197 Lion (*Leo*)

A lion is attentive in its natural diligence, generous in its irrational nature, virtuous in its bodily power, and condemned for its feral violence. Because of the first three the just man is compared to the lion, and because of the fourth the sinner.

However, because the lion is keenly diligent it is evident that he watches with his eyes open when he sleeps.[[1]](#endnote-1) When he is followed by hunters, he destroys his tracks with his tail lest he be captured.[[2]](#endnote-2) He looks about the earth so that he might fear less, so the just man in the state of entering upon his life looks to investigate his conscience. So, a woman looks at herself in her mirror, Can. 5[:2]: “I sleep, and my heart watches.”

Second, man destroys his tracks through contrition and confession, just as a thief throws away the object he has taken lest he be taken with it. But also, he does this with his tail, that is, the memory of his end, namely, his death, Eccli. 28[:6]: “Remember your last things,” that is, uncertain death, the judgment of the just, the pain of the damned, and the glory of the blessed, “and let enmity cease,” that is, to do away the enmity between yourself and God. These by not obeying between yourself and your neighbor, those by doing injury between the flesh and the spirit with the flesh consenting, Deut. 33[:20]: “Blessed in his breadth,” namely, charity, “Gad,” who is interpreted as the hanged thief, “he hath rested as a lion,” because after the destruction of his tracks, that is, of his sins, he rests on his bed with a pacified conscience.

Again, he considers the land of the living so that he may fear less the present labor, just as according to Gregory,[[3]](#endnote-3) a consideration of the reward lessens the power of the whip. And Num. 23[:24]: “A lion shall not lie down,” that is, the just man, “till it devours the prey,” until it eats bread in the kingdom of heaven.

Second, the lion is generous by nature because its name in Greek, lion (*leo*), means king (*rex*) in Latin,[[4]](#endnote-4) for it spares men prostrate,[[5]](#endnote-5) but it is terrible to other animals. Wherefore also in its roaring it signals its approach to another beast, so the just man in the state of setting out is mild by being submissive to the wise, Isai. 11[:7]: “The lion shall eat straw like the ox,” that is, the just man will be friendly with the just.

Again, he is merciful to the penitent, Judic. 14[:14]: “Out of the eater,” that is, out of the lion, “came forth meat,” restored by mercy.

¶ Again, he is terrible to sinners who do not want to repent, as Moses to Pharaoh, Amos 3[:8]: “Who will not fear?” Prov. 19[:12]: “As the roaring of a lion, so also is the anger of a king,” so that namely, the sinner seeing God figures the irate king, figures the approach so that he should not proceed further to sin.

¶ Again, it is virtuous in its power. For according to Isadore, book 12, *Etymologiae*,[[6]](#endnote-6) it has strength in its breast, firmness in its head, boldness in work. Wherefore also its cubs are born dead.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Third, from its roaring it thus raises them to life, thus a strong just man by the fervor of his zeal, so a house well fretted or cemented is said to be strong, Prov. 30[:30]: “A lion, the strongest of beasts, who has no fear of anything he meets.” For charity outside sends away fear, as is evident in Paul whom nothing could separate from Christ, Rom. 8[:35-39].

Again, a just man is firm in the foundation of the faith, just as a building founded upon stone. It is said to be strong, Prov. 12[:19]: “The lip of truth shall be steadfast forever.” Gen. 49[:9]: “Juda is a lion's whelp,” that is, one confessing Christ through faith.

Again, the just man is roaring with trust and hope, so the merchant labors by the hope of profit, Prov. 28[:1]: “The just, bold as a lion,” which is hunted as a prey, “shall be without dread.” In truth, however Isadore[[8]](#endnote-8) says that the lion fears the noise of wheels and fire. So, the just man fears the fire of hell and the hiss of the prophets. Wherefore the assurance of the just is composed of hope and fear not human, but divine because hope without fear ascends into presumption. Fear without hope descends into desperation because of the aforesaid matters. It is said of Judas Maccabeus as concerning the just man, 1 Macc. 3[:4]: “In his acts he was like a lion.” Apo. 5[:5]: “The lion of the tribe of Juda hath prevailed.”

Fourth, the lion is condemned for his feral violence because it can. Because it has a cruel rapacity and voraciousness, so one in sin has a cruel pride such as Pharaoh and Roboam, Eccli. 4[:35]: “Be not as a lion in thy house, terrifying them of thy household.” This lion is to be killed by tameness, in the example of David, 1 Kings 17[:36]: “I your servant have killed both a lion,” of pride, and a bear,” of sloth.” In the servant is noted humanity.

Again, the sinner has the rapacity of cupidity and avarice, Psal. [9:30]: “He lies in ambush that he may catch the poor man,” as if the lion in its cave. And Eccli. 13[:23]: “The wild ass is the lion's prey in the desert: so also, the poor are devoured by the rich.” This lion is to be killed by the freedom of mercy. In the example of Banaias, 1 Paral. 11[:22]: “Banaias killed a lion amid a pit in the time of snow.”

Third, it has the voraciousness of gluttony just as at the banquet of the rich, Luke 16[:19]. And just like Nabil, 1 Kings 25[:11]. For in 1 Pet. 5[:8] it is said, “Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion,” etc. This lion is to be killed by the strength of abstinence. In the example of Sampson, Judic. 14[:6]: “He tore the lion as he would have torn a kid in pieces, having nothing at all in his hand.” Therefore, the Psal. [21:22]: “Save me from the lion's mouth.”

Again, Christ is compared to the lion because of three matters. Because of his clemency, because he spares the prostrate,[[9]](#endnote-9) so Christ does for those confessing. Second because the lion destroys his tracks with his tail,[[10]](#endnote-10) so Christ keeps his secrets up to the final judgment. Third because he permits the captives he meets to be repatriated,[[11]](#endnote-11) so Christ does for the contrite.

1. Cf. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.2.5 (PL 82:434): Cum dormierint, vigilant oculi; cum ambulant, cauda sua cooperiunt vestigia sua, ne eos venator inveniat. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.2.5 (PL 82:434): cum ambulant, cauda sua cooperiunt vestigia sua, ne eos venator inveniat. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Gregory, *Moralia* 3.33.64 (PL 75:631): Et rursum consideratio munerum cogitationis asperae impatientiam refrenet, dicens: Si bona accepimus de manu Domini, mala quare non sustineamus? [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.2.3 (PL 82:434): Leo autem Graece, Latine rex interpretatur, eo quod princeps sit omnium bestiarum. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.2.6 (PL 82:434): Circa hominem leonum natura est benigna, ut nisi laesi nequeant irasci. Patet enim eorum misericordia exemplis assiduis. Prostratis enim parcunt; [Col.0434C] captivos obvios repatriare permittunt; hominem non nisi in magna fame interimunt. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.2.4 (PL 82:434): Virtus eorum in pectore, firmitas in capite. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 10.83.176-177 (LCL 353:404-405): haec inchoatos, in quo sunt genere leaenae, ursae; et vulpes informe etiam magis quam supradicta parit, rarumque est videre parientem. postea lambendo calefaciunt fetus omnia ea et figurant.

these produce them unfinished—in this class being lionesses and bears; and a fox bears its young in an even more unfinished state than the species above-mentioned, and it is rare to see one in the act of giving birth. Afterwards all these species warm their offspring and shape them by licking them. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.2.4 (PL 82:434): Rotarum timent strepitus, sed ignes magis. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 8.19.48 (LCL 353:36-37): Leoni tantum ex feris clementia in supplices; prostratis parcit, et, ubi saevit, in viros potius quam in feminas fremit, in infantes non nisi magna fame.

The lion alone of wild animals shows mercy to suppliants; it spares persons prostrated front of it, and when raging it turns its fury on men rather than women, and only attacks children when extremely hungry. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Cf. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.2.5 (PL 82:434): cum ambulant, cauda sua cooperiunt vestigia sua, ne eos venator inveniat. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Cf. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.2.6 (PL 82:434): captivos obvios repatriare permittunt. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)