enter through windows or doors into the dens of lions as well as the pits of reptiles and yet it comes out without being harmed, how much more God, the Lord of all, can enter into holes and dwelling-places where death is found and can enter also into human souls and there snatch Adam without receiving any injury. The rain also falls from the heavens and penetrates all the parts of the earth where it moistens and renews the dried roots and gives them new life.

14. A certain person may enter into conflict and war with Satan and endure affliction. He has a contrite heart. He holds himself in serious concern, sorrow, and tears. Such a person lives in a double tension. Thus he perseveres resolutely in such pursuits and the Lord is present to him in battle and keeps him steady, because he ardently seeks him and knocks at the door until he opens it for him. If you see him as a brother, strong in battle, it is because grace sustains him. But a person who lacks such a foundation has no great fear of God. He lacks a contrite heart, has no fear, and does not discipline himself and his members against any inordinate spirit. Such a one still possesses a worldly attitude. He has not yet entered into the battle. Therefore, the first one has really entered into a war and afflictions, while the second one is still quite ignorant of what it means to fight as a soldier. Even the seeds cast into the earth have to undergo afflictions from frost, winter, and cold temperature, but finally in due season new life springs forth.

15. It sometimes happens that Satan carries on a dialogue within your heart, such as: "See what great evils you have committed; see how your soul is full of so many

follies. See how you are weighed down by sins so that you can hardly expect to be saved.” These things he does to lead you to despair, thinking that your repentance has not been acceptable. For since evil through transgression entered into man’s heart, afterward evil argues day and night with the soul, as a man to a man. But you answer him in this way: “I have the Lord’s testimonies in Scripture: ‘I do not wish the death of sinners but their repentance so that the sinner himself may turn from his wicked way and live’ ” (Ez 33:11).

For this reason the Lord descended so that he might save sinners, raise up the dead, and bring new life to those wounded by death and to enlighten those who lay in darkness. The Lord truly came and called us to be God’s adopted sons, to enter into a holy city, ever at peace, to possess a life that will endure forever, to share an incorruptible glory. Let us singly strive to come to a good end after a good beginning. Let us persevere in poverty, in our pilgrimage, living in affliction and petitions to God without any shame as we continuously knock at the door.

As near as the body is to the soul in intimate interrelationship, so much nearer is God who is present to come and open the locked doors of our heart and to fill us with heavenly riches. He is, indeed, good and he loves mankind. His promises cannot deceive, provided we only persevere to the end, zealously seeking him. Glory be to the compassionate mercies of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit forever. Amen.

From Pseudo-Macarius, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and The Great Letter*, edited and translated with an introduction by George A. Maloney; preface by Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia. New York/Mahwah, [Paulist Press](#), 1992.

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