193 Tears (*Lacrime*)

Some cry uselessly such as the finally impenitent and the damned, about whom Lamen. [1:2]: “Weeping she has wept in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks.” Some cry usefully such as the penitents, the compassionate, and the contemplating. Concerning the first it is said in Luke 6[:21]: “Blessed are ye that hunger now: for you shall be filled. Blessed are you that weep now: for you shall laugh.” The penitent weep because of three matters.

First, because the offense to God that they may be reconciled, Judith [8:14]: “With many tears let us beg his pardon.”

Second, because the stain set before the subject just as a boy seeing that he has fallen in the mud cries, Psal. [6:7]: “Every night I will wash my bed with my tears.”

¶ Third, because the affliction of due punishment, just as therefore one cries as so inclined, 4 Kings 20[:5]: “I have seen your tears: and I have healed you.” And these tears of the penitents are very efficacious according to Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*,[[1]](#endnote-1) because just as “Water quenches a flaming fire,” Eccli. 3[:33], so the tears of the penitents to the fires of hell.

Again, just as blood is wiped away by a sponge, so sin by the tears. Esau by weeping inclined his father to bless him, Gen. 27[:34], so tears move. Wherefore the verses of the poet:[[2]](#endnote-2) ¶ If your words are broken by weeping it will do no harm. Sometimes tears have the weight of the voice.

¶ In the pruning of vines let it not go forward with a tear, then there will be no harvest. So, when man thinks there is a superfluity of sins unless the tears flow there is no hope of spiritual fruit. According to Cassiodorus, *Super Psalmis*,[[3]](#endnote-3) the formula of the penitent is that he begins with a tear, and end with joy, according to that of the Psal. [125:6-7]: “Going they went and wept,” etc., and it follows, “But coming they shall come with joyfulness.” Wherefore Jerome in *Epistola Christiana*,[[4]](#endnote-4) Nineveh the city which perished in sin stood in tears [Jonas 3:10]. Chrysostom[[5]](#endnote-5) concerning the restoration of the fallen we are refuted for laziness that the weeping so woefully lament their friends whom they could not recall back to life, and we can do nothing such for the resuscitation of their soul. The mother of Tobias wept irremediably for the return of her son, Tob. 10[:4].

Again, the Magdalene because she wept merited to see Christ first after his resurrection. Wherefore Augustine in *Sermone de Parasceve,[[6]](#endnote-6)* let the fault be washed by tears which one is ashamed to confess by mouth. Tears are not shameful in confessing; therefore, he obtains in beseeching. Tears do not speak, and they ask for forgiveness. More useful are the prayers of souls than speeches, because the strongest speech fails. But tears not speech sometimes bring forth the whole business, but tears always destroy the whole affect. Therefore, Peter did not use speech when he sinned, when he lost his faith, lest perhaps by that he would not be believed for confessing what he had used for denying. The reason perhaps he preferred to bring forth the cause for weeping than to say it.

Second,[[7]](#endnote-7) the compassionate are accustomed to weep for other’s affliction to which they are moved, Rom. 12[:15]: “Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep.” Jer. 9[:1]: “Who will give a fountain of tears to my eyes? and I will weep day and night for the slain of my people.” And Jer. 13[:17]: “My eyes shall run down the tears, because the flock is carried away captive.” Wherefore here it is to be noted that David wept for David and Jonathan, 1 Reg. 20[:41], but his own son when he died, he did not weep, 2 Reg. 12[:21-23]. Wherefore Chrysostom,[[8]](#endnote-8) we are not prohibited from weeping for the dead, Eccli. 38[:16]: “My son, shed tears over the dead, and begin to lament as if you had suffered some great harm,” etc. Wherefore Bernard,[[9]](#endnote-9) tears are witnesses of the human condition, not indications of distrust or infidelity. Therefore, King David wept for the dead Absalom, 2 Kings 18[:33]. But for his dead son whom he had from Bathsheba he did not weep [2 Kings 12:23], because according to Jerome, *Epistola* 116,[[10]](#endnote-10) he knew Absalom had sinned and would be in peril, but his other son he knew to be innocent. Again, according to Bede,[[11]](#endnote-11) in raising Lazarus Jesus wept [John 11:35], because it reminded him of the misery of this present life.

¶ Third, the contemplatives weep because of the absence of the bridegroom, Jer. 31[:16]: “Let your eyes cease from tears: for there is a reward for your work,” that is, Tob. 3[:22]: “After tears and weeping you pour in joyfulness.” Apo. 21[:4]: “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

1. Augustine, cf. Jerome, *Epistola* 66 Ad Pammachium 5 (PL 22:642): sciens scriptum: Sicut aqua extinguit ignem, ita eleemosyna peccatum (Eccli. 3. 33).

   Cf. William de Lancea, *Diaetae salutis* 7:3 (8:319b): Unde dicit Gregorius in *Moralibus*, quod flammam suggestionis extinguit citius aqua lacrymarum. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Ovid, *Ex Ponto* 3.1.157-158 (LCL 151:382-383): nec, tua si fletu scindentur verba, nocebit: / interdum lacrimae pondera vocis habent.

   if thy words are broken by sobbing it will do no harm; for tears sometimes have the weight of spoken words. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cassiodorus, *Expositio in Psalmum* 6.11 (PL 70:65): Quoniam ista quaedam formula poenitentium est, ut inchoent a lacrymis, et desinant in laetitia; quaetenus tali exemplo possit agnosci verum esse quod legitur. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Jerome, *Epistola 16.*1 (PL 22:358): Ninive civitas, quae peccato periit, fletibus stetit (Jon. 3. 10). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum* Homilia 2 ex cap. 2 (PG 56:645): Et erat videre majorem dolorem in matribus remanentibus, quam in parvulis morientibus. Parvuli enim unum patiebantur dolorem, quia separabantur a matribus, et non quia ducebantur ad mortem. Nec enim sciebant adhuc mortis timorem. Matres autem duplicem: unum quidem, quod videbant parvulos suos interfici: alterum, quod ipsae desolabantur a filiis. In parvulis mors eorum beata finem faciebat doloris: in matribus autem parvulorum memoria semper reparatio erat doloris. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Augustine, Enarrationes In Psalmum 6:10 (PL 36:96-97): Iste fructus est illius gemitus in quo laboratur, et illarum lacrymarum quibus lavatur lectus, et stratus rigatur; quoniam qui seminat in lacrymis, [Col.0096] in gaudio metet (Psal. CXXV, 5), et beati lugentes, quoniam ipsi consolabuntur (Matth. V, 5). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. William de Lancea, *Diaetae salutis* 7:3 (8:318b): Quintum est compassio humanae miseriae, ut dicit Apostolus: *Flere cum flentibus*. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. John Chrysostom, *In Hebraeos* Homilia 23.4 (PG 63:166): Sed si corpus quidem jacet mortuum, omnes hortaris ut commisereantur, et eos qui non lugent vocas immisericordes: pereuntge autem anima jubes non lugere. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Bernard, *Sermo* 26.12 (PL 183:911): Fuerunt lacrymae illae testes profecto naturae, non indices diffidentiae. Denique et prodiit mox ad vocem ejus qui erat mortuus, ne continuo putes fidei praejudicium dolentis affectum. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Jerome, *Epistola* 147.9 (PL 22:1202): Quid postquam Thamar virginem frater et consanguineus polluisti, versus in Absalom, occidere eum cupis, qui te rebellantem plangit et mortuum? Clamat contra te sanguis Nabuthae: et vinea Jezrael, hoc est, seminis Dei; quam in hortum voluptatum, lasciviae olera convertisti, dignam de te ultionem reposcit. Mittitur tibi Elias, tormenta et interitum nuntians. Incurvare, et sacco vestire paulisper, et de te poterit dicere Deus: Vidisti, quia reveritus fuerit Achab a facie mea? Non superducam malitiam in diebus ejus (3. Reg. 21. 29). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Bede, *De Tabernaculo et Vasus ejus, ad Vestibus Sacerdotum* 3.14 (PL 91:497): quia priusquam thymiama sui sacrosancti corporis propter salutem nostram in altari crucis [Col.0497D] incenderet, pro nostro amore etiam lacrymas fudit, quod in resuscitatione Lazari celeberrime innotuit. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)