

## Homily 27 Numbers 33:1-49

### *Concerning the stages of the sons of Israel.*

1.1. When God founded the world, he created innumerable different kinds of foods. This was owing to the diversities that exist, either of human desire or in the nature of animals. Not only is this the reason why, when a man sees the food of animals, he knows that it was created not for him but for the animals; but the animals themselves know their own food, and, for example, the lion uses certain foods, the deer, others, the ox, others, and birds, others. Moreover, among human beings there are certain differences in the foods that are sought, and one person, who is quite healthy and strong in his physical constitution, requires strong food and he "believes and has confidence to eat all things."<sup>1</sup> He is like a very strong athlete. But if someone feels that he is rather weak and without strength, he enjoys vegetables and does not receive strong food owing to his own weakness. Now if someone is an infant, even though he cannot indicate this with his voice, still in reality he seeks no other nourishment than that of milk. And so, each individual, whether owing to age or strength or the health of his body, longs for food suitable to himself and corresponding to his strength.

1.2. If you have considered this illustration from physical realities sufficiently, let us now move on from these things to the understanding of spiritual things. Every rational nature needs to be nourished by foods that are proper to it and that correspond to it. Now the true food of a rational nature is the Word<sup>2</sup> of God. But just as in the nourishment of the body, we have just granted many differences, this also applies to the rational nature, which feeds, as we have said, on reason and the Word<sup>3</sup> of God. Not every nature is nourished by one and the same

Word. That is why, as in the physical illustration, the food some have in the Word of God is milk,<sup>4</sup> that is, the clearer and simpler doctrine. This normally consists in moral instruction, which is customarily given to those who are starting out in divine studies and who are receiving the first elements of a rational education.

1.3. And so, when some such reading from the divine books is recited, in which there seems to be nothing obscure, they gladly receive it, for example, the brief books of Esther, Judith or even Tobit, or the precepts of the book of Wisdom. But if the book of Leviticus is read to him, his mind immediately stumbles and he flees from it as from something that is not his own food. For the one who had come to learn how to worship God and how to receive his commandments concerning justice and piety, hears precepts given about sacrifices and the rites taught that concern immolation. Why should one not immediately turn away from what is heard and, so to speak, refuse the food as not suitable for him?

1.4. Moreover, when the Gospels or the apostle or the Psalms are read, another person joyfully receives them, gladly embraces them, and rejoices in gathering from them, as it were, certain remedies for his weakness. But if the book of Numbers is read to him, and especially those passages which we now have in hand, he will judge that there is nothing advantageous, nothing as a remedy for his weakness or that will benefit the salvation of his soul. Instead, he will immediately reject it and spit it out, as heavy and burdensome foods and as those that are not suitable to a sick and weak soul. But if I may return to the illustration from the physical world, if understanding were given to a lion, for example, he will not immediately blame the abundance of grasses that has been created, because he himself feeds on raw meat, nor will he say that they were made by the Creator need-

Homily 27 <sup>1</sup>Rom 14:2. <sup>2</sup>Lat *sermo*. <sup>3</sup>Lat *verbum*. <sup>4</sup>Cf. 1 Cor 3:2.

lessly, because he does not use them as food; neither should a human being, because he uses bread and other nourishment suitable to him, blame God for making snakes, which apparently supply food for deer. Nor should the sheep or the ox, for example, find fault with the fact that it has been given to other animals to feed on meat, though for them grasses alone suffice for them to eat.

1.5. Now it is just the same way in the case of rational food, I mean that of the divine books. One should not immediately blame or reject a Scripture which appears rather difficult or obscure to understand, or which appears to contain things that cannot be used by the beginner and infant,<sup>5</sup> by the one who is weaker,<sup>6</sup> by those who are less strong in understanding all things, and who thinks that nothing applies to him that is useful or health-bringing. Rather, one should consider that, just as God's creation consists in snakes, sheep, human beings and straw, and the very diversity of these things points to the praise and glory of the Creator, because they either supply food or take in food in a suitable and timely fashion for each of those for whom they were created; so also each individual, insofar as he perceives himself healthy and strong, takes in all these things, which are the words of God, and in which there is different food according to the capacity of the souls.

1.6. Now if we inquire quite carefully, for example, into the reading of the Gospel or into the apostolic instruction in which things you seem to take delight and in which you reckon is found the food most suitable and agreeable to you, how many are the things that have escaped your notice, if you investigate and thoroughly scrutinize the Lord's commands? But if what seems obscure and difficult must be immediately shunned and avoided, you will find so many obscure and difficult things even in the passages about which you are very confident,

such that, if you hold to this judgment, you will be forced likewise to give them up. Yet there are very many things in these [writings] that are spoken openly and simply enough to edify the hearer of limited intelligence.

1.7. Now we have said these things first in the preface to stir up your minds, since we have in hand a reading of this sort, one that is hard to understand and seems superfluous to read. But we cannot say of the Holy Spirit's writings that there is anything useless or superfluous in them, even if they seem obscure to some. But what we need to do instead is to turn the eyes of our mind toward him who ordered this to be written and to ask him for an understanding of these things, so that if there is weakness in our soul, he who "heals all its illnesses"<sup>7</sup> may heal us; or if we are of limited intelligence, the Lord may be with us, guarding his children, and may nourish us and lead us to the "measure of age."<sup>8</sup> For both are within us: to attain health from our weakness and to the age of maturity<sup>9</sup> from our childhood. But it is up to us to ask this of God. Yet it belongs to God to "give to those who ask and to open to those who knock."<sup>10</sup> Let this be enough for the preface.

2.1. Now let us come to the beginning of the reading that has been recited, so that with the Lord's help we may be able to summarize the main points and explain their meaning, even though we may not expect total clarity. Well then, it says: "These are the stages<sup>11</sup> of the sons of Israel, from when they went forth out of the land of Egypt with their power<sup>12</sup> by the hand of Moses and Aaron. And Moses wrote down their starting places<sup>13</sup> and stages by the Word of the Lord,"<sup>14</sup> and so on. You have heard that Moses wrote these things down "by the Word of the Lord." Why did the Lord want these things to be written down? Was it so that this passage in Scripture about the stages the sons of Israel made might benefit us in some way, or

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Heb 5:13. <sup>6</sup>Cf. Rom 14:2. <sup>7</sup>Ps 103:3. <sup>8</sup>Cf. Eph 4:13. <sup>9</sup>Lit. "manhood." <sup>10</sup>Cf. Mt 7:7. <sup>11</sup>Lit. *mansiones*. <sup>12</sup>Lit. *virtus*. <sup>13</sup>Lit. *profectiones*. <sup>14</sup>Num 33:1-2.

that it would bring us no benefit? Who would dare to say that what is written "by the Word of God" is of no use and makes no contribution to our salvation, but merely narrates an event that happened, and which, to be sure, passed on by back then, but now pertains in no way to us when it is related? This opinion is impious and foreign to the catholic faith. It belongs only to those who deny that the one and only wise God of the Law and the Gospels is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>15</sup> So let us attempt, in a summary fashion, so far as time allows, to investigate what a faithful interpretation should understand from these stages.

2.2. Now when the discussion above gave us the opportunity of speaking about the departure<sup>16</sup> of the sons of Israel from Egypt,<sup>17</sup> we said that in a spiritual sense there can be seen a double exodus from Egypt, either when we leave our pagan life and come to the knowledge of the divine law, or when the soul leaves its dwelling place in the body. Therefore, these stages, which Moses now describes "by the Word of the Lord," have both in view.

2.3. For to be sure it is concerning those stages in which the soul, divested of the body, or rather, clothed again with its own body, will dwell, that the Lord declared in the Gospel by saying: "With my Father are many stages;<sup>18</sup> otherwise I would have told you: I am going to prepare a stage for you."<sup>19</sup> So then, these are the many stages that lead to the Father. And for each of them, what the reason is, what advantage comes to the soul by its sojourn there, or what instruction or enlightenment one receives, is something only the Father of the future world knows,<sup>20</sup> who says of himself: "I am the door."<sup>21</sup> "No one comes to the Father except through me."<sup>22</sup> Perhaps he will become the door for each soul in each of the different stages, so that it may enter through him and go out through him

and find pasture,<sup>23</sup> and then again enter another stage and from there another, until it reaches the Father himself.

But suddenly we have nearly forgotten our preface and have raised your hearing to lofty heights. Let us then, by all means, return to what happens among us and in us.

2.4. The sons of Israel were in Egypt; they were being afflicted with mortar and brick for the works of Pharaoh the king,<sup>24</sup> until they groaned and cried out to the Lord.<sup>25</sup> And he heard their groaning and sent his Word to them by Moses and led them out of Egypt. And we, then, when we were in Egypt, I mean in the errors of this world and in the darkness of ignorance, by doing the works of the devil in lusts and pleasures of the flesh, the Lord had pity on our affliction<sup>26</sup> and sent the Word, his only-begotten Son,<sup>27</sup> who brought us forth, snatched from the ignorance of error to the light of the divine law.

3.1. But first of all consider the reason of the mystery. If one observes it carefully, he will find in the Scriptures that there were forty-two stages in the departure of the sons of Israel from Egypt; and, further, the coming of our Lord and Savior into this world is traced through forty-two generations. For this is what the Evangelist Matthew records when he says: "From Abraham to David the king, fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation of Babylon, fourteen generations, and from the deportation of Babylon to Christ, fourteen generations."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, those who ascend from Egypt make forty-two stages, the same number as these forty-two stages of generations that Christ made when he descended to the Egypt of this world.

And Moses has recorded this quite carefully when he says: "The sons of Israel ascended with their power."<sup>29</sup> What is their "power" unless it is Christ himself, who is the "power of God"?<sup>30</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Rom 15:4, 6. This statement is directed against Marcion. <sup>16</sup>Lat *profectio*. <sup>17</sup>Cf. Homily 26.4.1-2. <sup>18</sup>Lat *mansiones*. <sup>19</sup>Jn 14:2. <sup>20</sup>Cf. Is 9:6. <sup>21</sup>Jn 10:9. <sup>22</sup>Jn 14:6. <sup>23</sup>Cf. Jn 10:9. <sup>24</sup>Cf. Ex 1:14. <sup>25</sup>Cf. Ex 2:23. <sup>26</sup>Cf. Ex 3:7. <sup>27</sup>Cf. 1 Jn 4:9. <sup>28</sup>Mt 1:17. <sup>29</sup>Lat *virtus*. Num 33:1. <sup>30</sup>1 Cor 1:24.

Thus the one who ascends, ascends with him who descended from there to us, so that he can reach the place from which that one descended, not by compulsion, but by dignity, so that what was spoken might be true, that: "He who descended is the one who also ascended."<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, the sons of Israel by forty-two stages reach the beginning of the taking their inheritance. In fact the beginning of the taking the inheritance was when Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh receive the land of Gilead.<sup>32</sup> And so the number of Christ's descent is established through forty-two fathers according to the flesh, as through forty-two stages of one who is descending to us. And the ascent of the sons of Israel up to the beginning of the promised inheritance is established through the same number of stages.

3.2. If you have understood how great a mystery that number of the descent and ascent contains, come now and let us begin to ascend through the things by which Christ descended and make that first stage, which he made last of all, namely, when he was born of the Virgin. And let this be the first stage for us who wish to go out of Egypt. In it we abandoned the cult of idols and the worship of demons—not gods—and believed that Christ was born of the Virgin and the Holy Spirit, and that the Word made flesh came into this world.<sup>33</sup> After this, let us now strive to go forward and to ascend one by one each of the steps<sup>34</sup> of faith and the virtues. If we dwell in them for such a long time until we come to perfection, we will be said to have made a stage at each of the steps of the virtues until, when we reach the height of our instruction and the summit of our progress, the promised inheritance is fulfilled.

4.1. Moreover, when the soul sets out from the Egypt of this life to head for the Promised Land, it necessarily goes by certain ways and, as we have said, carries out certain fixed stages. I

think the prophet was mindful of this when he said: "I remembered these things, and I poured out my soul on me, since I would depart for the place of the admirable tabernacle, up to the house of God."<sup>35</sup> Those stages and those tabernacles are what he speaks of in another place: "How lovely are your tabernacles, O Lord of the virtues!"<sup>36</sup> My soul longs and faints for the courts of the Lord."<sup>37</sup> For that reason the same prophet says in another passage: "My soul has sojourned much."<sup>38</sup> So understand, if you can, what these sojourns of the soul are, in which it laments with a certain groaning and grief that it has been sojourning for too long. But the understanding of these things is faint and obscured, so long as it is still sojourning. But when the soul has returned to its rest, that is, to its homeland in paradise, it will be taught more truly and will understand more truly what the meaning of its sojourn was. The prophet viewed this under a mystery and said: "Return, my soul, to your rest; for the Lord has done good to you."<sup>39</sup>

But for the time being the soul sojourns and makes a journey and makes stages, doubtless being governed by means of these stages through the providential oversight of God for the sake of some advantage, as is said in one passage: "I have afflicted you, and fed you with manna in the desert, which your fathers did not know, so that what is in your heart might be made known."<sup>40</sup> So these are the stages by which the journey from earth to heaven is made.

4.2. Who will be found so capable and aware of the divine secrets, who can describe the stages of that journey and the ascent of the soul and explain the toils and resting places of each location? For how will one explain that after the first, second and third stage, Pharaoh is still in pursuit? That the Egyptians are in pursuit? And that, granting they do not catch them, nevertheless they keep on pursuing? And, granting

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Eph 4:8-10. <sup>32</sup>Cf. Josh 17:5-6. <sup>33</sup>Cf. Jn 1:1, 9, 14. <sup>34</sup>Lat *gradus*. <sup>35</sup>Ps 42:4. <sup>36</sup>Lat *virtutes*. Or "powers." <sup>37</sup>Ps 84:1-2. <sup>38</sup>Ps 119:6 LXX (120:6 RSV). <sup>39</sup>Ps 116:7. <sup>40</sup>Deut 8:2-3.

they were drowned, yet they did conduct a pursuit? How will one express the significance of the fact that the people of God, who had been saved only after a few stages, first sang the song, saying: "Let us sing to the Lord, for he has been honored gloriously; he has thrown the horse and rider into the sea"?<sup>41</sup> But, as I have said, I do not know who would dare to explain the stages one by one and also to make conjectures about the characteristics of the stages by considering their names. Nor do I know if the understanding of the one who is speaking is equal to the weight of the mysteries, or if the hearing of the listeners is capable of understanding.

4.3. For how will one explain the encounter of war with the Amalekites, or the different temptations, and how will one tell about those whose "limbs fell in the desert,"<sup>42</sup> and that not all the sons of Israel absolutely, but the sons of the sons of Israel were able to reach the holy land? And [how will one explain] that that entire ancient people, whose life and dwelling had been with the Egyptians, fell; but only a new people that did not know the Egyptians reached the kingdom, with the exception of the priests and the Levites? For if anyone could find a place in the order of priests and Levites, if anyone could have no portion in the lands but the Lord himself, that one does not "fall in the desert," but reaches the Promised Land. This is why, if you do not wish to fall in the desert, but to reach the promises of the fathers, you should not have your allotment on the earth, nor should you have anything in common with earth. Let your portion be the Lord alone, and you will never fall. Therefore, the ascent from Egypt to the Promised Land is carried out, through which, as I have said, we are taught in mysterious descriptions the ascent of the soul to heaven and the mystery<sup>43</sup> of the resurrection from the dead.

5.1. Now names are recorded for the stages.

For it did not seem befitting that every other place under heaven, that is, mountains, valleys and fields, should make use of names, but that the ascent by which the soul ascends to the kingdom of God should not have names for its stages. The stages of the ascent bear names that have been adapted to the mysterious themes; and it has as its guide not Moses—for he did not know where he was going<sup>44</sup>—but the pillar of fire and the cloud,<sup>45</sup> that is, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit, just as the prophet says in another place: "The Lord himself was leading them."<sup>46</sup> Such, then, will be the ascent of the blessed soul, when all the Egyptians have been drowned, and the Amalekites and all who had attacked it [perish]. And by passing through each of the different stages, that is, those "many [stages]"<sup>47</sup> that are said to be with the Father, it will be more fully enlightened, and going from one to another, it constantly gains greater increases in its enlightenment, until it grows accustomed to endure looking on the "true light" itself, "which enlightens every man,"<sup>48</sup> and bears the splendor of its true majesty.

5.2. But if we go back to the second explanation that we mentioned above, we shall understand that the stages point to the progress of the soul when placed in this life, which, after its conversion from a pagan life, it follows not so much Moses as the law of God, and not so much Aaron as that priest who remains forever.<sup>49</sup> Before it comes to perfection, it dwells in the wilderness, where, of course, it is trained in the commandments of the Lord and where its faith is tested by temptations. And when it conquers one temptation and its faith has been proved by it, from there it goes to another one; and it passes as it were from one stage to another; and then, when it prevails over the things that have happened and endures them faithfully, it moves on to another stage. And thus, the progress through each of the tempta-

<sup>41</sup>Ex 15:1. <sup>42</sup>Num 14:32; 1 Cor 10:5. <sup>43</sup>*Lat sacramentum*. <sup>44</sup>Cf. Heb 11:8, where the words refer to Abraham. <sup>45</sup>Cf. Ex 13:21. <sup>46</sup>Ps 78:14; cf. Deut 1:32-33. <sup>47</sup>Cf. Jn 14:2. <sup>48</sup>Cf. Jn 1:9. <sup>49</sup>Cf. Heb 6:20.

tions of life and faith will be said to have stages, in which increases in virtues are acquired one by one, and what is written is fulfilled: "They will go from virtue to virtue,"<sup>50</sup> until the soul reaches its final end, or rather, the highest degree of the virtues, and it crosses the river of God and receives the promised inheritance.

6.1. And so, by using a twofold manner of explanation, we should consider this entire sequence of stages which has been read aloud, so that progress may come to our soul from both, when we learn from them both how this life that has turned from error and follows the law of God ought to be led, and how great an expectation we have of the future hope that is promised on the basis of the resurrection.<sup>51</sup> For in this way I think that an interpretation worthy of the laws of the Holy Spirit may be taught in regard to what is read. For what benefit is there in my knowing the location in the desert which is said to be, for example, where the sons of Israel camped as they were passing through? Or what progress is conferred on those who read and who "meditate on the law of God day and night,"<sup>52</sup> especially since we see what great care the Lord took in describing these stages in detail, so that their description was inserted this second time in the divine laws? For those names were already mentioned, granted with some differences, at that time when the sons of Israel are said to have lifted up through each different place from that place, and to have camped at that place. And now, again through the Word of the Lord, they are commanded to be recorded by Moses. And for the very reason that this description is repeated a second time, it seems to me to correspond well with the mystery of this explanation that we have proposed. For they are repeated twice in order to show two ways for the soul: one by which the soul placed in flesh trains itself in the virtues through the law of God, and by ascending through certain steps

of progression it goes, as we have said, "from virtue to virtue," and uses these progressions as stages as it were. But the other way is the way by which the soul, when it is about to ascend to heaven after the resurrection, neither suddenly nor unseasonably, ascends to the heights, but it is led through "many stages,"<sup>53</sup> through which it is enlightened stage by stage, and it always receives an increase of splendor, illumined at each stage by the light of wisdom, until it reaches the Father of lights himself.<sup>54</sup>

6.2. So it says: "The sons of Israel went forth with their power."<sup>55</sup> That power was with them that had said: "I will go down with you to Egypt."<sup>56</sup> And it is because that power was with them that the prophet says: "And there was no one weak among their tribes."<sup>57</sup>

Now they went forth "by the hand of Moses and Aaron."<sup>58</sup> The one hand of Moses does not suffice for going forth from Egypt; the hand of Aaron is also sought. Moses represents the knowledge of the law; Aaron, the skill in making sacrifices and immolations to God. Thus it is necessary for us, when we come forth from Egypt, to have not only the knowledge of the law and of faith, but also a harvest of works by which one pleases God. For the reason the hand of both Moses and Aaron is mentioned is so that you may understand "hand" to mean works. For if when I make my exodus from Egypt and convert to God, I cast away pride, then I have sacrificed a bull to the Lord by the hand of Aaron. If I have destroyed aggressive passions and licentiousness, I should believe that I have killed a goat for the Lord by the hands of Aaron. If I conquer lust, [I have sacrificed] a calf; if folly, I will seem to have sacrificed a sheep. In this way, then, when the vices of the soul are purged, the "hand of Aaron" is at work within us; and the hand of Moses is in us when we are enlightened from the law to understand these very things. And

<sup>50</sup>Ps 84:7. The Latin *virtus* means both "virtue" and "power." <sup>51</sup>Cf. 1 Pet 1:3. <sup>52</sup>Ps 1:2. <sup>53</sup>Cf. Jn 14:2. <sup>54</sup>Cf. Jas 1:17. <sup>55</sup>Lat *virtus*, which also means "virtue." Num 33:1. <sup>56</sup>Cf. Gen 46:4. <sup>57</sup>Ps 105:37. <sup>58</sup>Num 33:1.

the reason both hands are necessary for those making an exodus from Egypt is so that there may be found in them not only the perfection of faith and knowledge, but also that of deeds and works. And yet, these are not two hands, but one. For [it says]: "by the *hand* of Moses and Aaron" the Lord led them forth, and not by the *hands* of Moses and Aaron. For there is a single work for each hand and a single fulfillment of perfection.

7. It says: "And Moses wrote down their starting places<sup>59</sup> and their stages<sup>60</sup> by the Word of the Lord."<sup>61</sup> He wrote them down, then, "by the Word of the Lord" so that when we read them and see how many starting places and stages lie ahead of us on the journey that leads to the kingdom, we may prepare ourselves for this way and, by considering the journey that lies ahead of us, we may not allow the time of our life to be wasted by laziness and negligence. Otherwise, while we linger in the vanities of this world and take delight in each of the sensations that come to our sight or hearing or even to touch, smell and taste, the days may slip by, the time may pass, and we shall not find any opportunity for completing the journey that lies ahead, and we may faint while only halfway there. And it will come to pass to us what is reported of certain ones who were unable to reach the destination, but their "limbs fell in the desert."<sup>62</sup> Thus, we are making a journey, and the reason we have come into this world is so that we may pass "from virtue to virtue,"<sup>63</sup> not to remain on the earth for earthly things, like the man who said: "I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones, and I will say to my soul: Soul, you have many good things laid up for many years, eat, drink, be merry."<sup>64</sup> Otherwise, the Lord may say to us, as he said to him: "Fool! This night your soul will be taken from you."<sup>65</sup> He did not say "this day," but "this night." For

he is destroyed at night, like the firstborn of the Egyptians,<sup>66</sup> as one who "loved the world"<sup>67</sup> and its darkness and who belonged to "the rulers of the darkness of this world."<sup>68</sup> Now this world is called darkness and night, because of those who live in ignorance and do not accept the light of truth. But those who are like this do not set out "from Rameses," nor do they pass on "to Succoth."<sup>69</sup>

8.1. But let us see when the sons of Israel first set out "from Rameses." It says: "In the first month, on the fifteenth day of the month."<sup>70</sup> By the Lord's command, on the fourteenth day of the month<sup>71</sup> they celebrated the Passover in Egypt, killing a lamb the day before they set out; and they who were still in Egypt performed a kind of beginning of the feast. Therefore, on the following day, which is the first day of Unleavened Bread, on the fifteenth day of the first month, they set out from Rameses and come to Succoth to make the day of the feast of unleavened bread there. "Who is wise and will understand these things? Or discerning and he will know them?"<sup>72</sup> Or rather, who is there who even understands them "in part," as the apostle says: "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part"<sup>73</sup> Who understands how we celebrate the feast days even "in part," so that "no one will pass judgment on us in part for a feast or a new moon or a sabbath"?<sup>74</sup> For every feast day that is carried out on earth by human beings is carried out "in part," not completely, or with the perfect title of a feast. But when you come forth from that Egypt, then you will have a perfect feast; then you will keep the "unleavened bread of sincerity and truth"<sup>75</sup> to perfection; then you will celebrate the day of Pentecost in the wilderness; and then perhaps for the first time you will receive the heavenly food of manna and will carry out each of the different feasts about which we spoke earlier so far as we were able.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>59</sup>Lat *profectiones*. <sup>60</sup>Lat *mansiones*. <sup>61</sup>Num 33:2. <sup>62</sup>Heb 3:17; cf. 1 Cor 10:5. <sup>63</sup>Ps 84:7. <sup>64</sup>Lk 12:18-19. <sup>65</sup>Lk 18:20. <sup>66</sup>Cf. Ex 12:29. <sup>67</sup>Cf. 1 Jn 2:15. <sup>68</sup>Cf. Eph 6:14. <sup>69</sup>Cf. Num 33:3, 5. <sup>70</sup>Num 33:3. <sup>71</sup>Cf. Ex 12:6, 18. <sup>72</sup>Hos 14:9. <sup>73</sup>1 Cor 13:9. <sup>74</sup>Col 2:16. <sup>75</sup>1 Cor 5:8. <sup>76</sup>Cf. Homilies 23, 24.

8.2. But know that after that Passover that happened in Egypt, we found that a Passover was kept once in the desert, when the law was given,<sup>77</sup> and another, as we have observed, in Numbers;<sup>78</sup> and after this, it was never again carried out except in the Promised Land. Therefore, "on the fifteenth day of the first month," on the following day after the Passover, which is the first day of Unleavened Bread, "the sons of Israel set out from Rameses with a high hand," it says, "in the sight of all the Egyptians."<sup>79</sup> What is the "high hand"? For it says in another place: "Let your hand be lifted up."<sup>80</sup> Where there is no human or earthly work but a divine one, there the term "high hand" is found. For "hands" are quite often spoken of where works are to be understood. So it says: "with a high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians, they set out."

8.3. It says: "And the Egyptians were burying their dead."<sup>81</sup> The dead were burying their own dead,<sup>82</sup> but the living were following the Lord their God. After this it is said that "and on their gods the Lord made vengeance."<sup>83</sup> Moreover, in Exodus it says the following: "And on all the gods of the Egyptians the Lord will make vengeance."<sup>84</sup> Now here it says that "the Lord made vengeance on them." "There are some who are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth,"<sup>85</sup> the apostle says. Moreover, in the Psalms it is said: "All the gods of the nations are demons."<sup>86</sup> Thus, it calls, not the images, but the demons who dwell in the images "gods" on whom "the Lord made vengeance." But I would like to ask how God makes vengeance on the demons, when assuredly the day of vengeance and of judgment has not yet come.

8.4. Now I think that this vengeance is carried out on the demons when a person who had been deceived by them to worship idols is converted by the Word of the Lord and worships the Lord. And from the work of conversion

itself, vengeance is inflicted on him who had deceived. And similarly, if someone who had been deceived by demons to commit fornication is converted to purity, esteems chastity and weeps for his error, the demon is scorched by that man's tears of repentance and is set on fire, and thus vengeance is meted out to the author of the deception. And likewise, if someone turns away from arrogance to humility, from luxury to thrift, by these acts each one whips and tortures the different demons who had deceived them in these matters.

8.5. Into what great torments do you think they are driven if they see someone who according to the Lord's word, "sells everything he possesses and gives to the poor"<sup>87</sup> and "takes up his cross and follows" Christ?<sup>88</sup> But beyond everything and beyond all punishments are the kinds of torments that arise for them when they see someone engaged in the study of the Word of God and seeking out the knowledge of the divine law and the mysteries of the Scriptures with attentive exertions. This sets them all ablaze; and in that fire they are completely burned up, since they had darkened human minds with the darkness of ignorance, and by this means they had succeeded in making God unknown, in causing the zealous pursuit of divine worship to be transferred to themselves. What vengeance do you think is meted out to them, what fire of punishments is inflicted on them, when they see these things opened by the light of truth, and the clouds of their deceit dispersed by knowledge of the divine law?

8.6. For they possess all who live in ignorance; and not merely those who are still in ignorance, but they frequently go to those who have known God, and attempt once again to bring about works of ignorance in them. No sin is accomplished without them. For when someone commits adultery, surely this is not without a demon; or when a man is seized by excessive

<sup>77</sup>Cf. Ex 13:3. <sup>78</sup>Cf. Num 9:1-2. <sup>79</sup>Num 33:3. <sup>80</sup>Ps 10:12. <sup>81</sup>Num 33:4. <sup>82</sup>Cf. Mt 8:22. <sup>83</sup>Num 33:4. <sup>84</sup>Ex 12:12. <sup>85</sup>1 Cor 8:5. <sup>86</sup>Ps 96:5. <sup>87</sup>Cf. Mt 19:21. <sup>88</sup>Cf. Mt 16:24.



anger, or when one plunders someone else's goods; and "the one who sits against his neighbor and slanders him,"<sup>89</sup> and the one who "puts a stumbling block in the way of his mother's son"<sup>90</sup>—it is not without a demon. And therefore, we must be active in every way, lest we stir up against us once more the firstborn of the Egyptians, or their gods, whom the Lord struck down and destroyed, if we give them an opportunity to work in us what God hates. But if we keep ourselves away from all of them, in the way we have already spoken of above, then "the Lord has inflicted vengeance on all the gods of the Egyptians," and they receive punishments from our amendment and conversion.

9.1. So then, the sons of Israel come forth from Egypt, and "setting out from Rameses, they come to Succuth."<sup>91</sup> This sequence<sup>92</sup> of setting out and the distinction of the stages are quite necessary and must be observed by those who follow God and set their minds on progress in the virtues. With respect to this order I remember that already in other places, when we said a few things for the sake of edification, which the Lord deigned to grant, we pursued this subject, but we shall now once again call to mind a few things.

So the first starting place is "from Rameses";<sup>93</sup> and, whether the soul starting out from this world goes to the future age, or is converted from the errors of life to the way of virtue and to the knowledge of God, it "sets out from Rameses." For in our language, Rameses means "confused agitation" or "agitation of the worm."<sup>94</sup> Clearly by this is shown that everything in this world is set in agitations and disorders, and also in corruption—for this is what the worm indicates. It is not fitting for the soul to remain in these things, but it should set out and come to Succuth.<sup>95</sup> Now Succuth translates as "tabernacles." Therefore, the first progression

of the soul is that it be taken away from earthly agitation and realize that it must dwell in tabernacles, like a sojourner, and like one making a journey, so that it can be, as it were, ready for battle and encounter those who lie in wait for it unhindered and free.

9.2. From there, when the soul feels that it is now ready, it "sets out from Succuth and camps at Buthan."<sup>96</sup> Buthan means "valley." We have said that the stages refer to progress in the virtues. Now a virtue is not acquired except by training and effort, nor is it tested as much in prosperity as in adversity. Thus one comes to a valley. Now in valleys and in lower places, the struggle against the devil and the contrary powers takes place. So then, a contest must be carried out in the valley, and in the valley one must fight. After all, even Abraham fought against the barbarian kings in the Valley of Salt,<sup>97</sup> and there he gained a victory. So then, this wayfarer of ours descends to those who are in deep and low places, not to linger there, but to gain a victory there.

9.3. "But they set out from Buthan and camped at the mouth of Iroth."<sup>98</sup> Iroth translates as "village." For one does not yet come to the city; nor is what is perfect already held, but first and for the moment some small things are captured. For progress consists in coming to great things from small ones. So they come to the "mouth," that is, to the first entrance of a village, which is an indication of a manner of life<sup>99</sup> and of moderate abstinence. For an excessive and immoderate degree of abstinence is dangerous at the beginning stages.

Now Iroth is situated opposite "Beelsephon and opposite Magdalum."<sup>100</sup> Beelsephon translates as "the ascent of the watchtower or citadel." So then, the soul ascends from small things to great things, and it is not yet placed in the watchtower itself, but "opposite" the watch-

<sup>89</sup>Cf. Ps 101:5. <sup>90</sup>Cf. Ps 50:20; Rom 14:13. <sup>91</sup>Num 33:5. rsv *Succoth*. <sup>92</sup>Lat *ordo*. <sup>93</sup>Lat *Ramesse*. <sup>94</sup>Cf. Philo *On Dreams* 77; *On the Posterity of Cain* 56; Jerome *Epistle* 78.3. <sup>95</sup>Lat *Sochoth*. <sup>96</sup>Num 33:6; rsv *Etham*. <sup>97</sup>Cf. Gen 14:10. <sup>98</sup>Num 33:7; rsv *Pi-bahiroth*. <sup>99</sup>Lat *conversatio*. <sup>100</sup>Num 33:7; rsv *Baal-zephon*, *Migdol*.

tower, that is, in sight of the watchtower. For it begins to watch and to look for the future hope and to contemplate the height of the progressions and little by little one grows, while it is more nourished by hope than fatigued by toils. This camp or stage is "opposite Magdalum," but not yet in Magdalum itself. For Magdalum means "magnificence." So then, since it has in view both the ascent of the watchtower and the magnificence of the things to come, [the soul,] as we have said, is fed and nourished by great hopes. For it is now situated in starting places, not in perfection.

10.1. After this, "they set out from Iroth and pass through the midst of the Red Sea, and they camped at the bitterness."<sup>101</sup> We have said that the time of the progressions is a time of dangers. How hard a temptation it is to pass through the midst of the sea, to see the waves rising in mass, to hear the noise and crashing of the raging waters! But if you follow Moses, that is, the law of God, the waters will become for you a "wall on the right and left," and you will make a journey on "dry ground in the midst of the sea."<sup>102</sup> Moreover, it can happen that the heavenly journey that we have said the soul is making has some waters; it is possible that waves too may be found there. For one part of the waters is "above the heaven" and another part is "below the heaven,"<sup>103</sup> and for the time being we endure the waves and billows of these waters which are "below the heaven." May God grant that they always be quieted and calmed and not stirred up by any blowing winds.

10.2. But meanwhile, when we come to the crossing of the sea, although we see Pharaoh and the Egyptians in pursuit, we will not be afraid. Let there be no fear of them, no terror. Let us only believe in the "one true God and his Son Jesus Christ, whom he sent."<sup>104</sup> But if it is said that "the people believed in God and in his

servant Moses,"<sup>105</sup> we also believe accordingly in Moses, that is, in the law of God and the prophets. So be firm, and in a little while you will see "the Egyptians lying on the seashore."<sup>106</sup> Now when you see them lying there, rise up and sing out in songs to the Lord, and praise him who "sank the horse and rider in the Red Sea."<sup>107</sup>

10.3. So "they camped at bitterness."<sup>108</sup> Do not be terrified or afraid when you hear of "bitterness." For as the apostle teaches: "no discipline seems sweet at the moment, but bitter; but later it yields the very sweet and peaceful fruit of justice to those who have been trained by it."<sup>109</sup> After all, even the unleavened bread is commanded to be eaten with bitter [herbs];<sup>110</sup> nor is it possible to reach the Promised Land unless we pass through bitterness. For just as physicians put bitter [substances] in medicines with a view to the health and healing of those who are sick, so also the physician of our souls, with a view to our salvation, has willed that we suffer the bitterness of this life in various temptations, knowing that the end of this bitterness gains the sweetness of salvation for our soul; just as, on the contrary, the end of the sweetness found in physical pleasure yields a bitter end in the inferno of punishments, as the example of that rich man shows.<sup>111</sup> You, then, who are entering on the journey of virtue, should not turn back from camping at "bitterness." For you will set out even from there, just as the sons of Israel did.

11.1. It says: "They set out from bitterness and came to Elim."<sup>112</sup> Elim is where there are twelve springs of water and seventy [-two] palm trees.<sup>113</sup> You see, after bitterness, after the hardships of temptations, what pleasant places receive you! You would not have come to the palm trees unless you had endured the bitterness of temptations, nor would you have come to the sweetness of the springs unless you

<sup>101</sup>Num 33:8; *rsv Marab*. The Latin text consistently uses the plural, "bitternesses." <sup>102</sup>Cf. Ex 14:22. <sup>103</sup>Cf. Gen 1:7. <sup>104</sup>Jn 17:3; cf. Ex 14:31. <sup>105</sup>Ex 14:31. <sup>106</sup>Ex 14:30. <sup>107</sup>Cf. Ex 15:1. <sup>108</sup>Num 33:8. Lit. "bitternesses." <sup>109</sup>Heb 12:11. <sup>110</sup>Cf. Ex 12:8. <sup>111</sup>Cf. Lk 16:19-25.

<sup>112</sup>Num 33:9. Lat *Aelim*. <sup>113</sup>Cf. Num 33:9.

had first overcome what was sad and harsh; not indeed that the end of the journey and the perfection of all things is here; but God, who governs souls, has on this journey placed some places of refreshment into the midst of our toils, so that the soul may be refreshed and restored by them and may more readily return to the toils that remain.

Now Elim translates as "rams." Rams are the leaders of flocks. Who then are the leaders of Christ's flock if not the apostles, who are also the twelve springs? But since our Lord and Savior chose not only those twelve<sup>114</sup> but also seventy others,<sup>115</sup> for that reason there are not only twelve springs recorded, but also there are seventy palm trees. For they too are called apostles, as Paul himself says when he is explaining the resurrection of the Savior. He says: "he appeared to those Twelve,<sup>116</sup> then to all the apostles."<sup>117</sup> There he is showing that there are other apostles besides those twelve. Therefore, this pleasantness awaits you after bitterness, this rest after the toil, this grace after temptation.

11.2. "They set out from Elim and camped by the Red Sea."<sup>118</sup> Notice that they do not enter the Red Sea—it is enough to have entered it only once. Now they "camp by the sea," that they may see the sea and view its waves, but in no way fear its motions and assaults.

"And they set out from the Red Sea and camped in the desert of Sin."<sup>119</sup> Sin translates as "bramble bush" or "temptation." Thus, the hope of good things now begins to smile on you. But what is the hope of good things? "The Lord appeared from the bramble bush" and gave responses to Moses;<sup>120</sup> and this was the beginning of the Lord's visitation to the sons of Israel. But it is not in vain that Sin also translates as temptation. For visions usually involve

temptation as well. For sometimes an angel of wickedness "transforms himself as an angel of light."<sup>121</sup> And for that reason one must be on guard and exercise great care in order that you may knowingly discern the kind of visions. This is what Jesus the son of Nun did, when he saw a vision and knew that there was a temptation in it. He immediately questioned the one who appeared to him and said: "Are you of us, or of the adversaries?"<sup>122</sup> So then, when the soul sets out and comes to the place where it begins to distinguish between visions, it will then be proven to be spiritual if "it knows how to discern all things."<sup>123</sup> Ultimately, that is why one of the spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit is recorded to be "the distinguishing of spirits."<sup>124</sup>

12.1. "And they set out from the desert of Sin and came to Raphaca."<sup>125</sup> Raphaca translates as "health." You see the order of the progressions, how when the soul is once made spiritual and begins to see heavenly visions, it arrives at health, so that it deservedly says: "Bless the Lord, my soul, and all that is within me, [bless] his holy name!"<sup>126</sup> Which Lord? The one, it says, "who heals all your infirmities, who redeems your life from destruction."<sup>127</sup> For there are many infirmities of the soul: avarice is an infirmity of it, indeed the worst one; pride, anger, boasting, fear, inconstancy, timidity and the like. When, Lord Jesus, will you cure me of all these infirmities? When will you heal me so that I may say: "Bless the Lord, my soul, who heals all your infirmities," so that I may be able to make a stage at Raphaca, which is healing?

12.2. It would take too long if we wanted to go through each of the stages and explain one by one what is suggested by contemplating their names. Nevertheless, let us run through them in a brief and summary fashion, not to offer you a full exposition, since time certainly does not

<sup>114</sup>Cf. Mk 3:14; Jn 6:70. <sup>115</sup>Cf. Lk 10:1. <sup>116</sup>Cf. 1 Cor 15:5. It is noteworthy that Origen reads "twelve" here. Several Western (Greek) manuscripts read "eleven." Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (London and New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 567, calls the latter reading a "pedantic correction," since "Twelve" may have been an official designation. <sup>117</sup>1 Cor 15:5, 7. <sup>118</sup>Num 33:10. <sup>119</sup>Num 33:11. <sup>120</sup>Cf. Ex 3:2. <sup>121</sup>2 Cor 11:14. <sup>122</sup>Josh 5:13. <sup>123</sup>Cf. 1 Cor 2:15. <sup>124</sup>1 Cor 12:10. <sup>125</sup>Num 33:12; RSV *Dophkah*. <sup>126</sup>Ps 103:1. <sup>127</sup>Ps 103:3-4.

allow that, but to offer you opportunities for understanding.

Well then, "they set out from Raphaca and come to Halus."<sup>128</sup> Halus translates as "toils." Do not be surprised that toils follow health. For the soul acquires health from God in order to accept toils with delight and not unwillingly. For it will be said to it: "You will eat the toils of your harvest; you are blessed, and it will be well with you."<sup>129</sup>

After this they come to "Raphidin."<sup>130</sup> Now Raphidin translates as "praise of judgment." Praise most justly follows after toils. Yet of what reality is the praise for? Judgment, it says. So the soul that judges and discerns correctly becomes worthy of praise, that is to say, the soul that "judges all things spiritually and is itself judged by no one."<sup>131</sup>

12.3. After this it "arrives at the desert of Sina."<sup>132</sup> Sina itself is a place in the desert that was earlier mentioned as "Sin."<sup>133</sup> But this place is, rather, the name of the mountain that is in that desert; it is called Sina after the name of the desert. Thus, after the soul has been made praiseworthy in judgment and begins to have a right judgment, then God gives it the law, since it has begun to be capable of receiving divine secrets and heavenly visions.

From there one arrives at the "tombs"<sup>134</sup> of lust.<sup>135</sup> What are the tombs of lust? Doubtless it is where lusts are buried and covered over, where all desire is quenched and the flesh no longer "lusts against the spirit"<sup>136</sup> by its having been put to death by the death of Christ.<sup>137</sup>

After this they come to "Aseroth,"<sup>138</sup> which translates as "perfect halls," or "blessedness." Consider quite carefully, O my wayfarer, what the order of the progressions is. After you have been buried and have handed over to death the lusts of the flesh, you will come to the breadth of the halls, you will come to blessedness. For

blessed is the soul that is no longer beset by any vices of the flesh.

12.4. From there one arrives at "Rathma,"<sup>139</sup> or "Faran." Rathma translates as "complete vision," and Faran means "visible face." Why should the soul not grow in such a way, that when it has ceased being beset by the harassments of the flesh, it has complete visions and receives a perfect understanding of things, namely by recognizing more fully and more deeply the causes of the incarnation of the Word of God<sup>140</sup> and the reasons of his dispensations?

From there one arrives at "Remmon Phares,"<sup>141</sup> which in our language means "a lofty cutting away," that is, when the separation and distinction of great and heavenly realities from earthly and lowly things takes place. For as the understanding of the soul grows, the knowledge of lofty things is supplied to it and it is given judgment, by means of which it knows how to cut away what is eternal from what is temporal, and to separate what is perishable from what is everlasting.

12.5. After here one arrives at "Lebna,"<sup>142</sup> which translates as "whitening." I know that in some passages whitening is recorded in a blameworthy fashion, as for example when it is said: "whitened wall"<sup>143</sup> and "whitened tombs."<sup>144</sup> But here, the whitening is that concerning which the prophet says: "You will wash me and I shall be whiter than snow";<sup>145</sup> and again Isaiah: "If your sins are like scarlet, I will whiten them like snow, and I will make them gleam like wool."<sup>146</sup> And again in the Psalm: "They will be whitened with snow in Zalmon."<sup>147</sup> And the hair of the Ancient of Days is said to be gleaming, that is, white like wool.<sup>148</sup> So then, this whitening must be understood to come from the splendor of the true light and to descend from the brightness of heavenly visions.

<sup>128</sup>Num 33:13; rsv *Alush*. <sup>129</sup>Ps 128:2. <sup>130</sup>Num 33:14; rsv *Rephidin*. <sup>131</sup>Cf. 1 Cor 2:15. <sup>132</sup>Num 33:15; rsv *Sinai*. <sup>133</sup>Cf. Num 33:12. <sup>134</sup>Lat *monumenta*. <sup>135</sup>Num 33:16; rsv *Kibroth-battaavah*. <sup>136</sup>Gal 5:17. <sup>137</sup>Cf. Rom 6:2-4; 7:4. <sup>138</sup>Num 33:17; rsv *Hazereth*. <sup>139</sup>Num 33:18; rsv *Rithmah*. <sup>140</sup>Cf. Jn 1:14. <sup>141</sup>Num 33:19; rsv *Rimmon-perez*. <sup>142</sup>Num 33:20; rsv *Libnah*. <sup>143</sup>Acts 23:3. <sup>144</sup>Mt 23:27. <sup>145</sup>Ps 51:7. <sup>146</sup>Is 1:18. <sup>147</sup>Ps 68:14. <sup>148</sup>Cf. Dan 7:9.

After this a stage takes place in "Ressa,"<sup>149</sup> which among us could be called "visible" or "praiseworthy temptation." Why is it that no matter what great progress the soul makes, temptations are still not taken away from it? This is why it is clear that temptations are exercised on it as a kind of protection and defense. For just as meat becomes rotten if it is not sprinkled with salt, no matter of what quality it consists, so also the soul. If it is not somehow salted with constant temptations, it immediately becomes negligent and dissolute. This is confirmed by the saying "every sacrifice will be salted with salt."<sup>150</sup> Ultimately, this is why even Paul said: "And to keep me from being too elated by the loftiness of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, an angel of Satan, to harass me."<sup>151</sup> So this is the visible or praiseworthy kind of temptation.

12.6. From here one arrives at "Macelath,"<sup>152</sup> which is "principality" or "staff." By these two terms is indicated both power and that the soul has progressed to the point that it rules over the body and obtains this by that the staff of power; or it has power not only over the body but over the whole world, when it says: "But the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."<sup>153</sup>

From there one comes to "Mount Sephar,"<sup>154</sup> which is called "sound of trumpets." The trumpet is a sign of war. Therefore, when the soul senses that it has been armed with so many outstanding virtues, it necessarily goes forth to the war it has "against the principalities and powers, and against the rulers of this world."<sup>155</sup> Or, at least, the trumpet sounds in the Word of God, that is, in the word of preaching and teaching, to give "a meaningful sound by the trumpet," so that the one who hears it "can prepare himself for war."<sup>156</sup>

After this one comes to "Charadath,"<sup>157</sup> which in our language signifies "made compe-

tent"; just as indeed he himself says, that: "He has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant."<sup>158</sup>

12.7. From there a stage is made at "Mace-loth,"<sup>159</sup> which translates as "from the beginning." For the one who strives for perfection contemplates the beginning of things, or rather, he refers everything to him who was "in the beginning,"<sup>160</sup> and he never separates from that beginning.

After this one makes a stage at "Cataath,"<sup>161</sup> which is "encouragement" or "endurance." For it is necessary for someone who wants to be of use to others to endure many things and to bear them all patiently, as it is said of Paul: "For I will show him how much he must endure for the sake of my name."<sup>162</sup>

From there one comes to "Thara,"<sup>163</sup> which is understood among us as "contemplation of amazement." We cannot express the Greek word, which they call *ekstasis*, with a single word in the Latin language, that is, when the mind is struck with admiration over some great reality. Thus, the contemplation of amazement means a time when the astounded mind is amazed by the knowledge of great and marvelous things.

12.8. After this one comes to "Matheca,"<sup>164</sup> which translates as "new death." What is the new death? When "we die together with Christ and are buried together with Christ, that we may also live together with him."<sup>165</sup>

From there one comes to "Asemna,"<sup>166</sup> which is said to mean "mouth" or "bones." Doubtless through these things the virtue and strength of endurance is being revealed.

Now from here a stage is made at "Meso-roth,"<sup>167</sup> which is thought to mean "one who excludes." What do they exclude? Doubtless the wicked suggestions of the opposing spirit from their thoughts. For this is what the wisdom

<sup>149</sup>Num 33:21; rsv *Rissah*. <sup>150</sup>Lev 2:13. <sup>151</sup>2 Cor 12:7. <sup>152</sup>Num 33:22; rsv *Khelatbah*. <sup>153</sup>Gal 6:14. <sup>154</sup>Num 33:23; rsv *Shepher*. <sup>155</sup>Eph 6:12. <sup>156</sup>1 Cor 14:8. <sup>157</sup>Num 33:24; rsv *Haradah*. <sup>158</sup>2 Cor 3:6. <sup>159</sup>Num 33:25; rsv *Makbeloth*. <sup>160</sup>Jn 1:1. <sup>161</sup>Num 33:26; rsv *Tabath*. <sup>162</sup>Acts 9:16. <sup>163</sup>Num 33:27; rsv *Terah*. <sup>164</sup>Num 33:28; rsv *Mitkhah*. <sup>165</sup>2 Tim 2:11; cf. Rom 6:4. <sup>166</sup>Num 33:29; rsv *Hashmonah*. <sup>167</sup>Num 33:30; rsv *Moseroth*.

of God says: "If the spirit of one having power rises up against you, do not leave your place."<sup>168</sup> Thus, the place must be held and the adversary must be excluded, lest he find a place in our heart, as the apostle says: "Give no place to the devil."<sup>169</sup>

After this one arrives at "Baneain,"<sup>170</sup> which means "springs" or "filters," that is, where one draws from the springs of the divine words until one filters them by drinking. Now the word "filter" [*excolat*] comes from *colare* [to strain], and not from *colere* [to cultivate]. Thus, a person filters the word of God when he does not pass over even the "least commandment," or rather when not even "one iota or one dot" from the word of God are considered superfluous to his understanding.<sup>171</sup>

After this one comes to "Galgad,"<sup>172</sup> which translates as "temptation" or "something packed together." Temptation, as I see it, is a kind of strength and defense for the soul. For it is so interconnected with virtues that no virtue appears to be seemly or complete without them. And for that reason for those making progress toward virtue, there are various and frequent stages involving temptations.

When you pass through them, you will camp at "Tabatha."<sup>173</sup> Tabatha translates as "good things." Thus, one will not come to good things except after the experience of temptations.

From there, it says, they "camped at Eb-rona,"<sup>174</sup> which is "passage." For everything must be passed through, since, even if you come to good things, it is necessary that you pass through to better things, until you come to that good in which you should always remain.

After this one reaches "Gasiongaber,"<sup>175</sup> which translates as "the counsels of a man." If someone ceases to be a child in understanding, he arrives at the counsels of a man, just as that one did who said: "But when I became a man,

I laid aside the things that belonged to childhood."<sup>176</sup> Thus, the counsels of a man are great, as that one also says: "the counsel in a man's heart is deep water."<sup>177</sup>

12.10. From there one comes again to "Sin."<sup>178</sup> Sin is once again "temptation." For we said that there is no other way of clearing the way to enter on this journey. It is just as if, for instance, some goldsmith wanted to make a necessary vessel. He brings it often to the fire; he strikes it repeatedly with his hammers; he smoothes it often with razors, so that it becomes more purified and is brought to that form and beauty that the craftsman is looking for.

After this one camps at "Pharancades,"<sup>179</sup> which is "holy fruitfulness." You see where the person has come from; you see that holy fruitfulness follows the furrows of temptations.

Then one camps at "Mount Or,"<sup>180</sup> which translates as "a mountaineer." For one comes to the mountain of God in order to become a "rich mountain and a swelled<sup>181</sup> mountain";<sup>182</sup> or it derives from the fact that one who always dwells on the mountain of God is called a mountaineer.

12.11. The stage at "Selmona"<sup>183</sup> follows after this one. This translates as "shadow of the portion." I think the shadow mentioned is the one about which the prophet said: "The Spirit<sup>184</sup> of our face is Christ the Lord, to whom we said: In his shadow we will live among the Gentiles."<sup>185</sup> Moreover, similar to this one is the shadow about which it is said: "The Spirit of the Lord will overshadow you."<sup>186</sup> Thus, the shadow of our portion, which offers us shade from all the heat of temptations, is Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit.

Now from here we come to "Phinon,"<sup>187</sup> which we think translates as "brevity of the mouth." For the person who can view the mys-

<sup>168</sup>Eccles 10:4. <sup>169</sup>Eph 4:27. <sup>170</sup>Num 33:31; rsv *Bene-jaakon*. <sup>171</sup>Cf. Mt 5:18-19. <sup>172</sup>Num 33:32; rsv *Hor-baggidgad*. <sup>173</sup>Num 33:33; rsv *Jotbathab*. <sup>174</sup>Num 33:34; rsv *Abronah*. <sup>175</sup>Num 33:35; rsv *Ezion-geber*. <sup>176</sup>1 Cor 13:11. <sup>177</sup>Prov 20:5. <sup>178</sup>Num 33:36; rsv *Zin*. <sup>179</sup>Num 33:36; rsv *Kadesh*. <sup>180</sup>Num 33:37; rsv *Mount Hor*. <sup>181</sup>The Greek word means "curdled like cheese." <sup>182</sup>Cf. Ps 68:15. <sup>183</sup>Num 33:41; rsv *Zalmonah*. <sup>184</sup>Or "breath" or "wind." <sup>185</sup>Lam 4:20. <sup>186</sup>Lk 1:35. <sup>187</sup>Num 33:42; rsv *Punon*.

tery of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, even if he sees or hears things "which it is not permissible for men to speak,"<sup>188</sup> will necessarily have brevity of the mouth, since he knows to whom, when and how he ought to speak about the divine mysteries.

After this one comes to "Oborh."<sup>189</sup> Although we have not found a translation of this name, nonetheless we do not doubt that in this name as well, as in all the others, the rational meaning of the progressions is preserved.

There follows after this the stage that is called "Gai,"<sup>190</sup> which translates as "chasm."<sup>191</sup> For through these progressions one approaches the "bosom of Abraham," who says to those who are in torments: "Between you and us a great chasm has been fixed."<sup>192</sup> Thus he rests also in his bosom, just as the blessed Lazarus did.

12.12. From there one comes in turn to "Dibon-gad,"<sup>193</sup> which bears the meaning "beehive of temptations." Observe the marvelous caution of divine providence! Behold now this wayfarer on his heavenly journey is very close to the highest perfection by a succession of virtues, and yet temptations do not leave him. But I hear of temptations of a new kind: it says: a "beehive of temptations." Scripture describes the bee a praiseworthy creature. Kings and commoners make use of its labors for their health.<sup>194</sup> This is rightly understood of the words of the prophets and the apostles and of all who wrote the sacred books. And I think this can be understood most worthily as the beehive, that is, the entire canon<sup>195</sup> of the divine Scriptures. So then, for those who strive for perfection, there is some temptation even in this beehive, that is, in the prophetic and apostolic words. Do you wish to see that the temptation in them is not the least one? I find written in this beehive: "See to it," it says, "that when you see the sun and the moon, you do not worship these things, which

the Lord your God has reserved for the Gentiles."<sup>196</sup> Do you see what a temptation proceeds from that beehive? And again when it says: "You shall not revile the gods."<sup>197</sup> And again [there is temptation] in the beehive of the New Testament, where we read: "Why do you wish to kill me, a man who has told you the truth?"<sup>198</sup> And again the Lord himself says in another place: "This is why I speak to them in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand, lest they should be converted and I would heal them."<sup>199</sup> Moreover, when the apostle says: "In their case the god<sup>200</sup> of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers."<sup>201</sup> And you will discover many temptations of this kind in this divine beehive to which it is necessary that each of the saints come, so that even by means of these things it may be known how perfectly and religiously he is thinking about God.

12.13. After this one comes now to "Gelmon Deblathaim,"<sup>202</sup> which translates as "contempt of figs," that is, where earthly things are completely scorned and despised. For unless we spurn and treat with contempt what seems to delight us on earth, we cannot pass on to the heavenly things.

For there follows after this the stage at "Abarim opposite Nabau."<sup>203</sup> The former word means "passage," but Nabau translates as "separation." For when the soul has made its journey through all these virtues and has ascended to the height of perfection, it then "passes" from the world and "separates." This is what is written of Enoch: "And he was not found, because God had translated him."<sup>204</sup> Someone like this, even if he seems to be still in the world and to dwell in flesh, nonetheless is not "found." Where is he not found? He is not found in any worldly activity, in any fleshly affair, in any worthless conversation. For God has "translated

<sup>188</sup>2 Cor 12:4. <sup>189</sup>Num 33:43. <sup>190</sup>Num 33:44, 45; rsv *Iye-abarim* or *Iyim*. <sup>191</sup>Lat *chaos*. <sup>192</sup>Lk 16:26. <sup>193</sup>Num 33:45. <sup>194</sup>Cf. Prov 16:24. <sup>195</sup>Or "enumeration." <sup>196</sup>Deut 4:19. <sup>197</sup>Ex 22:28. <sup>198</sup>Jn 8:40. <sup>199</sup>Mt 13:13-15. <sup>200</sup>Or "God." <sup>201</sup>2 Cor 4:4. <sup>202</sup>Num 33:46; rsv *Almon-diblathaim*. <sup>203</sup>Num 33:47; rsv *Abarim, Nebo*. <sup>204</sup>Gen 5:24.

him" from these things and has established him in the realm of the virtues.

The last stage is "east of Moab by the Jordan."<sup>205</sup> Now the reason this race takes place at all and is run is so that one may reach the river of God, that we may dwell near the flowing wisdom and be watered by the waves of divine knowledge; so that having thus been purified by them all we may merit to enter the Promised Land.

For the time being, these are the things we have been able to touch on in passing and to bring forth before the public concerning the Israelites' stages according to one method of exposition.

13.1. Now possibly this kind of exposition, which relies on the meaning of Hebrew terms, may seem contrived and violently forced to those who do not know the conventions of that language. Therefore, we shall give a comparison in our language as well, by which the logical method we have used may be clarified. There is a literary game in which boys receive the first elements [of education]. Some of the boys are called the "abcd's" others, "syllabarians"; others, "namers"; and others, "counters." Now when we hear these terms, we know from them which of the boys has made progress. Likewise in the liberal arts, when we hear a passage recited or a consolation or an encomium or any other topics in order, we notice a youth's progress by the name of the topic. So why should we not believe that by these names of places, as in the names of topics, there can be indicated stages of progress for those who are learning by divine instructions? And just as the students appear to linger in each different topic and to make, as it were, stages in them, and they set out from one to another, and again from it to another, so also, why should not the name of the stages and the progression from one to another, and from it again to another, be believed to indicate the

mind's progress and to signify the increase of the virtues?

13.2. But I leave the other aspect of the exposition to be inferred and contemplated from this one by any who are prudent. For it is enough to have given opportunities to the wise,<sup>206</sup> since it is not expedient that the minds of the hearers remain completely idle and lazy. Therefore, by making a comparison with this exposition, let that other exposition be measured, or rather, let something more penetrating and more divine be contemplated. "For God gives the Spirit not by measure,"<sup>207</sup> but because "the Lord is Spirit,"<sup>208</sup> he "blows [*spirat*] where he wills."<sup>209</sup> And we desire that he may inspire [*adspiret*] you as well, so that you may perceive things that are better and loftier than these in the words of the Lord, as you make your journey through the places we have described in accordance with our mediocrity. Thus we ourselves may also be able to walk with you on that higher and loftier way, as our Lord Jesus Christ leads us, who is "the way and the truth and the life,"<sup>210</sup> until we reach the Father, "when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father"<sup>211</sup> and subjects every principality and power to him. "To him be glory and power in the ages of ages. Amen."<sup>212</sup>

## Homily 28 Numbers 34-35

1.1. The last story that is recorded in the book of Numbers is the one in which the Lord commands Moses "to give orders to the sons of Israel,"<sup>1</sup> that when "they have entered the holy land," they may know how to take possession of its inheritance and that they should observe the boundaries of their limits in these things. And after this, with the Lord himself now describing this, it is said: "toward Africa," that is, toward the west, the boundary of that place should be observed, and of that place toward the east,

<sup>205</sup>Num 33:48. <sup>206</sup>Cf. Prov 9:9. <sup>207</sup>Jn 3:34. <sup>208</sup>2 Cor 3:17. <sup>209</sup>Jn 3:8. <sup>210</sup>Jn 14:6. <sup>211</sup>Cf. 1 Cor 15:24. <sup>212</sup>1 Pet 4:11. **Homily 28**  
<sup>1</sup>Num 34:2.