

~Other Speakers A-F: St. Augustine:

16. And lo, I was received in Rome by the scourge of bodily sickness; and I was very near to falling into hell, burdened with all the many and grievous sins I had committed against thee, myself, and others--all over and above that fetter of original sin whereby we all die in Adam. For thou hadst forgiven me none of these things in Christ, neither had he abolished by his cross the enmity[137] that I had incurred from thee through my sins. For how could he do so by the crucifixion of a phantom, which was all I supposed him to be? The death of my soul was as real then as the death of his flesh appeared to me unreal. And the life of my soul was as false, because it was as unreal as the death of his flesh was real, though I believed it not.

My fever increased, and I was on the verge of passing away and perishing; for, if I had passed away then, where should I have gone but into the fiery torment which my misdeeds deserved, measured by the truth of thy rule? My mother knew nothing of this; yet, far away, she went on praying for me. And thou, present everywhere, didst hear her where she was and had pity on me where I was, so that I regained my bodily health, although I was still disordered in my sacrilegious heart. For that peril of death did not make me wish to be baptized. I was even better when, as a lad, I entreated baptism of my mother's devotion, as I have already related and confessed.[138] But now I had since increased in dishonor, and I madly scoffed at all the purposes of thy medicine which would not have allowed me, though a sinner such as I was, to die a double death. Had my mother's heart been pierced with this wound, it never could have been cured, for I cannot adequately tell of the love she had for me, or how she still travailed for me in the spirit with a far keener anguish than when she bore me in the flesh.

17. I cannot conceive, therefore, how she could have been healed if my death (still in my sins) had pierced her inmost love. Where, then, would have been all her earnest, frequent, and ceaseless prayers to thee? Nowhere but with thee. But couldst thou, O most merciful God, despise the "contrite and humble heart"[139] of that pure and prudent widow, who was so constant in her alms, so gracious and attentive to thy saints, never missing a visit to church twice a day, morning and evening--and this not for vain gossiping, nor old wives' fables, but in order that she might listen to thee in thy sermons, and thou to her in her prayers? Couldst thou, by whose gifts she was so inspired, despise and disregard the tears of such a one without coming to her aid--those tears by which she entreated thee, not for gold or silver, and not for any changing or fleeting good, but for the salvation of the soul of her son? By no means, O Lord. It is certain that thou wast near and wast hearing and wast carrying out the plan by which thou hadst predetermined it should be done. Far be it from thee that thou shouldst have deluded her in those visions and the answers she had received from thee--some of which I have mentioned, and others not--which she kept in her faithful heart, and, forever beseeching, urged them on thee as if they had thy own signature. For thou, "because thy mercy endureth forever,"[140] hast so condescended to those whose debts thou hast pardoned that thou likewise dost become a debtor by thy promises.