

Luke: 12:22–31

From Catena Aurea:

22. And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat: neither for the body, what ye shall put on.

23. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.

THEOPHYLACT. The Lord carries us onward by degrees to a more perfect teaching. For He taught us above to beware of covetousness, and He added the parable of the rich man, intimating thereby that the fool is he who desires more than is enough. Then as His discourse goes on, He forbids us to be anxious even about necessary things, plucking out the very root of covetousness; whence he says, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought. As if He said, Since he is a fool, who awards to himself a longer measure of life, and is thereby rendered more covetous; be not ye careful for your soul, what ye shall eat, not that the intellectual soul eats, but because there seems no other way for the soul to dwell united to the body except by being nourished. Or because it is a part of the animate body to receive nourishment, he fitly ascribes nourishment to the soul. For the soul is called also a nutritive power, as it is so understood. Be not then anxious for the nourishing part of the soul, what ye shall eat. But a dead body may also be clothed, therefore he adds, Nor for your body, what ye shall put on.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 21. in Matt.) Now the words, Take no thought, are not the same as do no work, but, "Have not your minds fixed on earthly things." For it so happens, that the man who is working takes no thought.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. Now the soul is more excellent than food, and the body than clothing. Therefore He adds, The life is more than meat, &c. As if He said, "God who has implanted that which is greater, how will He not give that which is less?" Let not our attention then be stayed upon trifling things, nor our understanding serve to seek for food and raiment, but rather think on whatever saves the soul, and raises it to the kingdom of heaven.

AMBROSE. Now nothing is more likely to produce conviction in believers that God can give us all things, than the fact, that the ethereal spirit perpetuates the vital union of the soul and body in close fellowship, without our exertion, and the healthgiving use of food does not fail until the last day of death has arrived.

Since then the soul is clothed with the body as with a garment, and the body is kept alive by the vigour of the soul, it is absurd to suppose that a supply of food will be wanting to us, who are in possession of the everlasting substance of life.

12:24–26

24. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?

25. And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?

26. If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. As before in raising our minds to spiritual boldness, He assured us by the example of the birds, which are counted of little worth, saying, Ye are of more value than many sparrows; so now also from the instance of birds, He conveys to us a firm and undoubting trust, saying, Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which neither have storehouse nor barn, and God feedeth them; how much more are ye better than fowls?

AMBROSE. But it is a great thing to follow up this example in faith. For to the birds of the air who have no labour of tilling, no produce from the fruitfulness of crops, Divine Providence grants an unfailling sustenance. It is true then that the cause of our poverty seems to be covetousness. For they have for this reason a toilless and abundant use of food, because they think not of claiming to themselves by any special right fruits given for common food. We have lost what things were common by claiming them as our own. For neither is any thing a man's own, where nothing is perpetual, nor is supply certain when the end is uncertain.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. Now whereas our Lord might have taken an example from the men who have cared least about earthly things, such as Elias, Moses, and John, and the like, He made mention of the birds, following the Old Testament, which sends us to the bee and the ant, and others of the same kind, in whom the Creator has implanted certain natural dispositions.

THEOPHYLACT. Now the reason that he omits mention of the other birds, and speaks only of the ravens, is, that the young of the ravens are by an especial providence fed by God. For the ravens produce indeed, but do not feed, but neglect their young, to whom in a marvellous manner from the air their food comes, brought as it were by the wind, which they receive having their mouths open, and so are nourished.

Perhaps also such things were spoken by synecdoche, i. e. the whole signified by a part. Hence in Matthew our Lord refers to the birds of the air, (Matt. 6:26.) but here more particularly to the ravens, as being more greedy and ravenous than others.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 21. in Matt.) Observe, that when God has once given a soul, it abides the same, but the body is taking growth daily. Passing over then the soul as not receiving increase, he makes mention only of the body, giving us to understand that it is not increased by food alone, but by the Divine Providence, from the fact that no one by receiving nourishment can add any thing to his stature. It is therefore concluded, If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, take no thought for the rest.

AUGUSTINE. (de Qu. Ev. l. ii. qu. 28.) But in speaking concerning increasing the stature of the body, He refers to that which is least, that is, to God, to make bodies.

12:27–31

27. Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

28. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?

29. And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.

30. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.

31. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 22. in Matt.) As our Lord had before given instruction about food, so now also about raiment, saying, Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin, that is, to make themselves clothing. Now as above when our Lord said, the birds sow not, He did not reprove sowing, but all superfluous trouble; so when He said, They toil not, neither do they spin, He does not put an end to work, but to all anxiety about it.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 22. in Matt.) He does not here employ the example of the birds, making mention of a swan or a peacock, but the lilies, for he wishes to give force to the argument on both sides, that is to say, both from the meanness of the things which have obtained such honour, and from the excellence of

the honour conferred upon them; and hence a little after He does not call them lilies, but grass, as it is added, If then God so clothe the grass, which to-day is, He says not, which to-morrow is not, but to-morrow is cast into the oven; nor does He say simply, God clothe, but He says, God so clothe, which has much meaning, and adds, how much more you, which expresses His estimation and care of the human race. Lastly, when it behoves Him to find fault, He deals here also with mildness, reproofing them not for unbelief, but for littleness of faith, adding, O ye of little faith, that He may so the more rouse us up to believe in His words, that we should not only take no thought about our apparel, but not even admire elegance in dress.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. For it is sufficient to the prudent for the sake of necessity only, to have a suitable garment, and moderate food, not exceeding what is enough. To the saints it is sufficient even to have those spiritual delights which are in Christ, and the glory that comes after.

AMBROSE. Nor does it seem of light moment, that a flower is either compared to man, or even almost more than to man is preferred to Solomon, to make us conceive the glory expressed, from the brightness of the colour to be that of the heavenly angels; who are truly the flowers of the other world, since by their brightness the world is adorned, and they breathe forth the pure odour of sanctification, who shackled by no cares, employed in no toilsome task, cherish the grace of the Divine bounty towards them, and the gifts of their heavenly nature. Therefore well also is Solomon here described to be clothed in his own glory, and in another place to be veiled, because the frailty of his bodily nature be clothed as it were by the powers of his mind to the glory of his works. But the Angels, whose diviner nature remains free from bodily injury, are rightly preferred, although he be the greatest man. We should not however despair of God's mercy to us, to whom by the grace of His resurrection He promises the likeness of angels.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. it were strange for the disciples, who ought to set before others the rule and pattern of life, to fall into those things, which it was their duty to advise men to renounce; and therefore our Lord adds, And seek not what, ye shall eat, &c. Herein also our Lord strongly recommends the study of holy preaching, bidding His disciples to cast away all human cares.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. (in Orat. Dom. Serm. 1.) Some have obtained dominion and honours and riches by praying for them, how then dost thou forbid us to seek such things in prayer? And indeed that all these things belong to the Divine counsel is plain to every one, yet are they conferred by God upon those that seek them, in order that by learning that God listens to our lower petitions, we may be raised to the desire of higher things; just as we see in children, who as soon as they are born cling to their mother's breasts,

but when the child grows up it despises the milk, and seeks after a necklace or some such thing with which the eye is delighted; and again when the mind has advanced together with the body, giving up all childish desires, he seeks from his parents those things which are adapted to a perfect life.

AUGUSTINE. (de Qu Ev. I. ii. qu. 29.) Now having forbidden all thought about food, he next goes on to warn men not to be puffed up, saying, Neither be ye lifted up, (nolite in sublime tolli μη μετεωρίζεσθε.) for man first seeks these things to satisfy his wants, but when he is filled, he begins to be puffed up concerning them. This is just as if a wounded man should boast that he had many plasters in his house, whereas it were well for him that he had no wounds, and needed not even one plaster.

THEOPHYLACT. Or by being lifted up he means nothing else but an unsteady motion of the mind, meditating first one thing, then another, and jumping from this to that, and imagining lofty things.

BASIL. And that you may understand an elation of this kind, remember the vanity of your own youth; if at any time while by yourself you have thought about life and promotions, passing rapidly from one dignity to another, have grasped riches, have built palaces, benefitted friends, been revenged upon enemies. Now such abstraction is sin, for to have our delights fixed upon useless things, leads away from the truth. Hence He goes on to add, For all these things do the nations of the world seek after, &c.

GREGORY OF NYSSA. (ubi sup.) For to be careful about visible things is the part of those who possess no hope of a future life, no fear of judgment to come.

BASIL. But with respect to the necessities of life, He adds, And your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 22. in Matt.) He said not "God," but your Father, to incite them to greater confidence. For who is a father, and would not allow the want of his children to be supplied? But He adds another thing also; for you could not say that He is indeed a father, yet knoweth not that we are in need of these things. For He who has created our nature, knoweth its wants.

AMBROSE. But He goes on to shew, that neither at the present time, nor hereafter, will grace be lacking to the faithful, if only they who desire heavenly things seek not earthly; for it is unworthy for men to care for meats, who fight for a kingdom. The king knoweth wherewithal he shall support and clothe his own family. Therefore it follows, But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you.

CHRYSOSTOM. (ubi sup.) Now Christ promises not only a kingdom, but also riches with it; for if we rescue from cares those who neglecting their own concerns are diligent about ours, much more will God.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

12:22–28 Three Imperatives about Food and Clothing

A Call to Abandon Anxiety.

Cyril of Alexandria: How carefully and with what great skill he brings the lives of the holy apostles to spiritual excellence. And with them he benefits us too, because he desires all humankind to be saved and to choose the wise and more excellent life. For this reason he makes them abandon unnecessary anxiety and does not allow a careworn and frenetic diligence that would make them wish to gather what exceeds their necessities. In these matters excess adds nothing to our benefit. “Do not be anxious,” therefore, he says, “about your life, what you shall eat, nor about your body, what you shall put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.” He did not simply say, “Do not be anxious,” but added “about your life,” that is, do not give much attention to these things, but devote your earnestness to things of far greater importance. For life indeed is of more importance than food, and the body is more important than clothing. Since, therefore, we are at risk concerning both life and body, and pain and punishment are decreed against those who will not live uprightly, let all anxiety be laid aside with regard to clothing and food....

These things, in turn, are followed immediately by a savage crowd of other desires, the result being apostasy from God.... It is our duty, therefore, to stay away from all worldly desires, and rather to take delight in those things which please God. Commentary on Luke, Homily 90.

God’s Care for Birds and Flowers.

Cyril of Alexandria: But perhaps you will reply to this, “Who then will give us the necessities of life?” Our answer to this is as follows: The Lord is worthy to be trusted, and he clearly promises it to you and through little things gives you full assurance that he will be true also in that which is great. “Consider,” he says, “the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them.” ... Through the birds and the flowers of the field, he produces in you a firm and unwavering faith. Nor does

he permit us at all to doubt, but rather he gives us the certainty that he will grant us his mercy and stretch out his comforting hand, that we may have sufficiency in all things. It is, moreover, a very wicked thing that while those who are placed under the yoke of bodily slavery depend on their masters as sufficient to supply them with food and clothing, we will not consent to put our trust in almighty God, when he promises us the necessities of life. Commentary on Luke, Homily 90.

Flowers and Grass Illustrate Divine Mercy.

Ambrose: It is indeed a good and moral saying. By the comparison with flowers and grass, the Lord's words provoke us to faith in the gift of divine mercy, either literally, because we are unable to add to our body's stature, or spiritually, because we cannot exceed the measure of our stature without the favor of God. For what is so moral for persuasion as when you see that even the nonrational things are so clothed by God's providence that they lack no use for grace or for ornament? Then you believe the more that rational man, if he places all his usefulness in God and does not dishonor the faith with intent to waver, can never lack, inasmuch as he has rightly trusted in the favor of God? Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 7.125.

Angels, Martyrs and Saints are the Flowers of the World.

Ambrose: It is pleasing to note that lilies spring not from the barrenness of mountains and the wildness of forests but from the loveliness of gardens. These are the fruit-bearing gardens of diverse virtues, as it is written, "A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed." Where there is integrity, chastity, piety, faithful silence of secrets, the radiance of angels, there are the violets of confessors, the lilies of virgins, the roses of martyrs. And let no one think it is inappropriate to compare lilies with angels, when Christ called himself a lily, saying, "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys." Christ is fittingly a lily, because where there is the blood of martyrs, there is the Christ, who is a flower exalted, undefiled and blameless, in which the roughness of thorns does not offend but enveloping grace begins to shine. Roses have thorns which are the torments of the martyrs. The indivisible Godhead, which did not feel torments, has no thorns. Therefore, if lilies, like angels, are clothed beyond the glory of men, we should not despair of the mercy of God toward us—we to whom through the grace of the resurrection the Lord promises the likeness of angels. In this passage, Jesus also seems to touch on the question which the apostle did not overlook, either—the question that the nations of this world would ask, namely, how will the dead rise and with what manner of body will they come? By saying, "Seek the kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well," Jesus indicates that grace will not be lacking for the faithful in the present

or in the future, if only those who desire the heavenly do not seek the earthly. It is unseemly for the soldiers of the kingdom to worry about food. The King knows how to feed, cherish and clothe his household, and therefore he said, “Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you.” Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 8.128–30.

12:29–33 Imperatives About the Kingdom

Seek the Kingdom.

Cyril of Alexandria: He announced as a general law, useful and necessary for salvation, not only to the holy apostles but to all living on the earth, that people must seek his kingdom. He announced this, being sure that what he gives will be sufficient for them to be in need of nothing else. What, then, does he say? Fear not, little flock. And by “do not fear,” he means that they must believe that certainly and without doubt their heavenly Father will give the means of life to those who love him. He will not neglect his own. Rather he will open his hand to them—the hand which ever fills the universe with goodness. Commentary on Luke, Homily 91.

No Fear for Those Who Will Be Given a Kingdom.

Peter Chrysologus: The flock is little in the eyes of the world, but great in the eyes of God. It is little—because he calls glorious those whom he has trained to the innocence of sheep and to Christian meekness. The flock is little, not as the remnant of a big one, but as one which has grown from small beginnings. This little flock denotes the infancy of his newborn church, and immediately he promises that through the blessings of heaven this church will soon have the dignity of his kingdom. Sermon 22.

Real Riches Come Through Almsgiving.

Cyril of Alexandria: Give away these earthly things, and win that which is in heaven. Give that which you must leave, even against your will, that you may not lose things later. Lend your wealth to God, that you may be really rich.

Concerning the way in which to lend it, Jesus next teaches us saying, “Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail.” The blessed David teaches us exactly the same in the psalms, where by inspiration he says of every

merciful and good man, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” Worldly wealth has many foes. There are numerous thieves, and this world of ours is full of oppressors. Some plunder by secret means, while others use violence and tear it away even from those who resist. But no one can do damage to the wealth that is laid up above in heaven. God is its keeper, and he does not sleep. Commentary on Luke, Homily 91.