

~Other Speakers A-F: St. Augustine:

43. There is yet another "evil of the day"[351] to which I wish I were sufficient. By eating and drinking we restore the daily losses of the body until that day when thou destroyest both food and stomach, when thou wilt destroy this emptiness with an amazing fullness and wilt clothe this corruptible with an eternal incorruption. But now the necessity of habit is sweet to me, and against this sweetness must I fight, lest I be enthralled by it. Thus I carry on a daily war by fasting, constantly "bringing my body into subjection,"[352] after which my pains are banished by pleasure. For hunger and thirst are actual pain. They consume and destroy like fever does, unless the medicine of food is at hand to relieve us. And since this medicine at hand comes from the comfort we receive in thy gifts (by means of which land and water and air serve our infirmity), even our calamity is called pleasure.

44. This much thou hast taught me: that I should learn to take food as medicine. But during that time when I pass from the pinch of emptiness to the contentment of fullness, it is in that very moment that the snare of appetite lies baited for me. For the passage itself is pleasant; there is no other way of passing thither, and necessity compels us to pass. And while health is the reason for our eating and drinking, yet a perilous delight joins itself to them as a handmaid; and indeed, she tries to take precedence in order that I may want to do for her sake what I say I want to do for health's sake. They do not both have the same limit either. What is sufficient for health is not enough for pleasure. And it is often a matter of doubt whether it is the needful care of the body that still calls for food or whether it is the sensual snare of desire still wanting to be served. In this uncertainty my unhappy soul rejoices, and uses it to prepare an excuse as a defense. It is glad that it is not clear as to what is sufficient for the moderation of health, so that under the pretense of health it may conceal its projects for pleasure. These temptations I daily endeavor to resist and I summon thy right hand to my help and cast my perplexities onto thee, for I have not yet reached a firm conclusion in this matter.

45. I hear the voice of my God commanding: "Let not your heart be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness."[353] Drunkenness is far from me. Thou wilt have mercy that it does not come near me. But "surfeiting" sometimes creeps upon thy servant. Thou wilt have mercy that it may be put far from me. For no man can be continent unless thou give it.[354] Many things that we pray for thou givest us, and whatever good we receive before we prayed for it, we receive it from thee, so that we might afterward know that we did receive it from thee. I never was a drunkard, but I have known drunkards made into sober men by thee. It was also thy doing that those who never were drunkards have not been--and likewise, it was from thee that those who have been might not remain so always. And it was likewise from thee that both might know from whom all this came.

I heard another voice of thine: "Do not follow your lusts and refrain yourself from your pleasures."[355] And by thy favor I have also heard this saying in which I have taken much delight: "Neither if we eat are we the better; nor if we eat not are we the worse."[356] This is to say that neither shall the one make me to abound, nor the other to be wretched. I heard still another voice: "For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know how to be abased and I know how to abound. . . . I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."[357] See here a soldier of the heavenly army; not the sort of dust we are. But remember, O Lord, "that we are dust"[358] and that thou didst create man out of the dust,[359] and that he "was lost, and is found."[360] Of course, he [the apostle Paul] could not do all this by his own power. He was of the same dust--he whom I loved so much and who spoke of these things through the afflatus of thy inspiration: "I can," he said, "do all things through him who strengtheneth me." Strengthen me, that I too may be able. Give what thou commandest, and command what thou wilt. This man [Paul] confesses that he received the gift of grace and that, when he glories, he glories in the Lord. I have heard yet another voice praying that he might receive. "Take from me," he said, "the greediness of the belly."[361] And from this it appears, O my holy God, that thou dost give it, when what thou commandest to be done is done.

46. Thou hast taught me, good Father, that "to the pure all things are pure"[362]; but "it is evil for that man who gives offense in eating"[363]; and that "every creature of thine is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving"[364]; and that "meat does not commend us to God"[365]; and that "no man should judge us in meat or in drink."[366] "Let not him who eats despise him who eats not, and let him that does not eat judge not him who does eat."[367] These things I have learned, thanks and praise be to thee, O my God and Master, who knockest at my ears and enlightenest my heart. Deliver me from all temptation!

It is not the uncleanness of meat that I fear, but the uncleanness of an incontinent appetite. I know that permission was granted Noah to eat every kind of flesh that was good for food; that Elijah was fed with flesh; that John, blessed with a wonderful abstinence, was not polluted by the living creatures (that is, the locusts) on which he fed. And I also know that Esau was deceived by his hungering after lentils and that David blamed

himself for desiring water, and that our King was tempted not by flesh but by bread. And, thus, the people in the wilderness truly deserved their reproof, not because they desired meat, but because in their desire for food they murmured against the Lord.

47. Set down, then, in the midst of these temptations, I strive daily against my appetite for food and drink. For it is not the kind of appetite I am able to deal with by cutting it off once for all, and thereafter not touching it, as I was able to do with fornication. The bridle of the throat, therefore, must be held in the mean between slackness and tightness. And who, O Lord, is he who is not in some degree carried away beyond the bounds of necessity? Whoever he is, he is great; let him magnify thy name. But I am not such a one, "for I am a sinful man." [368] Yet I too magnify thy name, for he who hath "overcome the world" [369] intercedeth with thee for my sins, numbering me among the weak members of his body; for thy eyes did see what was imperfect in him, and in thy book all shall be written down. [370]