113 To Sleep (*Dormire*)

Some sleep is a natural concession as a poultice of nature, just as rest is interposed as a recreation of labor, Mark 4[:38], Jesus “was in the hinder part of the ship, sleeping upon a pillow.” This sleep is delightful if it comes from sobriety, just as a proportioned object delights the senses, but excelling the sensible it corrupts, Eccli. 31[:24]: “Wholesome sleep with a man.” Against which is said in Eccle. 5[:11]: “The fullness of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.”

¶ However, sleep becomes blameworthy if it comes from a superfluity, just as is evident in the lethargic, Psal. [40:9]: “Shall he that sleeps rise again no more?” Prov. 6[:9]: “How long will you sleep, O sluggard? when will you rise out of your sleep?”

¶ Third, sleep is excusable if it comes from sadness or pregnancy, just as infirmity excuses from the law, Matt. 26[:43]: “He finds them sleeping: for their eyes were heavy.”

¶ Fourth, sleep is commendable if it comes from suitableness, just as with the infirm, after a critical day, sleep is healthful and a good sign, John 11[:12]: “If he sleeps, he shall do well.” This is against those who sleep when others are watchful, and the contrary, 1 Thes. 5[:6]: “Let us not sleep, as others do; but let us watch, and be sober.” For just as it is said in Act. 20[:9]: “Eutychus, by occasion of his sleep fell from the third loft down.” And Matt. 13[:25]: “While men were asleep, his enemy came and over-sowed cockle.” And Jonah 1[:5], while Jonah slept the ship was endangered.

But the greatest danger is to sleep among enemies, and this world is full of enemies. Wherefore, Saul sleeping lost his spear and water cup, 1 Kings 26[:11]. Thus, those here, who do not run of themselves through negligence, lose the spear of the richness of the passion and the water of devotion. Sampson sleeping lost his hair of strength, Judges 16[:19]. Thus, the negligent lose their seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. And the harlot sleeping smothered her son, 3 Kings 3[:19]. And the first one himself in riding sleeping fell dangerously, thus it is for the first in dignity if he sleeps in his cure.

¶ It is the custom in certain places, such as in the castle of the besieged, if the watch is found at night sleeping, he is thrown from the wall. Wherefore, Augustine narrates, book 2, c. 22, *De civitate*,[[1]](#endnote-1) that when the besieged Romans were sleeping, the capitol was almost captured by the Gauls, and they were awakened by the geese. Afterwards they deified them. Again, the doctors say that the sign of approaching death is when the delirious sleeps much, because thus he can fall into lethargy, but the sinner is lethargic. But the one sleeping is awakened in three ways, namely, by heat if his head is rubbed with a poultice of mustard.

¶ Again, if something stinking is placed to his nose. Again, if the hair of his head or of his beard is pulled. By these ways the sinner is awakened by the heat of love for the Lord, by the stench of detestation to sin, by the pain of contrition, John 2[:19]: “In three days I will raise it up.” In this way was Peter awakened in prison by the angel, Act. 12[:7]. Again, they who do not wish to be awakened have a hatred of a terrible sound, thus they who sleep in sins do not wish to hear the thunder of the word of God, nor the terror of the judgment of the Lord. The foolish virgins slept up to the middle of the night when the bridegroom came and because they were not prepared, they did not enter with him to the nuptials, [Matt. 25:12].

Again, note that those sleeping are accustomed to recognizing five ways[[2]](#endnote-2) for this that they might sleep more softly. The first of which is to close the door. Thus, the devil closes the mouth of the sinner lest he confess. Thus, the wolf clamps down on the throat of a beast lest it cry out.

¶ The figure for this [1] Mach. 5[:47], they obstructed the gates of the city lest Judas enter, that is, not granting him to speak. However, the devil obstructs the throat of the sinner as if with his five fingers lest he speak. Of which the first is the shame of confessing, the second is the complacency of sin, the third is the hope of a longer life, the fourth is persevering in good, and the fifth is despair of forgiveness.

Second, the sleeping one extinguishes the light. Thus, the devil darkens the light of thought lest man recognize the danger of his sin and teeth-gnashing damnation, Wis. 2[:21]: “Their own malice blinded them.” And note here that just as man easily lifts a great weight when it is in water, nor does he feel the true weight until he comes to shore. Thus, while the love of sin lasts, man does not feel the weight of sin.

¶ Third, one sleeping blocks the windows. Thus, the devil blocks the senses of man lest the light of grace enter. Because he blocks the ear lest it hear the word of God; he blocks the mouth so that it does not confess; he blocks their eyes lest they see the good.

Fourth, one restrains the household lest they do good work. For he desires to rest in a lazy place. Wherefore, it is read [Matt. 12:44]: “I will return into my house … swept.” Wherefore also note that among those sleeping in sins the more lettered sleep more deeply. Wherefore, Chrysostom says,[[3]](#endnote-3) nothing is more difficult than that I might correct that one who thinks he knows everything. Just as we see bodily that some are light sleepers and are awakened as if only by a call. Others are heavy sleepers, whom it is necessary to strike. Others are the deepest sleepers, whom it is necessary to slap or drag to this extent that they be awakened. Thus, spiritually and morally some simply sleep lightly to such an extent that they are awakened at the voice of the preacher. Others sleep more deeply so that it is necessary to strike them by rebuking or disapproving. Others sleep most deeply whom it is necessary to slap with censure.

¶ Again, there are three kinds of men for whom it is perilous to sleep: the shepherd of a flock, the pilot of a ship, the gate keeper of a besieged city. On account of the first danger Jacob said in Gen. 31[:40]: “Sleep departed from my eyes.” And Luke 2[:8]: “And there were in the same country shepherds watching … over their flock.”

¶ Concerning the second, it is said concerning the negligent superiors who are the pilots of the ship of the church, Prov. 23[:34]: “You shall be as one sleeping in the midst of the sea, and as a pilot fast asleep, when the stern is lost.”

¶ Third because the gatekeepers of a rich city and the overseers of the Church are now besieged by devils and tyrants. Wherefore also the first gatekeeper is blamed, Matt. 26[:40], Simon, are you sleeping? Which is figured in 2 Kings 4[:5-8], the doorkeeper winnowing wheat slept and thieves entered and killed Isboseth.

1. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 2.22.2 (PL 41:69-70): Sed tamen haec numinum turba ubi erat, cum longe antequam mores corrumperentui antiqui, a Gallis Roma capta et incensa est? an praesentes forte dormiebant? Tunc enim tota Urbe in hostium potestatem redacta, solus collis Capitolinus remanserat; qui etiam ipse caperetur, nisi saltem anseres diis dormientibus vigilarent. Unde pene in superstitionem Aegyptiorum bestias avesque colentium Roma deciderat, cum anseri solemnia celebrabant. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The author proceeds to give only four ways of securing a sound sleep. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Matthaeum* Homilia 40 ex cap. 21:32 (PG 56:852): Nihil autem impossibilius, quam illum corrigere, qui omnia scit, et tamen contemnens bonum, diligit malum. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)