

Sunday after the Exaltation of the Holy Cross – Mark 8:38-9:1

Caesarius of Arles (c. 470–543). Was the Bishop of Arles in what is today southern France in the mid-sixth century. He was renowned for his attention to his pastoral duties. Among his surviving works the most important is a collection of some 238 sermons that display an ability to preach Christian doctrine to a variety of audiences. He was exiled twice by Arian leaning local kings for standing up for the Christian faith and standing against the Arian heresy..

HE HELPS EFFECT WHAT HE COMMANDS. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: What he commands is not difficult, since he helps to effect what he commands...Just as we are lost through loving ourselves, so we are found by denying ourselves. Love of self was the ruin of the first man. If he had not loved himself in the wrong order, he would have been willing to be subject to God, preferring God to self. SERMONS 159.⁴

BEARING WITH VEXATION. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: What does this mean, “take up a cross”? It means he will bear with whatever is troublesome, and in this very act he will be following me. When he has begun to follow me according to my teaching and precepts, he will find many people contradicting him and standing in his way, many who not only deride but even persecute him.⁷ Moreover, this is true, not only of pagans who are outside the church, but also of those who seem to be in it visibly, but are outside of it because of the perversity of their deeds. Although these glory in merely the title of Christian, they continually persecute faithful Christians. Such belong to the members of the church in the same way that bad blood is in the body.⁸ Therefore, if you wish to follow Christ, do not delay in carrying his cross; tolerate sinners, but do not yield to them. Do not let the false happiness of the wicked corrupt you. You do well to despise all things for the sake of Christ, in order that you may be fit for his companionship. SERMONS 159.5.⁹

WALKING REQUIRES TWO FEET. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: When the Lord tells us in the Gospel that anyone who wants to be his follower must renounce

himself, the injunction seems harsh; we think he is imposing a burden on us.¹⁶ But an order is no burden when it is given by one who helps in carrying it out. To what place are we to follow Christ if not where he has already gone? We know that he has risen and ascended into heaven; there, then, we must follow him. There is no cause for despair—by ourselves we can do nothing, but we have Christ’s promise...One who claims to abide in Christ ought to walk as he walked. Would you follow Christ? Then be humble as he was humble. Do not scorn his lowliness if you want to reach his exaltation. Human sin made the road rough. Christ’s resurrection leveled it. By passing over it himself, he transformed the narrowest of tracks into a royal highway. Two feet are needed to run along this highway; they are humility and charity. Everyone wants to get to the top—well, the first step to take is humility. Why take strides that are too big for you—do you want to fall instead of going up? Begin with the first step, humility, and you will already be climbing. SERMONS 159, 1.4–6.¹⁷

ON RIGHTLY LOVING THE WORLD. CAESARIUS OF ARLES: While there is much in the world to love, it is best loved in relation to the One who made it. The world is beautiful, but much fairer is the One who fashioned it. The world is glorious, but more delightful is the One by whom [NT Vol. II, p. 108] the world was established. Therefore, let us labor as much as we can, beloved, that love of the world as such may not overwhelm us, and that we may not love the creature more than the creator. God has given us earthly possessions in order that we may love him with our whole heart and soul.²¹ But sometimes we provoke God’s displeasure against us when we love his gifts more than God himself. The same thing happens in human relationships. Suppose someone gives a special gift to his protégé. But the protégé then begins to despise the giver, and loves the gift more than the one who gave. Suppose he comes to think of the giver no longer as friend but enemy. Just so it is with our relationship with God. We love more those who love us for ourselves rather than our gifts. So God is known to love those who love him more than the earthly gifts he gives. SERMONS 159.6.²²