

I.

Now we should discuss perseverance carefully. We've already said something about it in the first book, when we were taking our lead from the beginning of faith. The claim, then, is that the perseverance by which we persevere in Christ until the end is a gift from God. The end, I say—the ending of this life, in which there's nothing but the risk of falling. And so it is never certain whether someone has received this gift for as long as that person leads their life. If they fall before they die, it is said that they did not persevere. Nothing could be truer.

Why, then, should it be said that someone who didn't persevere received or had perseverance? If someone has continence, for example, and falls away from it and becomes incontinent, it's correct to say that he had it and does not have it. It's the same with justice, with repentance, even with faith itself. "He was continent." "He was just." "He was patient." "He was faithful." Oh, he was like that for so long, but when he stops being that way, then he's not what he was. But if someone did not persevere, how "was" he perseverant? People show they're perseverant by persevering, and this person didn't do that. But perhaps someone will counter this by saying, "If someone becomes faithful and lives ten more years (by the grace of the Word), but falls from the faith at the mid-point of those ten years, can't we say that he persevered for five years? I don't want to argue about words here. If that kind of thing is also thought to be perseverance, then it can be talked about in its own time. What concerns us now, though, is the perseverance by which someone perseveres in Christ until the end. This shouldn't be said to any degree about anyone who hasn't persevered until the end. It would be better to have this kind of perseverance for only one year (or as short a time as we can think of) and live faithfully until death, than to live for many years and leave the stability of the faith just a short time before death.

II.

Well, having settled that, let's see whether this perseverance, the perseverance of "Whoever will have persevered until the end will be saved," is a gift from God. The Apostle said: "For the sake of Christ, it has been given to you not only to believe in Him, but even to suffer for Him." If perseverance is not a gift of God, how could the Apostle be telling the truth? One of these pertains to the beginning, another to the end, but each is a gift from God, since each is said to be given, as we already said above. What is a truer beginning for a Christian than to believe in Christ? What end is better than to suffer for Christ? Some opposition can be found to calling belief in God a gift, as some say that a gift from God is not the beginning but rather the increasing of faith. Thanks to God's gift, I've already said enough against this opinion above. But what can be said here? Why wouldn't perseverance in Christ until the end be given to someone who was given the gift of suffering in Christ or, to put it bluntly, the gift of dying in Christ?

Another Apostle, Peter, has shown us that this is a gift of God. "It's better," he said, "for those who do good to suffer than those who do bad, if that's what the will of God wants." When he says "if that's what the will of God wants," he shows that suffering for Christ is something divinely given, and not to everyone who's holy. It's not the case that those whom the will of God doesn't want to arrive at the experience and glory of suffering won't arrive at His Kingdom, provided that they persevere in Christ until the end. Who would say that perseverance wasn't given to those who die in Christ due to a bodily illness or some other affliction? Of course, it's given with much more difficulty to those whose death is itself for Christ. It's much more difficult to persevere when there's

a persecutor trying to make you not persevere. And so you have to be sustained in perseverance right up to death. It's as difficult to have the one kind of perseverance as it is easy to have the other. But to the one for whom nothing is difficult, it's easy to give both. And this is what God promised, saying: "I've given fear of myself to their hearts, so that they won't pull away from me." And what does not mean, if not: "The fear of myself, which I'll give to their hearts, will be such and so great that they will stick with me in perseverance?"

But why is that 'easier' perseverance asked for from God, if it's not given by God? Or would this request be a kind of mockery, since what is being requested from God is known not to be given by Him, but to be within human power rather than being given by God? It's the same with thanksgiving: any giving of thanks that gives thanks to God for something he didn't give or do is a mockery. I'll say the same thing here as I said in the last book. "Make no mistake," said the Apostle, "God is not mocked!" Man, Good witnesses not just your words, but even your thoughts. If, truthfully and faithfully, you ask for something from His great wealth, trust that you will receive what you asked for from Him whom you asked. Don't honor Him with your lips while holding yourself above Him in your heart, believing that what you pretend to pray for from Him is already yours or depends on you. Or is perseverance perhaps not what is being asked for from Him? If that's the case, then you can't be disproven by my arguments. You'll need to be overwhelmed by the prayers of the saints. Or is there anyone who would not ask from God that he persevere in God? Think of the Lord's Prayer, so called because the Lord taught it. When it's recited by the saints, are they understood to be praying for anything else besides perseverance?

Read the explanation of this a little more carefully. It can be found in a book about this subject that was put together by the blessed martyr Cyprian. Its title was "On the Lord's Prayer." See how many years in advance an antidote was prepared for the future poisons of the Pelagians! There are three antidotes that the catholic church uses to defend against such poisons, as you know. First is that the grace of God is not given to us because of our merits. Those too are gifts from God, and all the merits of just people are to be attributed to God. The second is that, no matter how just they are, there's no one living in this corruptible body without some sins. And third is that each person is born punishable, born in the sin of the first human and bound by the chains of condemnation, even if they are not themselves responsible (for that first sin). What is contracted through genealogy can only be dissolved in regeneration. Of these three antidotes, only the third is not dealt with in that book by the glorious martyr. But he discussed the first two antidotes with so much clarity that those aforementioned heretics, the new enemies of Christ's grace, were found convicted long before they were even born. What he says is that perseverance is a gift of God, just like all the other merits of the saints, which are nothing if not gifts of God. "We say," he tells us, "May your name be sanctified." It's not that we wish God to be sanctified by our prayers, but that we're asking for His name to be sanctified in us. Otherwise, who would be sanctifying God, who Himself sanctifies? But He said, 'Be holy, since I too am holy.' That's what we're looking for. We're asking that we, who are already sanctified in baptism, might persevere in what we've begun."

A little bit later on, he's still discussing the same subject and still teaching us to ask the Lord for perseverance. And it wouldn't be right or truthful for him to do this at all, unless perseverance is also a gift from God. And so he says: "We pray that this sanctification remains in us. And since our Lord and judge warned the man who was healed and brought to life by Him that he should not fail, lest something worse happen to him, we pray such prayers continually. Night and day, we request that the sanctification and life that were taken from the grace of God be persevered by the

protection of the grace of God.” Perseverance in sanctification—that is, that we persevere in sanctification—this is what that teacher understood us to be asking for from God when, having already been sanctified, we say: “May your name be sanctified.” What is this other than to ask for what we’ve already received? Or are we asking that it also be persevered, so that we don’t cease to have it? It’s like when a holy person asks God to be holy. What he’s actually asking for is to remain holy. It’s the same when a pure person asks to be pure, a continent person to be continent, a just person to be just, a pious person to be pious, and on and on for all the other gifts of God that we defend against the Pelagians. But without doubt, all of these holy people are asking that they persevere in those good things that they know they’ve received. And if they receive this, too, then they’re actually receive God’s great gift of perseverance, by which all the other gifts are preserved.

What about when we say “May your kingdom come?” Are we asking for anything other than that what we don’t doubt will come to all the saints might come to us, too? And what about those who are already holy? What are they praying for, if not that they might persevere in the holiness that was given to them? That’s the only way the kingdom of God will come to them. It is certain that the kingdom will come only to those who persevere until the end, and to no one else.