

Banquet of the Ten Virgins (Discourse 1) – St. Methodius of O

1 Chapter 1. The Difficulty and Excellence of Virginity; The Study of Doctrine 2 Necessary for Virgins.

3 Virginity is something supernaturally great, wonderful, and [glorious](#); and, to speak
4 plainly and in accordance with the [Holy Scriptures](#), this best and noblest manner of
5 life alone is the root of [immortality](#), and also its flower and [first-fruits](#); and for this
6 reason the Lord promises that those shall enter into the [kingdom of heaven](#) who
7 have made themselves eunuchs, in that passage [Matthew 19:12¹](#) of the [Gospels](#) in
8 which He lays down the various reasons for which men have made themselves
9 eunuchs. Chastity with men is a very rare thing, and difficult of attainment, and in
10 proportion to its supreme excellence and magnificence is the greatness of its
11 dangers.

12 For this reason, it requires strong and generous natures, such as, vaulting over the
13 stream of pleasure, direct the chariot of the [soul](#) upwards from the earth, not
14 turning aside from their aim, until having, by swiftness of thought, lightly bounded
15 above the world, and taken their stand [truly](#) upon the vault of heaven, they purely
16 contemplate [immortality](#) itself as it springs forth from the undefiled bosom of the
17 Almighty.

¹ Matthew 19:10-12, "The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, its not expedient to marry." But he said to them, "Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been sp from birth, and tjere are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs bu men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He ho is able to receive this, let him receive it.""

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18 Earth could not bring forth this draught; heaven alone [knew](#) the fountain from
19 whence it flows; for we must think of [virginity](#) as walking indeed upon the earth,
20 but as also reaching up to heaven. And hence some who have longed for it, and
21 considering only the end of it, have come, by reason of coarseness of [mind](#),
22 ineffectually with unwashed feet, and have gone aside out of the way, from having
23 conceived no worthy idea of the *virginal* manner of life. For it is not enough to
24 keep the body only undefiled, just as we should not show that we think more of the
25 temple than of the image of the god; but we should care for the [souls](#) of men as
26 being the divinities of their bodies, and adorn them with righteousness. And then
27 do they most care for them and tend them when, striving untiringly to hear divine
28 discourses, they do not desist until, wearing the doors of the wise, [Sirach 6:36](#) they
29 attain to the [knowledge](#) of the [truth](#).

30 For as the putrid humours² and matter of flesh, and all those things which corrupt
31 it, are driven out by [salt](#), in the same manner all the irrational appetites of
32 a [virgin](#) are banished from the body by divine teaching. For it must needs be that
33 the [soul](#) which is not sprinkled with the words of [Christ](#), as with [salt](#), should stink
34 and breed worms, as King David, openly confessing with tears in the mountains,
35 cried out, “My wounds stink and are corrupt” [[Ps 38:6](#)], because he had not salted
36 himself with the exercises of self-control, and so subdued his carnal appetites, but

² Putrid desires: decayed or rotting desires (distractions from the kingdom)

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37 self-indulgently had yielded to them, and became corrupted in [adultery](#). And
38 hence, in Leviticus, [Leviticus 2:13](#)³; [[Mark 9:48](#)] every gift, unless it be seasoned
39 with [salt](#), is forbidden to be offered as an oblation to the Lord God. Now the whole
40 spiritual meditation of the [Scriptures](#) is given to us as [salt](#) which stings in order to
41 benefit, and which disinfects, without which it is impossible for a [soul](#), by means
42 of reason, to be brought to the Almighty; for you are the [salt](#) of the
43 earth, [Matthew 5:13](#) said the Lord to the [apostles](#). It is fitting, then, that
44 a [virgin](#) should always [love](#) things which are [honourable](#), and be distinguished
45 among the foremost for wisdom and addicted to nothing [slothful](#) or luxurious, but
46 should excel, and set her mind upon things worthy of the state of [virginity](#), always
47 putting away, by the word, the foulness of luxury, lest in any way some slight
48 hidden corruption should breed the worm of incontinence; for the
49 unmarried [woman](#) cares for the things of the Lord, how she may please the
50 Lord, that she may be [holy](#) both in body and in spirit, [1 Corinthians 7:34](#) says
51 the [blessed Paul](#). But many of them who consider the hearing of the word quite a
52 secondary matter, think they do great things if they give their attention to it for a
53 little while. But discrimination must be exercised with respect to these; for it is not
54 fitting to impart divine instruction to a nature which is careful about trifles⁴, and

³ "You shall season your cereal offerings with salt; you shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be lacking from you cereal offering; with all your offering you shall offer salt."

⁴ Small or insignificant – meaning here more care is spent on these things than more important things

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55 low⁵, and which counterfeits wisdom. For would it not be laughable to go on
56 talking to those who direct all their energy towards things of little value, in order
57 that they may complete most accurately those things which they want to bring to
58 perfection, but do not think that the greatest pains are to be taken with those
59 necessary things by which most of all the [love](#) of [chastity](#) would be increased in
60 them?

61 **Chapter 2. Virginité a Plant from Heaven, Introduced Late; The** 62 **Advancement of Mankind to Perfection, How Arranged.**

63 For [truly](#) by a great stretch of power the plant of [virginité](#) was sent down to men
64 from heaven, and for this reason it was not revealed to the first generations. For the
65 race of [mankind](#) was still very small in number; and it was necessary that it should
66 first be increased in number, and then brought to perfection. Therefore the men of
67 old times thought it nothing unseemly to take their own sisters for wives, until the
68 law coming separated them, and by forbidding that which at first had seemed to be
69 right, declared it to be a [sin](#), calling him cursed who should uncover the
70 nakedness of his sister; God thus mercifully bringing to our race the needful help
71 in due season, as [parents](#) do to their children. For they do not at once set masters
72 over them, but allow them, during the period of childhood, to amuse themselves

⁵ Base or uncoth

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73 like young animals, and first send them to teachers stammering like themselves,
74 until they cast off the youthful wool of the [mind](#), and go onwards to the practice of
75 greater things, and from thence again to that of greater still. And thus we must
76 consider that the God and Father of all acted towards our forefathers. For the
77 world, while still unfilled with men, was like a child, and it was necessary that it
78 should first be filled with these, and so grow to manhood. But when hereafter it
79 was colonized from end to end, the race of man spreading to a boundless extent,
80 God no longer allowed man to remain in the same ways, considering how they
81 might now proceed from one point to another, and advance nearer to heaven, until,
82 having attained to the very greatest and most exalted lesson of [virginity](#), they
83 should reach to perfection; that first they should abandon the intermarriage of
84 brothers and sisters, and marry wives from other [families](#); and then that they
85 should no longer have many wives, like brute beasts, as though born for the mere
86 propagation of the species; and then that they should not be adulterers; and then
87 again that they should go on to continence, and from continence to [virginity](#), when,
88 having trained themselves to despise the flesh, they sail fearlessly into the peaceful
89 haven of [immortality](#).

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90 **Chapter 3. By the Circumcision of Abraham, Marriage with Sisters**
91 **Forbidden; In the Times of the Prophets Polygamy Put a Stop To; Conjugal**
92 **Purity Itself by Degrees Enforced.**

93 If, however, any one should venture to find fault with our argument as destitute of
94 Scripture [proof](#), we will bring forward the writings of the [prophets](#), and more fully
95 demonstrate the [truth](#) of the statements already made. Now [Abraham](#), when he first
96 received the covenant of [circumcision](#), seems to signify, by
97 receiving [circumcision](#) in a member of his own body, nothing else than this, that
98 one should no longer beget children with one born of the same parent; showing
99 that every one should abstain from intercourse with his own sister, as his own
100 flesh. And thus, from the time of [Abraham](#), the custom of marrying with sisters has
101 ceased; and from the times of the [prophets](#) the contracting of marriage with several
102 wives has been done away with; for we read, Go not after your [lusts](#), but refrain
103 yourself from your appetites; [Sirach 18:30](#) for wine and [women](#) will make men of
104 understanding to fall away; [Sirach 19:2](#) and in another place, Let your fountain be
105 blessed; and [rejoice](#) with the wife of your youth, [Proverbs 5:18](#) manifestly
106 forbidding a plurality of wives. And Jeremiah clearly gives the name of fed

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107 horses [Jeremiah 5:8⁶](#) to those who [lust](#) after other [women](#); and we read, The
108 multiplying brood of the ungodly shall not thrive, nor take deep rooting from
109 bastard slips⁷, nor lay any fast foundation. [Wisdom 4:3](#)

110 Lest, however, we should seem prolix⁸ in collecting the testimonies of
111 the [prophets](#), let us again point out how [chastity](#) succeeded to marriage with one
112 wife, taking away by degrees the [lusts](#) of the flesh, until it removed entirely the
113 inclination for sexual intercourse engendered by habit. For presently one is
114 introduced earnestly deprecating, from henceforth, this seduction, saying, “O Lord,
115 Father, and Governor of my life, leave me not to their counsels; give me not
116 a [proud](#) look; let not the greediness of the belly, nor [lust](#) of the flesh, take hold of
117 me.” [[Sir 23:4-6](#)]⁹ And in the Book of Wisdom, a book full of all [virtue](#), the [Holy](#)
118 [Spirit](#), now openly drawing His hearers to continence and [chastity](#), sings on this
119 wise, “Better it is to have no children, and to have [virtue](#), for the memorial thereof
120 is [immortal](#); because it is [known](#) with God and with men. When it is present men
121 take example at it; and when it is gone they desire it: it wears a crown and triumphs
122 for ever, having gotten the victory, striving for undefiled rewards.” [Wisdom 4:1-2](#)

⁶ Jeremiah 5:7-9, “How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken me, and have sworn by those who are no gods. When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery and trooped to the houses of harlots. They were well-fed stallions, each neighing for his neighbor’s wife. Shall I not punish them for these things?”

⁷ “Bastard slips”: illegitimate seedlings; children out of wedlock.

⁸ Tediously prolonged or wordy; excessive argument especially written

⁹ **The author, to grow in Wisdom, prays for the Cardinal Virtues: Prudence Fortitude, Justice and Temperance.**
[Source: Didache Bible footnote on Sir 23:1-6]

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123 **Chapter 4. Christ Alone Taught Virginity, Openly Preaching the Kingdom of**
124 **Heaven; The Likeness of God to Be Attained in the Light of the Divine**
125 **Virtues.**

126 We have already spoken of the periods of the [human race](#), and how, beginning
127 with the intermarriage of brothers and sisters, it went on to continence; and we
128 have now left for us the subject of [virginity](#). Let us then endeavour to speak of this
129 as well as we can. And first let us inquire for what reason it was that no one of the
130 many patriarchs and [prophets](#) and righteous men, who taught and did many noble
131 things, either praised or chose the state of [virginity](#). Because it was reserved for the
132 Lord alone to be the first to teach this doctrine, since He alone, coming down to us,
133 taught man to draw near to [God](#); for it was fitting that He who was first and chief
134 of [priests](#), of [prophets](#), and of [angels](#), should also be saluted as first and chief
135 of [virgins](#). For in old times man was not yet perfect, and for this reason was unable
136 to receive perfection, which is [virginity](#). For, being made in the *Image* of [God](#), he
137 needed to receive that which was according to His *Likeness*; which the Word being
138 sent down into the world to perfect. He first took upon Him our form, disfigured as
139 it was by many [sins](#), in order that we, for whose sake He bore it, might be able
140 again to receive the divine *form*. For it is then that we are [truly](#) fashioned in the
141 likeness of [God](#), when we represent His features in a [human](#) life, like skilful

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142 painters, stamping them upon ourselves as upon tablets, learning the path which He
143 showed us. And for this reason He, being [God](#), was pleased to put on [human](#) flesh,
144 so that we, beholding as on a tablet the divine Pattern of our life, should also be
145 able to imitate Him who painted it. For He was not one who, thinking one thing,
146 did another; nor, while He considered one thing to be right, taught another. But
147 whatever things were [truly](#) useful and right, these He both taught and did.

148 **Chapter 5. Christ, by Preserving His Flesh In-Corrupt in Virginit**
149 **y, Draws to the Exercise of Virginit**
150 **y; The Small Number of Virgins in Proportion to the**
151 **Number of Saints.**

151 What then did the Lord, who is the Truth and the Light, take in hand when He
152 came down from heaven? He preserved the flesh which He had taken upon Him
153 incorrupt in [virginit](#)y, so that we also, if we world come to the likeness
154 of [God](#) and [Christ](#), should endeavour to [honour virginit](#)y. For the likeness of God is
155 the avoiding of corruption. And that the Word, when He was incarnate, became
156 chief Virgin, in the same way as He was chief Shepherd and chief Prophet of
157 the [Church](#), the Christ-possessed John shows us, saying, in the Book of the
158 Revelation, “And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with Him
159 an hundred forty and four thousand, having His name and His Father's name
160 written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many

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161 waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and I heard the voice of harpers harping
162 with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before
163 the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred
164 and forty and four thousand¹⁰, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they
165 which were not defiled with [women](#); for they are [virgins](#)¹¹. These are they who
166 follow the Lamb wherever He goes;” [Revelation 14:1-4](#) showing that the Lord is
167 leader of the [choir](#) of [virgins](#). And remark, in addition to this, how very great in the
168 sight of [God](#) is the dignity of [virginity](#): “These were redeemed from among [men](#),
169 being the [first-fruits](#) unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no
170 guile: for they are without fault,” [Revelation 14:4-5](#) he says, and they follow the
171 Lamb wherever He goes. And he clearly intends by this to teach us that the number
172 of [virgins](#) was, from the beginning, restricted to so many, namely, a hundred and
173 forty and four thousand, while the multitude of the other [saints](#) is innumerable. For
174 let us consider what he means when discoursing of the rest. “I beheld a great
175 multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people,
176 and tongues.” [Revelation 7:9](#) It is plain, therefore, as I said, that in the case of the

¹⁰ A hundred forty four thousand: the number of the tribes of Israel [and the apostles] squared and then multiplied by a thousand, **signifying completeness** (144x1000) [Source: Ignatius Study Bible]

¹¹ This probably has two levels of meaning. (1) The assembly is made of of celebrate men whose *bodies* have never been given to women. (2) The assembly is made up of holy men whose *souls* have not been defiled by the impurities of the harlot city (Rev: 17:1-6; 18:3) See CCC 1618 & 1619. **“The Lamb walks the way virginity. Follow him there, you virgins, for on this count you follow him wherever he goes...the masses of the faithful, unable to follow the Lamb to this blessing, will rejoice with you; but they will not be able to sing that new song which is for you alone.”** (St. Augustine, On Holy Virginity 29) [Source: Ignatius Study Bible]

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177 other [saints](#) he introduces an unspeakable multitude, while in the case of those who
178 are in a state of [virginity](#) he mentions only a very small number, so as to make a
179 strong contrast with those who make up the innumerable number.

180 This, O Arete¹², is my discourse to you on the subject of [virginity](#). But, if I have
181 omitted anything, let Theophila¹³, who succeeds me, supply the omission.

182 [The 11 Discourses end in Chapter 2, called Arete (Virtue), with a hymn which
183 ought be called the “Ode to Biblical Virginity”. Click [Here](#) if you would like to
184 read this beautify hymn.]

¹² Meaning: “Virtue”

¹³ Meaning: “Loved by God”