195 To Wash (*Lavare*)

Washing is double in man, of body and soul. But washing of the body confers nothing to the cleaning of the soul, just as beauty of the body does not increase the beauty of the soul, Matt. 15[:2]: “Your disciples do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” But today many care more for the washing of the body than the soul. In truth, however that custom which was among the ancients of washing feet before they would eat, as is evident in Abraham, Gen. 18[:4]: “Wash your feet, and rest.” And in Lot, Gen. 19[:2]. It was significant that no one in this life could be worthy to the table of God nor to the rest of conscience nor to the fruition of glory unless the feet of affection had been washed. Wherefore Christ on the day before the supper washed the feet of his disciples and after he fed them, John 13[:5]. The Philosopher[[1]](#endnote-1) says that the camel has feet that are very fleshy, therefore it needs frequent washing lest the feet become infected. Thus, because our affections are very carnal, by birth we are to be washed by confession, Gen. 24[:29-32] Laban gave to his servant Abraham water for washing the feet of the camels. So, God the father gives us the water of devotion.

Therefore, according to that of Isai. 1[:16]: “Wash yourselves, be clean, take away the evil of your devices.” And Jer. 4[:14]: “Wash your heart from wickedness, O Jerusalem, that you may be saved.” And that we may have the means that we be washed, the Lord ordained for us the washing of baptism and flowing of his blood, Eph. 5[:2]: “Christ delivered himself for us,” [Eph. 5:26]: “That he might sanctify the Church, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life.” And Apo. 1[:5]: “He washed us from our sins in his own blood.” Because of which it is said Apo. 7[:14] concerning the saved “He washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” And Ezech. 40[:38]: “At a door in the forefronts of the gates: there they washed the holocaust.” The door is Christ, John 10[:7]. The stone which by the touch of uncleanness destroys its virtue and again by the washing recuperates just as is evident concerning the onyx. By how much one commits the eye thus the polluted soul ought to be washed with the water of penitence and by the memory of the passion of Christ he will recuperate the lost virtue.

Again, Moses made a washing area in the atrium of the tabernacle from the mirror of women in which the priests continually serving to carry through the mysteries had to be washed according to the Master in his *Historia* on Exod. 38[:8].[[2]](#endnote-2) The atrium is the present Church in which we ought to see our stains in the mirror of Scripture and wash them in the wash basin of penance. Wherefore also Elyseus told the leprous Naaman that he should wash himself seven times in the Jordan, 4 Kings 5[:10]. In which it is figured that one with polluted sin ought to wash himself seven times against the seven mortal sins, Lev. 13[:15] sprinkling him who is unclean seven times and this in the Jordan, that is, in seeing Jesus when he came to John to be baptized, Luke 3[:16].

¶ Again, note that whatever one should offer to God, it ought first to be washed, thus it is required in us and particularly in prelates and in clerics who should enter the temple and minister. They ought to consider and wash in the basin which is made of mirrors of women just as it is said above. The mirror shows the stains on the face which particularly must be wiped clean, Matt. 6[:17]: “Wash your face,” the reason of which is double. Because the stain in the face[[3]](#endnote-3) is more repulsive than elsewhere nor can it easily be hidden.

¶ Again, because a stain on the face is more dangerous which the judges of physiognomy say because it mostly is summed up from the face. So, because the prince in the Church or in the world is more powerful, that part in the body according to that is summed up for the whole judgment. Therefore, it is necessary that this be washed and clean according to that poetic saying,[[4]](#endnote-4) The world shapes itself after its ruler’s pattern. Wherefore it is read [Gen.] 43[:31] that Joseph before he wished to show himself to his brothers “washed his face, coming out” to them. And the cleansing acquired by washing ought to be persevering, Can. 5[:3]: “I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them.” And Eccli. 34[:10]: “He that washes himself after touching the dead, if he touches him again, what does his washing avail?” As if saying, nothing but alas, because today many would rather run after the filth of sins than to the virtue of holy matters. Just so the sow would rather run to the mud than to the flowers, 2 Pet. 2[:22]: “The dog is returned to his vomit: and, the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”

Again, note that washing out to carry away the filth, Isai. 1[:16]: “Wash yourselves, be clean.” The example of the rabbit which so often washes itself that is saved.

Again, it is accustomed to bring beauty so linen cloth is washed so that it may be whitened, Psal. [25:6]: “I will wash my hands among the innocent.” Ruth 3[:3]: “Wash yourself and anoint yourself and put on your best garments.” And Judith 10[:3]: “And she washed her body, and anointed herself with the best ointment, and adorned herself with all her ornaments.”

¶ Again, it is accustomed to encourage humility, John 13[:14]: “If then I being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet,” etc. The example of Abigail, 1 Kings 25[:41]: “Let your servant be a handmaid, to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.”

Again, the example of Peter to whom Christ said, John 13[:8-9]: “If I wash you not, you shall have no part with me. And Peter said, not only my feet,” that is, affection, “but also my hands,” work, “and my head” intention. In order that the affection be clean, the work meritorious, and the intention righteous. Judges 19[:21]: “After they had washed their feet, he entertained them with a feast.”

1. Aristotle, *History of Animals,* 2.1 499a29-30 (Barnes 1:794): The foot is fleshy underneath, like that of the bear, so that, when the animal goes to war, they protects its feet, when they get sore, with sandals. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Peter Comestor, *Historia scholastica* Exodus 70 (PL 198:1188-1189): «Locutus est iterum Dominus ad Moysen: Facies et labium aeneum cum basi sua (Exod. X),» vas scilicet lavatorium, quod etiam luter dicitur, quod erat inter tabernaculum, et altare holocaustorum, in quo missa aqua, lavabant sacerdotes manus suas et pedes, vestes sanctas accepturi, ut sacrificarent, similiter ingressu tabernaculum, et egressuri, quod dicitur factum de speculis mulierum [Col.1189A] excubantium ad ingressum tabernaculi. Forte de sedibus speculorum aeneis factum fuit. Vel potius eo facto in circuitu labii supremi circumposita fuerunt specula, in quibus sacerdos videre posset, si uspiam, vel in facie, vel in veste, maculam haberet abluendam. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. William de Lancea, *Diaetae salutis* 2.2 (8:266a): medicus Christus animarum nostarum, doceat poenitentem faciem lavare, vestes componere, caput ungere, et cor pungere, ut dicitur in *Matthaeo*. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Claudian, *Panegyric on the Fourth Consulship of the Emperor Honorius (A.D. 398)* 299-300 (LCL 135:308-309): componitur orbis / regis ad exemplum,

   The world shapes itself after its ruler’s pattern [↑](#endnote-ref-4)