

XXXIII. JESUS,

*With His Heavenly Father and Holy Spirit,
Is a Truthful, Wise, All-Powerful, Just, Zealous,
and yet Gentle and Merciful, LORD (Num. 11:31).*

Just as the rich glutton ate himself sick and into hell (Luke 16:19ff.), so certain Israelites simply refused to be poor Lazaruses in the wilderness and insisted on having full pots and paunches, and because of this ate their sudden death.

This account is not only mentioned here, but also in Psalm 78:29–31, Wisdom 16:3, and 1 Corinthians 10:7, for which reason it must be necessary and profitable for us to know.

Above all else, one must know who the Lord is from whom this wind went forth, and whose wrath was so greatly stirred up. Athanasius gives us the right answer: “The Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord, and yet there are not three Lords, but there is only one Lord.” Thus again we have the Lord Jesus here in the midst of the most blessed Trinity, and we see clearly what we are to hold concerning Him and His heavenly Father and Holy Spirit.

O Lord Jesus, You are a truthful Lord. You promised the Israelites quails; You truly and certainly kept this. Great lords in the world are not always to be trusted. Hence they say, “Poor man, do not lie; that is the privilege of nobility.” They play with promises as children play with balls; but it is impossible, O Lord Jesus, for You to deceive (Heb. 6:18). “Blessed are all who trust in You” (Ps. 2:12). Therefore the whole people had to say, “Amen” (Deut. 27:15ff.).

You are a wise Lord. “Your wisdom cannot be measured.”¹⁸⁶ The manner of Your rule is incomprehensible (Ps. 147:5). There has never been an abler fowler in the world. More quails have never been caught at once as long as the sun has shone on the earth. Let Your unfathomable wisdom fill in the gap whenever our cleverness falls short.

186 *Sapientiae tuae non est numerus*; Aug. *Conf.* 1.1, from Ps. 147:5; see PL 32:660.

THE GREAT WORKS OF GOD

You are an all-powerful Lord. All creation must stand at Your bidding. The waters had to produce quails, as in Genesis 1:20. The wind had to drive them forth before each man's door. The quails were kept from going higher than two cubits above the ground, so that even children could catch them. He who gathered least caught enough to last for ten days; others for the whole four weeks. Likewise, Jonah's whale also had to carry out Your will (Jonah 2:1–10), the fire in the Babylonian furnace was prevented from burning (Dan. 3:27), the sun had to stand still (Joshua 10:13) and to go back (2 Kings 20:11; Isa. 38:8), etc. Who would not delight in serving such an all-powerful Lord? Your omnipotence makes me joyful in every annoyance.

You are a just Lord. You treat no one in the world unjustly. You did not poison the Israelites with quails (for quails are not an unwholesome food). Rather, the Israelites earned them with their vulgarity. They obtained them from You not through humble prayer but through forceful, impatient grumbling. Oh, help me to guard myself against all such murmur-filled impatience (1 Cor. 10:10), to be willing to be a poor Lazarus, and to make do with meager rations if that is what You desire! If in temporal distress You do not hear me according to my desire, but rather according to Your wisdom, I will let Your grace be sufficient for me (2 Cor. 12:9). What You give in wrath does not bring prosperity. When temporal goods are forcefully demanded of You, they cause nothing but heartache. Rachel wanted children without regard to anyone else; afterwards she had to die in childbirth and conclude her life with her son of sorrows, Benoni (Gen. 30:1; 35:18).

You directed the Israelites through Moses to sanctify themselves before they ate quails, but we find nothing about their doing so. Therefore I will learn at the expense of others and sanctify myself first through repentance and devout prayer. I will myself be the consecrating bishop of my house (1 Tim. 4:5–6). Your gifts bring as much good to an unrepentant house as grass does a dog. Food enjoyed without prayer must in turn swell with pain through every vein in the body. Thus that admirable housefather used to pray,

A healthy bite,
A conscience bright,

A goodly sip,
 And a happy leap
 From this life into heaven,
 May I in grace, dear God, be given!

The Israelites had not had meat for a long time. Now that they finally got some, they gobbled it up as greedily as Duke Boleslav, after Lent, ate thirteen young chickens on Easter Day, because of which he too met his death (see the *Schlesische Chronica*). “One should go to the table as if one approached the altar,”¹⁸⁷ says Bernard. “We should go to our meal as if we were taking medicine,”¹⁸⁸ says Augustine. You and all honest people oppose careless gluttons (Luke 21:34).

When they had eaten the quails, there was no *Deo Gracias* or *Benedicite*. God had been completely forgotten by them, contrary to Your will: “When you have eaten and are full, bless the LORD your God” (Deut. 8:10). How could You not be angry with these uncouth acorn-gobbling swine? In Exodus 32:6 too the people sat down to eat and rose up to play, and it cost them life and limb.

“O LORD, You are righteous; we must be ashamed” (Dan. 9:7). Help us in the midst of great chastisements to recognize our sin and to praise Your righteousness, saying, “O LORD, You are righteous, and all Your judgments are just” (Ps. 119:75, 137).

We surely earned this punishment;
 To this each man must give assent.¹⁸⁹

O God, be gracious to us poor sinners! (Luke 18:13).

Although the grumbling Israelites were many, You were not afraid to punish them. You can quickly thin out the thick crowds of the children of the world. “The multitude of the erring does not justify the error,”¹⁹⁰ says Jerome.

187 *Ad mensam quasi ad aram.*

188 *Ad alimenta accedamus quasi ad medicamenta.*

189 “Ach lieben Christen, seid getrost” (J. Gigas, 1561), st. 1, lines 5–6; Wack 4:179, no. 257.

190 *Multitudo errantium non parit errori patrocinium.*

Oh, defend me, Lord Jesus, that I may not let my belly be my god! For the glory of such persons shall be their shame, as St. Paul says (Phil. 3:19) and this example shows.

(I will happily pass over the allegory that Rabanus makes here from Col. 3:1, that the quails should remind us to seek what is above.)

Besides this, O Lord Jesus, I also see that You are longsuffering, gentle, patient, and of great goodness (Exod. 34:6; Ps. 86:15; Jonah 4:2). For above also in Exodus 16:13, You gave the grumbling Israelites quails. There You bore with their first display of stupidity. You are a rich Host; You can easily make a loan to a wicked villain. But when they return to their former offense, You claim the whole balance that You have allowed to run up before. The honorable German princes are also of this ilk; they are slow to take up arms, yet slow to put them down again. O Lord Jesus, help me not to abuse Your patience and longsuffering, or else, as they say, “Whatever one has crumbled into one’s broth one must eat to the dregs.”¹⁹¹

So if the Israelites contrived with impatience that You should give them what they desired, how then would You deny me (if I should cry to You in humility) what would be good for me? (Luke 18:18–30).

Finally in this passage I also see Your great mercy. Not all the Israelites were slain, for not all of them shared this impatient sentiment. The rest journeyed on to Hazeroth. “God’s firm foundation stands, having this seal: The Lord knows His own” (2 Tim. 2:19). Lot had to be saved from destruction in Sodom (Gen. 19:16, 20). The 6,000 Christians had to be driven out of the city of Jerusalem to their own good fortune.¹⁹² Your mercy is as great as You Yourself are (Sir. 2:18). Let me experience this in time and eternity.

The place where the Israelites ate their death was named “Graves of Desiring.” O Lord Jesus, when I look at things in the light of Your Word, I find the true name that fits our graves also. Indeed, our graves are Graves of Desiring; in them we must pay for our wicked desires with our own skin. What Adam and Eve did is shown in the graveyard

191 *Tute quod intristi, omne tibi exedendum*; Ter. *Phor.* 2.2.318.

192 *Eus. Hist. eccl.* 3.5.3.

and our burial place. “Death is the wages of sin” (Rom. 6:23). Adam and Eve’s desire, together our own perverse desires, brought us to this misery. Therefore You atoned for our desire with Your hunger in the wilderness (Matt. 4:2) and with Your thirst on the cross (John 19:28). Help me to repent sincerely before my end, to mourn my wicked desire, to ask for Your forgiveness, and to take comfort in Your hungering and thirsting, that I may not remain in my grave of desiring, and that, even though I must atone for my sinful desiring with temporal death, I may yet wake on the Last Day according to my heart’s desire, and enter into the everlasting joy and desire of all the elect children of God (Matt. 25:21).