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# *On Fasting and Feasts*

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## Second Homily on Fasting

1 *Comfort the people, you priests! Speak to the ears of Jerusalem!*<sup>1</sup> Speech is of such a nature that it has the ability to increase the desires of the eager and to awaken the eagerness of the lazy and sluggish. Thus after generals have arranged their army into a battle line, they give an encouraging speech before the battle begins, and their exhortations have such power that quite often they produce contempt of even death in the majority. And as trainers and coaches escort their athletes to contests in stadiums, they exhort them vehemently about the necessity of toiling for the crowns, such that many of them are convinced to disclaim their bodies out of ambition for victory. And indeed, though it falls on me to array the soldiers of Christ for the war against invisible enemies and to prepare the athletes of piety for the crowns of righteousness through self-control, even I need a word of encouragement.

So then, brothers, what I am saying? That it is valid for those who practice on a regular basis and train hard in wrestling academies to fatten themselves with plenty of food, so that they can engage in their toils with greater vigor? Rather, I am saying that those to whom it is said: *the fight is not against blood and flesh, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness,*<sup>2</sup> need to be trained for the contest through self-control and fasting. While oil fattens the athlete, fasting strengthens the practitioner of piety.<sup>3</sup> Hence the more you deny the flesh, the

<sup>1</sup>Is. 40:1-2. Basil has altered the scriptural text considerably: *Comfort, comfort my people, says God. You priests, speak to the heart of Jerusalem.*

<sup>2</sup>1 Jn. 6:12.

<sup>3</sup>Ok. for geography: the ecclesiastical. This could also be translated "the ascetic of piety."

more you render the soul radiant with spiritual health. For it is not the body's tone but rather the soul's perseverance and steadfastness in affliction that results in strength against invisible enemies.

2 So then, fasting is beneficial at all times for those who undertake it. For the demons dare not hurl abuses at the one who fasts, and the angels who diligently guard our life stand beside those who purify their soul through fasting. And even more so now, when the summons to fast has been announced to the whole world. There is no island, no mainland, no city, no people, no remote place which does not hear the summons. Rather soldiers, and travelers, and sailors, and merchants all likewise hear the announcement and receive it with great joy. No one should remove himself from the register of those who fast, in which all peoples and all ages and all ranks of dignity are counted. It is angels who register them in each church. If you take a little pleasure in food, beware of losing your place in the angels' register and having the one who raises the army consider you liable to an indictment of desertion. It is less dangerous to be convicted of abandoning your weapons in battle than to be seen abandoning the great weapon of fasting.

Are you rich? Do not mock fasting, deeming it unworthy to welcome as your table companion. Do not expel it from your house as a dishonorable thing eclipsed by pleasure. Never denounce yourself to the one who has legislated fasting and thereby merit condemnation to bitter penury caused either by bodily sickness or by some other gloomy condition. Let not the pauper think of fasting as a joke, seeing that for a long time now he has had it as the companion of his home and table. But as for women, just as breathing is proper and natural for them, so too is fasting. And children, like flourishing plants, are irrigated with the water of fasting. As for seniors, their long familiarity with fasting makes a difficult task easy. For those in training know that difficult tasks done for a long time out of habit become quite painless. As for travelers, fasting is an expedient companion. For just as self-indulgence necessarily weighs them down

because they carry around what they have gorged themselves with, so too fasting renders them swift and unencumbered. Furthermore, when an army is summoned abroad, the provisions the soldiers take are for necessities, not for self-indulgence. Seeing that we are marching out for war against invisible enemies, pursuing victory over them so as to hasten to the homeland above, will it not be much more appropriate for us to be content with necessities as if we were among those living the regimented life of a military camp?

3 Endure suffering like a good soldier, and contend like a professional athlete, so that you may be crowned,<sup>4</sup> all the while knowing this, that everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things.

But just now as I was saying this, something occurred to me that does not deserve to go unmentioned. The provisions of worldly soldiers are increased in proportion to their exertions, whereas the spiritual warrior who has less provisions has more honor. And so, our *helmet*<sup>5</sup> differs in nature from their corruptible one: theirs is made of copper, whereas ours is made of *the hope of salvation*.<sup>6</sup> Their shield is made of wood and hide, but our defense is *the shield of faith*.<sup>7</sup> We are protected by a *breastplate of righteousness*,<sup>8</sup> but they wear chainmail. And we have the *sword of the Spirit*<sup>9</sup> for our defense, but they wield a sword of iron. Thus it is clear that we are not strengthened by the same provisions as they are: the doctrines of piety strengthen us, whereas they need their stomachs filled.

So then, since the temporal cycle has brought us to these days, which we miss as dearly as our nurses from long ago, let us all welcome them with gladness. The church uses these days to nurture us in piety. Therefore, you who are about to fast should not look gloomy like the Jews, but beautify yourself in accordance with the gospel, not

<sup>4</sup>Cl. 1 Cor 9:25.

<sup>5</sup>1 Thess 5:8.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Eph 6:16.

<sup>8</sup>Eph 6:14.

<sup>9</sup>Eph 6:17.

dependent over the emptiness of your stomach but rather delighting in your soul because of the spiritual joys.<sup>10</sup> For you know that *the desires of the flesh are against the spirit and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh.*<sup>11</sup> So then, since they are opposed to one another, let us diminish the comfort of our flesh and boost the strength of our souls, so that through fasting from the passions we may achieve victory and be rewarded with the crowns of self-control.

4 So then, right now you need to make yourself worthy of the seriousness of fasting, lest you ruin tomorrow's self-control by today's drunkenness. "Since it's been announced that five days of fasting are coming upon us, today let's drown ourselves in drink."<sup>12</sup> What an evil thought! What a wicked ideal! No one about to enter into a legitimate marriage with a woman first shacks up with concubines and whores. Nor does a legitimate wife tolerate shacking up with such degenerates. So likewise, when fasting is on the horizon, your first response should not be to get drunk. For drunkenness is the universal harlot, the mother of shamelessness, the lover of the absurd, the frenzied woman who is prone to every form of disgracefulness.

Indeed, fasting and prayer have no place in the soul defiled by drunkenness. The Lord welcomes inside the sacred precincts the one who fasts but refuses admission to someone nursing a hangover as impure and unclean. After all, if you were to arrive tomorrow reeking of wine and vomit, how could I consider your hangover as fasting? Don't offer the excuse: "I've not filled my cup with undiluted wine recently!" Realize that your system is still not cleansed of wine. Where should I put you? With the drunks? Or with those who fast? A past inebriation still holds one in its grip; a present hunger tests to fasting. Your drunkenness makes you the subject of dispute, like an enslaved prisoner of war. Providing clear evidence of disputation, enslavement, it will not keep you—and rightly so—from smelling like wine, as if it were still in its jug.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Mt 6:16–18.

<sup>11</sup> Gal 5:17.

<sup>12</sup> Here Basil refers to a five-day fast. See above, *First Homily on Fasting*, n. 52.

The first day of your fast will immediately meet with disapproval because of the lingering effects of your drunkenness. That the beginning of your fast meets with disapproval and the whole of it is rejected is clear: *Drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God.*<sup>13</sup> If you were to come to fasting drunk, what benefit is it for you? Indeed, if drunkenness excludes you from the kingdom, how can fasting still be useful for you? Don't you realize that experts in horse training, when the day of the race is near, use hunger to prime their racehorses? In contrast you intentionally stuff yourself through self-indulgence, to such an extent that in your gluttony you eclipse even irrational animals. A heavy stomach is uncondusive not only to running but also to sleeping. Oppressed by an abundance of food, it refuses to keep still and is obliged to toss and turn endlessly.

5 Fasting protects children, chastens the young, makes seniors venerable. For grey hair is more venerable when it is adorned with fasting. It is an adornment very well suited for women: it restrains those in their prime, guards the married, nourishes virgins. Such is how fasting is practiced privately in homes. But how it is practiced in our public life? It disposes every city as a whole and all its people to good order, quiets shouting, banishes fighting, silences abuse. What teacher's arrival settles down the uproar of boys as abruptly as the advent of fasting quells the tumult of the city? What reveler carries on when fasting? What band of lascivious dancers is formed by fasting? Silly giggling and obscene ditties and erotic dancing abruptly leave the city, banished by fasting as if by a stern judge.

Now if all were to take fasting as the counselor for their actions, nothing would prevent a profound peace from spreading throughout the entire world. Nations would not rise up against one another, nor would armies clash in battle. If fasting prevailed, weapons would not be wrought, courts of justice would not be erected, people would not live in prisons, nor would there ever be any criminals in the deserts, any slanderers in the cities, or any pirates on the sea. If

<sup>13</sup> 1 Cor 6:10.

all were students of fasting, they would never hear *the voice of the taskmaster*<sup>14</sup> mentioned in the book of Job. Nor would our life be so lamentable and sorrowful if fasting were to preside over our life. For it is clear that it would have taught all people not only to control themselves with regard to food, but also to completely avoid and be utterly estranged from avarice, greed, and every kind of vice. When these are extirpated, nothing can prevent us from passing our life in profound peace and tranquility of soul.

6 Now those who reject fasting and pursue self-indulgence as if it were the source of life's happiness have opened the way to that great swarm of vices and destroy their own bodies as well. Please observe the difference in the faces of those whom you will see tonight and those whom you will see tomorrow. Tonight their faces will be swollen, flushed, and dripping with beads of sweat; their eyes watery and droopy; and deprived of sharp perception due to an internal cloudiness. But tomorrow their faces will be serene and stately, restored to their natural color and full of intelligence; their eyes sharp in perception since no internal cause obscures their eyes sharp in every leonous, moderation in life. It made Moses the lawgiver, Samuel the fruit of fasting. Hannah as she fasted vowed to God: *O Lord God of Sabaoth, if you were to look upon your maidservant and give me a male child, then I will offer him in your presence as a gift. O Lord God drink no wine or strong drink until the day of his death.*<sup>15</sup> The great Samson was reared on fasting, and as long as it was part of that man's life, his enemies fell by the thousands,<sup>16</sup> the gates of the city were pulled down,<sup>17</sup> and lions did not withstand the strength of his hands.<sup>18</sup> But when drunkenness and fornication seized him, he was easily captured by his enemies. And after he was deprived of his eyes,

<sup>14</sup> Job 3:18.<sup>15</sup> Sam 1:11-13X.<sup>16</sup> Judg 15:16.<sup>17</sup> Judg 16:3.<sup>18</sup> Judg 14:6.

he was set out as a plaything for little Philistine boys. After Elijah fasted, he shut up heaven for three years and six months.<sup>19</sup> For when he saw that such great arrogance had been born of self-indulgence, he deemed it necessary to subject them to involuntary fasting with a famine, forcing an end to their sin, which had already increased beyond measure. It was fasting that, like a kind of cauterization or amputation, halted the rampant spread of vice.

7 Take fasting, O you paupers, as the companion of your home and table; O you servants, as rest from the continual labors of your servitude; O you rich, as the remedy that heals the damage caused by your indulgence and in turn makes what you usually despise more delightful; O you infirm, as the mother of health; O you healthy, as the guardian of your health. Ask the physicians, and they will tell you that the most perilous state of all is perfect health. Accordingly experts prescribe going without food to eliminate excessive eating lest the burden of copulence destroy the body's strength. For by prescribing not eating food to eliminate intemperance, they foster a kind of receptivity, re-education, and fresh start for the redevelopment of the nutritive faculty. Hence one finds the benefit of fasting in every pursuit and in every bodily state, and it is equally suitable for everything: homes, fora, nights, days, cities, deserts. Therefore, since in so many situations fasting graces us with something that is good in itself, let us undertake it cheerfully, as the Lord said, not looking gloomy like the hypocrites but exhibiting cheerfulness of soul without pretense.<sup>20</sup>

And yet I do not think that I need as great an effort to encourage someone to fast as I do to discourage someone today not to fall into the evil of drunkenness. For indeed while many undertake fasting because of custom and peer pressure, I dread drunkenness because drunkards cling to it as a kind of paternal inheritance. Just like those who sail away for a long journey, today some of these idiots buy wine for the

<sup>19</sup> 1 Kg 17:1.<sup>20</sup> Cf. Mt 6:16-18.

five days of fasting.<sup>21</sup> Who is so idiotic that, even before he starts to drink, he is already out of his mind like a drunk? Doesn't he know that the stomach does not keep down what is deposited in it? It is treacherous to enter into a contract with the stomach! Being a storehouse that contains many things and yet unguarded, the stomach retains the injury done to it, but does not keep down what is deposited in it.

Avoid having what was just read said to you, if you should arrive drunk tomorrow: *I have not chosen this fasting, says the Lord.*<sup>22</sup> Why do you mix what cannot be mixed? What partnership has fasting with drunkenness? What communion has intoxication with self-control? *What agreement has the temple of God with idols?*<sup>23</sup> For if the temple of God is where the Spirit of God dwells,<sup>24</sup> then those who permit the filth of licentiousness to enter into themselves through drunkenness are the temple of idols.

Today is the vestibule of fasting. Doubtless he who has been defiled in the vestibule is not worthy to enter into the sanctuary. No household servant who wants to regain the favor of his master employs his enemy as his patron and mediator. Drunkenness is inimical to God, but fasting is the beginning of repentance. So then, if you wish to return to God through repentance, flee drunkenness lest it render your alienation from him all the more bitter. Nonetheless, abstinence from food by itself is insufficient for praiseworthy fasting. Rather, we must fast with an acceptable fasting that is pleasing to God. True fasting is being a stranger to vice, controlling the tongue, abstaining from anger, distancing oneself from lust, evil speech, lying, perjury. The absence of these vices makes fasting true, and so shunning these vices makes fasting good.

8 Let us take delight in the Lord<sup>25</sup> by meditating on the utterances of the Spirit and by undertaking the precepts of salvation and all

<sup>21</sup> See note 12 above.

<sup>22</sup> 1Ks 9:8-9.

<sup>23</sup> 2Kt 07:6-16.

<sup>24</sup> 1 Jn 07:30b.

<sup>25</sup> Ps 124:06-11(XV).

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the teachings aimed at the emendation of our souls. Yet let us be on guard against the interior fast.<sup>26</sup> The Prophet prays for it to be averted, saying: *The Lord will not let the souls of the righteous go hungry.*<sup>27</sup> And: *I have not seen the righteous man forsaken or his children begging for bread.*<sup>28</sup> Since he knows that the children of our patriarch Jacob descended into Egypt for bread, he is not speaking about perceptible bread, but rather he is speaking about the spiritual food by which our interior man is perfected. *May the fast with which the Jews were threatened not come upon us. Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, and I will send a famine upon this land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the word of the Lord.*<sup>29</sup> It was for this reason that the Just Judge sent it, because he saw their mind wasting away from a lack of the nourishment that comes from the doctrines of truth, yet their external man was growing enormously fat and obese.

And so, in all the coming days the Holy Spirit will give you a feast at both the morning and evening festivities. No one should willingly absent themselves from this spiritual banquet. Let all of us share in the sober cup. It has been prepared by Wisdom, who hands it to us equally, to the extent that each has the capacity to drink it. *For she has prepared her cup and slaughtered her beasts,*<sup>30</sup> that is, the food for the perfect, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.<sup>31</sup> Filled with such an abundance, may we be found worthy too of the joy experienced in the bridegroom's chamber, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and might forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>26</sup> 2Kt 07:06-16(XV) 1Ks 09:08-09(XV) 1Jn 07:30(XV) 1Jn 07:30b(XV)

<sup>27</sup> Prov 10:3.

<sup>28</sup> Ps 125:06-11(XV)

<sup>29</sup> Am 8:11.

<sup>30</sup> Prov 9:2.

<sup>31</sup> Job 5:14.

## Homily Against Drunkards

1 The spectacles of this evening move me to speak, but then again the futility of previous efforts check my impulse and blunt my willingness. For even a farmer, when his first batch of seeds has not germinated, is quite reluctant to spread a second batch in the same fields. In the past we encouraged you continuously and then night and day during these seven weeks of fasting we testified to you ceaselessly about the gospel of the grace of God: If so many exhortations have proved to be of no benefit at all, then what should we expect if we preach today? O how many nights have you kept vigil in vain? How many days have you assembled in vain? Indeed, in vain! He who has made progress in good works, then relapses into old habits, not only suffers the loss of the reward for his labors, but also merits heavier condemnation. Even though he tasted the good word of God and merited knowledge of the mysteries, he forsook everything, and merited fleeting pleasure. *For the least of all men may be pardoned in mercy, but mighty men will be mightily tested.*<sup>1</sup> A single evening and a single assault of the enemy destroyed and obliterated all that labor! So then, am I willing to speak now? I would have kept silent, trust me, if I had not feared the example of Jeremiah. When he did not want to address the disobedient people, he suffered the very things he himself described: a fire came into his heart, he was weakened in every way, and he could not bear it.<sup>2</sup>

Lewd women, who forget the fear of God and scorn the everlasting fire, on that day when they were supposed to be sitting in their homes in remembrance of the resurrection, reflecting on that day

<sup>1</sup>Wis 6:6.

<sup>2</sup>See Jer 20:9.

when the heavens will be opened and the Judge will appear to us out of the heavens, as well as the trumpets of God, and the resurrection of the dead, and the just judgment, and the repayment to each according to his deeds—lewd women, instead of pondering these things in their mind, purifying their hearts of wicked thoughts, washing away their past sins with tears, and preparing themselves to meet Christ on that great day of his appearing,<sup>3</sup> instead of doing these things they shook off their yoke of slavery to Christ, ripped the veils of modesty from their heads, despised God, despised his angels, acted shamelessly at the sight of every male, tousling their hair, *dragging their garments in trains and at the same time tinkling with their feet*,<sup>4</sup> incited frenzied dancing with their lascivious eyes and boisterous laughter, enticing young men to commit every form of licentiousness with them, formed bands of dancers in the martyr's shrines in front of the city and made the holy places a workshop for their own obscenity. They defiled the air with their obscene ditties,<sup>5</sup> defiled the earth with their unclean feet, stomping on it while dancing, and drew a crowd of young men into a circle of spectators around themselves: they were truly insolent and totally carried away, omitting no excess of insanity. How could I keep silent about such things? How could I bemoan them as much as they deserve? Wine has caused us the loss of these souls; though wine is the gift God gave to the sober as a comfort for infirmity, it has now become an instrument of licentiousness for the lascivious.

2 Drunkenness is the demon of our own choosing, entering souls through pleasure. Drunkenness is the mother of wickedness, the antithesis of virtue. It turns the brave man into a coward, the chaste man into a lecher. Righteousness it knows not; prudence it destroys. For as water counters fire, so too does an excessive amount of wine extinguish rationality. And so, I was reluctant to say something

<sup>3</sup>See Acts 2:20, Jude 16, Rev 6:12, 16:14.

<sup>4</sup>Is 3:16, 1 XX.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Basil, *Second Homily on Foraging*, 9.

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against drunkenness, not because it is an insignificant vice or worth overlooking, but because whatever I say would produce no benefit at all. For if the drunkard is out of his mind and in a stupor, whoever rebukes him goes through this rigmarole in vain since he does not hear a thing! So then, to whom shall we preach? For the one who needs exhortation does not need the assistance provided by what I chaste and sober does not need the assistance provided by what I say since he is free from passion. So then, what shall I do in these circumstances, when speaking is useless and silence problematic? Should we neglect to care for them? But negligence is dangerous. Then again, shall I say something against drunkards? But our words ring in dead ears. So then, perhaps, just as in times of pestilence those who care for bodies fortify the healthy with preventive remedies, but do not touch those who have succumbed to the disease, so too what I say can be useful for half of you: it can provide relief and healing for those not under the influence, but cannot provide relief and healing for those who have succumbed to the disease.

3 How do you differ, O man, from irrational brutes? Isn't it by the gift of reason, which you received from the one who created you, that you became the ruler and lord of all creation? So whoever has deprived himself of his wits through drunkenness is *compared to senseless beasts and becomes like them*.<sup>6</sup> In fact, I would say that those in a drunken state are even more irrational than beasts. For all quadrupeds and beasts have the impulse to mate at appointed times, but those whose soul is seized by drunkenness and whose body is filled with unnatural heat are driven at every opportunity and at every hour to impure and disgraceful intercourse, and to pleasures, And not only does this produce brutish irrationality in them, but also the perversion of their senses shows that the drunkard is worse than every beast. For what beasts vision and hearing is as distorted as a drunkard's? Don't they fail to recognize their closest kin and frequently run up to strangers as if they were intimate friends?

<sup>6</sup>Is 49:12 (89:11 LX).

Don't they frequently jump over shadows as if they were streams or gullies? Their ears are filled with sounds like the roaring of the billowing sea. The ground seems to rise uphill and the mountains appear to circle around them. Sometimes they cannot stop laughing, sometimes they are pained and wail inconsolably. Now they are courageous and undaunted, now terrified and cowardly. They find sleep onerous, insufferable, suffocating, and in fact bordering on death, but when awake they are in more of a stupor than when asleep. For their life unfolds in a dream: they have neither coat nor anything to eat the next day, yet in their drunkenness they rule like a king and lead armies, build cities, and distribute goods. It is the wine seething in their hearts that fills them with such fantasies and such great delusion. But others come round to the opposite passions: they lose all hope, and become downcast, distressed, teary, frightened at every noise, and easily scared. The same wine in different bodily situations effects different passions in souls. For in some it can cause a diffusion of blood which flushes the surface of the body, rendering them cheerful and pleasant and glad. But in others it causes an oppressive condition which contracts and compresses their blood, bringing them round to the opposite disposition. And what need is there to speak of the throng of the other passions? Discontentment? Irritability? Querulousness? Volatility? Shouting? Uproar? Gullibility? Rage?

4 A lack of self-control with respect to pleasures is quick to arise from wine, like water suddenly welling up from a spring—and undiluted wine is swiftly accompanied by the malady of lasciviousness.<sup>7</sup> This malady demonstrates that every madness which beasts have for females takes second place to the lust of drunkards. For irrational brutes recognize the boundaries of their nature, but drunkards seek the female in the male and the male in the female. Nor is it easy to enumerate verbally all the awful things that happen because of

<sup>7</sup>Here Basil plays on *akrasia*, "lack of self control," and *akratos*, "undiluted wine."

drunkenness. So then, while the harmful effects of plague are experienced by people over time since the air infects bodies with its own corruption little by little, the harmful effects of wine are experienced immediately. For after drunkards have so destroyed their soul that they are branded with every kind of stigma and blemish, even still they also destroy the very condition of the body. Not only do they languish and waste away because of excessive indulgence in those pleasures that make one crazy for sex, but also because of the burdens that this places on them they lug around a body that is flaccid and flabby and robbed of its vital tone. Their eyes are reddened. They are sallow in appearance. They breathe with difficulty. Their tongue is loose. Their shouting is unintelligible. Their feet stumble like those of children. They have accidental excretions of waste products, which trickle as if from irrational brutes.

Because of their self-indulgence they are pitiable. They are more pitiable than those storm-tossed on the sea, who wave after wave submerges and keeps from rising above the surf. The souls of drunkards are similarly swept underwater when submerged in wine. And so, just as storm-tossed ships, whenever they become full of water, must lighten themselves by jettisoning their cargo, so too must drunkards unload themselves of whatever weighs them down. But they are hardly freed from what loads them down by vomiting and spitting up! Drunkards are more pitiable than those sailing on dangerous waters insofar as the latter blame winds, the sea, and external forces, but the former willingly choose to enter the storm of drunkenness. Whoever is possessed by a demon is pitiable, but whoever is drunk, even though he suffers the same things, does not deserve our pity because he wrestles with a demon of his own choosing.

Furthermore, those in a drunken state<sup>8</sup> concoct drugs, not out of a scheme to avoid the terrible suffering that comes from wine, but rather to prolong their drunkenness indefinitely. For they find the day short, and the night and the winter brief, at least insofar as time for drinking is concerned. But their wickedness has no end.

<sup>8</sup>Here I follow the alternative reading *gēthn* instead of *gēthos*.

For wine leads to more wine. It does not satisfy a need, but produces an inexorable need for another drink, making those who are drunk thirsty and arousing in them an ever-greater appetite for more. But even though they imagine that they have an insatiable desire for drink, they experience or rather deliberately choose something quite the opposite of this. For by continual self-indulgence they dull their senses. Just as too much light blinds the eyes, and those buffeted by loud noises are made completely deaf by the excessive beating that their ears suffer, so too drunkards fail to notice that they destroy whatever pleasure they experience by their excessive love of pleasure.<sup>9</sup> They find the wine tasteless and watery even if it is undiluted. And when in its place they drink fresh wine, they find it warm, even if it is completely unmixed, even if it is ice-cold, and it cannot quench that internal fire that burns within them from an excessive amount of wine.

*Who has woe? Who has confusion? Who has quarrels? Who has bouts of nausea and gossip? Who has afflictions without cause? Who who scope out where the drinks are?*<sup>10</sup> Now woe is an interjection that expresses lament. And so, those who are drunk deserve lament because drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> They have confusion because of the mental disturbance that wine produces. And they have bouts of nausea because of the bitterness that the pleasure of drinking distributes throughout their bodies. For the use of their feet is hampered, even the use of their hands is hampered, because drunkenness delivers fluid to these members. And yet even before they suffer these things, at the very moment they drink they are suffering inflammations of the brain.<sup>12</sup> For when the cerebral membranes become saturated with the fumes emitted by exhaled wine, the head is stricken with unendurable pains. Unable to remain upright upon the shoulders, the head flops around on the vertebrae,

<sup>9</sup>See Basil, *Second Homily on Fasting* 8.

<sup>10</sup>Prov 23:29–30.

<sup>11</sup>1 Cor 6:10.

<sup>12</sup>Pl. phrenitis.

### *Homily Against Drunkards*

now dropping here, now sinking there. *Gossip* refers to the excessive now dropping here, now sinking there. *Gossip* refers to the excessive talking and contentious debates found at drinking parties. Finally, *afflictions without cause* happen to the intoxicated, seeing that they are unable to stand up straight on account of their drunkenness. For they slip and fall down in so many different ways that their bodies cannot avoid suffering *afflictions without cause*.

5 But who could say such things to drunkards? They have headaches from their hangover, they're half-asleep, they yawn, their eyes are foggy, and they're nauseous. In such a state they pay no regard to their teachers, who shout at them from all directions: *Do not get drunk on wine, in which lies dissipation!*<sup>13</sup> And again: *Wine leads to licentiousness, and drunkenness to arrogance!*<sup>14</sup> Disregarding these teachings, they willingly experience the effects of drunkenness. Their body becomes swollen, their eyes moist, their mouth dry and parched. For just as ravines appear full while running with torrents of melted snow, but are left dry once all the water has passed by, so too the body<sup>15</sup> of an intoxicated person is, as it were, full and devoid when a pool of wine is formed in it, but is exposed as dry and devoid of moisture once even a little of the wine has flowed away. But when the body is continually overwhelmed and inundated by an excessive amount of wine, it also loses its vital humor. For what human constitution is so strong that it can withstand the evils of drunkenness? How could a body continually heated and continually sodden by wine avoid becoming exhausted and enfeebled and depleted? Hence the trembling and weakness: for when their breath grows short because of an excessive amount of wine and the tension of their sinews relaxes, the whole mass of their body is overcome by tremors. Why do you call the curse of Cain upon yourself, seeing that you tremble and wander in a stagger all through life?<sup>16</sup> For the body that lacks physical steadiness cannot avoid quivering and tottering.

<sup>13</sup>1 Pet 5:18.

<sup>14</sup>Prov 20:1.

<sup>15</sup>Reading τὸ σῆμα (Maran) instead of τὸ στόμα (Garnier).

<sup>16</sup>See Gen 4:11–14.