

The illustration is a medieval-style painting. In the center, the Virgin Mary stands, wearing a long white robe with a blue mantle. She holds a white lily in her right hand and has her left hand on the head of a man kneeling before her. The man is wearing a dark tunic with a red and black diamond pattern and is looking up at Mary with a reverent expression. In the background, a group of men in white robes are watching the scene. To the left, there is a large, ornate altar with a crucifix. The scene is set in a church with stone walls and a large window in the background.

JAN M. ZIOLKOWSKI

# READING THE JUGGLER OF NOTRE DAME

Medieval Miracles and Modern Remakings





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### 3. *The Life of the Fathers*

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The French *La Vie des Pères*, which translates into English literally but a little lumberingly as *The Life of the Fathers*, brings to mind immediately the more famous Latin *Vitae Patrum*, also translated as *The Lives of the Fathers*. The second element in these two names signals that the materials assembled in them pertain to the so-called [desert fathers](#), legendary figures of early Christianity such as Saints Anthony, Hilary, and Paul of Thebes. From the third century on, these ascetics inhabited wastelands in Egypt near Alexandria as well as equivalent spaces in Syria and Palestine. Taking flight from the temptations of the world, they strove to perfect themselves by chastising their bodies and practicing constant prayer. At the same time, by dwelling in both heroic solitude as hermits and regulated communities as monks, they laid the foundations for two contrasting ways of life, eremetical (from the Greek word for *wilderness*) and coenobitical (from the elements in the same language for *common* and *life*). Predictably, the text that evolved from *The Lives of the Fathers*, along with the closely related *Conferences* of John Cassian, was later recommended for reading aloud to monks in [The Rule of Saint Benedict](#). The title is well attested in many codices that survive to this day as well as in catalogues from medieval monasteries that contain listings for manuscripts now lost.

As the centuries rolled by, *The Lives of the Fathers* snowballed. Along the way, it absorbed content from such sources as a few lives written by Jerome, *The History of Monks in Egypt* by Rufinus of Aquileia, *The Lausiac History* by Palladius, and variously entitled sayings of early ascetics by assorted Christian authors of late antiquity. This expanding core of material, much of it translated and adapted from Greek models, was itself enlarged by additions drawn from other works. The quarries from which narrative building blocks were hewn included Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, four books about the holy men of sixth-century Italy, and the story of the legendary Christian martyrs, Barlaam and Josaphat, likely based on the life of the Buddha.

This heterogeneous corpus awakened intense interest in the twelfth and early thirteenth century, as ever more attention was paid to imitation of the apostolic life and as aspirations grew that the glory days of early Christianity could and should be renewed. Would-be reformers saw the desert fathers as heroes to be emulated. This identification with the past may have held especially true for the Cistercians, who resembled these late antique forebears in practicing strict discipline and in inhabiting foundations usually located in remote wastes. Yet it would be a slip to overemphasize the role of ecclesiastics and to underestimate the attraction of the laity to these stories.

*The Lives of the Fathers* also offered role models to individuals who though outside conventional church organizations embraced spiritual rigor and even stringent self-discipline. Thanks to the Crusades, the regions of the eastern Mediterranean where the early solitaries had resided were once again on people's minds with an immediacy that had been lacking for more than a half millennium.

To satisfy the new enthusiasm, translations were required. As Cistercianism spread, more and more of Europe's many vernacular languages established themselves as media for literature that was more than worthy of being recorded on parchment. Consequently, portions of the Latin *The Lives of the Fathers* were put into medieval French versions time and again. The two best known were composed by an anonymous Anglo-Norman poet, perhaps before the late 1170s, for the Templars under the patronage of Henri d'Arci and by the prolific translator *Wauchier de Denain* for Philippe, marshal of Namur who died in 1212.

Confusingly, both *The Lives of the Fathers* in Latin and adaptations of it in French, despite the similarity of the titles, are distinct from *The Life of the Fathers*. This later compilation, written between 1215 and 1250 or so in French verse, is extant in some forty manuscripts. It comprises 74 devout tales, a fair number of which closely match short narratives found in contemporary compilations of exempla for preaching. Its contents include stories borrowed from the tradition of *The Lives of the Fathers* that relate to the desert fathers of late antiquity, but these traditional stories are supplemented with miracles of the Virgin that take place in less distant venues and more recent times.

The narratives within *The Life of the Fathers* have been traditionally known by short labels that were assigned to them in the late nineteenth century by the famous philologist, Gaston Paris (see Part 2, Chapter 1). The more than 30,000 octosyllabic lines of the collection at its fullest extent were produced in at least three stages. The first series, written between 1215 and 1230, contains nos. 1–42, while the second, from after 1241, and third, from around 1250, both shorter, comprehend the remaining 32. We will concentrate upon the first series.

"Our Lady's Tumbler" opens with a short preamble in which its author pretends to acknowledge indebtedness to *The Lives of the Ancient Fathers* for the "little exemplum" that he recounts. As often happens in medieval literature, the supposed citation is a red herring: no form of the work credited contains any story that approximates ours closely enough to be regarded as a source. Yet the poet was not being altogether disingenuous, since numerous narratives in the French text we know as *The Life of the Fathers* reveal many of the same preoccupations that inform "Our Lady's Tumbler."

Both tales here come from the first collection. They have been chosen for inclusion because of thematic correspondences they show to "Our Lady's Tumbler." The first belongs to a cluster of stories in which simple faith takes precedence over learning and Latinity. "*Miserere*," as this narrative is called, corresponds intriguingly to a miracle about a priest who could perform just a single Mass. The only such act of worship this simple and humble clergyman knew was in honor of the Virgin, built

around the Gregorian chant “*Salve sancta parens*” or “Hail Holy Mother.” This song was used in opening the celebration of the eucharist in feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The narrative about “the priest of one Mass” (as it is customarily designated) was incorporated within the poems of both [Adgar](#), a twelfth-century Anglo-Norman who composed the earliest extant *Miracles of the Virgin* in a vernacular language, and [Gautier de Coinci](#), active in the first half of the thirteenth century in Soissonnais, a region to the northeast of Paris within the historical territory of Picardy.

As the story goes in *The Life of the Fathers*, the protagonist is not a priest but a simple and humble man who left the world. He knew only one Latin prayer, which he uttered consistently with a key word differing from the prescribed text. When the hermit providing him spiritual guidance directed him to use the correct wording, the would-be monk ceased to experience the divine illumination and good health from which he had previously benefited. When the disciple was permitted to take up again his old way of praying, all returned to its previous happy state.

The second tale offered here, likewise from the first version of *The Life of the Fathers*, has been labeled “[Goliard](#).” True to the title, the principal player in this little drama is a goliard. Such status could align him with jongleurs and tumblers, but this man is a cleric whose distinguishing feature is that he likes to gluttonize and play games of chance in taverns. When the funds he has pilfered run out, this scoundrel concocts the scheme of entering a Cistercian monastery so that he may rob their valuables. Yet once inside, year after year passes without his being able to tear himself away. After two full decades, he is stopped from leaving when a painting of the Virgin with her son in her lap becomes animate. The baby Jesus snatches the host from the former carouser until he repents, at which point the infant restores it. When the penitent demands that he be executed, the abbot instead extols him.

The forty-two tales in the first version of *The Life of the Fathers* contain eight which are miracles of the Virgin. Among the other six, one that reveals intriguing affinities with “Our Lady’s Tumbler” is “[Fou](#).” As the French title suggests, it concerns a fool or madman. This man, named Félix, prays every night before an image of Mary. Once, when the supposed madman sleeps in front of the painting, the Virgin is seen by an onlooking knight to descend from heaven and crown Félix. Among other features connecting this narrative with that of our poem is the prominence in it of Cistercianism, in the form of Cîteaux itself. But “*Fou*” deals with not just Félix but two other clerics, along with assorted other characters. Its hubs are pan-Mediterranean, with Egypt, Jerusalem, Antioch, Besançon, and Cîteaux all becoming stopping points in the story. Finally, it runs to more than a thousand lines, most of which have no direct relation to “Our Lady’s Tumbler.” For these reasons it deserves mention here but not inclusion.

## A. "Miserere"

Whoever has ears for listening ought to listen to what he can enjoy, if he has in himself a little knowledge. The first bit of wisdom is to fear God. The man who fears and loves him sincerely benefits from it. He who wishes to act against reason [2750] sooner or later must find retribution for his folly. He is wise who humbles himself and does what he ought to do, there where he sees his honor and gain. Obedience, in truth, derives from fear and humility. He who upholds these two maintains himself as obedient.

The camel, which is a dumb beast, [2760] devoid of knowledge and reason, holds itself firm in obedience: when its master comes to load it, it kneels and humbles itself as he binds his load upon it. By this example a person who has reason and understanding can understand that he ought to obey God, when he sees the beast come to its knees out of obedience. [2770] You ought truly to contemplate it, as the wise do, but the fool can only carry out his intention, who does not fear before he finds death, which covers him in earth and sends him off to dwell in the death of hell without returning. He is silly who waits until death deals him its blow, and he is wise who shows foresight [2780] and who fears God as he ought to fear him.

### Of the Simple Man Who Was Saved by *Miserere tui, Deus*

May everyone now have mercy on himself.

I tell you here of a layman who was simple, humble, and gentle, and who gave himself wholly to God. All his wits went to loving God. He certainly spent his time well, because he had no concern for the world but took care about God.

This man set about doing good, [2790] until he heard about a saintly hermit, a recluse. In that country there was no other. There was no other: wasn't this one enough? A great country and land are enlightened by one man, and a great number of people are brought low by a fool, who leads them in such a fashion that thanks to him each one is in trouble. This one enlightened his country [2800] by the good counsels that he gave.

The simple man had a great desire to become acquainted with him and his life. So he thought to seek him out until he could see his saintliness. He had a great yearning to become a monk; he had thought about it a long time. He gave away all that he had and made the Lord God his heir. He wished to restore to the Lord God the goods [2810] that God had lent him: each of us ought to do the same.

When he had settled his affairs, he got up one morning and departed to seek him out. He sought him until the hermitage appeared to him in a wasteland, between a wood and a thicket. As one who was versed in loving God, he went now in that direction and [2820] found ready at hand the good man who was fulfilling his obligation to serve God and who took joy in the service. He told him of his intention, and the other listened to him in kindly fashion.

"Sir, I repent my sins; for God's sake I, as one who has need of it, ask advice of you."

"May the Lord God, who has guided you here, be thanked and praised for it."

[2830] "If it pleases you, sir, now listen to me. I have lived a long time in the world, where I have spent all my youth. If you please, I would become a monk and devote myself to serving God, to better my soul and my life, for I do not know or see at all how a man can save himself who consents to surrender himself to the world. So, for God's sake, act so that [2840] I may be put by you on a good path. You and the others who know the benefits that you ought to show us, you say that to serve God we ought to leave behind

everything and flee the comfort and riches of the world so as to gain the great majesty of heaven and to escape the [wheel](#) of hell, which makes fools grow hoarse from screaming who are tortured [2850] for the sins they have committed. For this reason I want to show foresight, for I do not want through my fault to send my soul to its doom, for to act so by sending it is all too foolish. I want then to consign myself to all manner of deprivation, and to give and render my soul to Jesus Christ. It is right that he should have it, insofar as he created it. May he be shamed who takes it from him; [2860] he will be shamed, that will never fail."

"Friend, you have spoken very well. Now listen to me a little. It is very difficult to give up one's habits and to take up others. Poverty, desperation, and anguish make many people do and say things that after the deed they regret to have done. There are three things, without lying, [2870] from which one cannot retreat: a wife, because of the sacrament, an oath, and belonging to a religious order. So you ought to put yourself to the test and weigh your heart, before you promise something that you will regret afterward."

"Sir, you have spoken well and truly. You ought then to know my circumstance. I have taken this oath and ought to maintain it; [2880] for that reason it is proper for me to follow through."

"By my faith, since you have made the promise, because of the obligation you ought to keep it."

"The obligation is good and agreeable for me; I took it gladly, for it pleases me very much."

From the words that he heard, the hermit saw well and understood that this man had a good disposition and that he himself would produce a good sowing in him. The person ought well to love his sowing [2890] and ought to sow plentifully, who knows that he spreads it in such a place that it will produce a hundredfold yield. So he thought that he would detain the man, who could hardly wait for counsel.

The following day, without waiting any more, he had him prepare a hermitage where he put him, and he gave him his rule and instructed him well. He was easily instructed, [2900] for he had a humble and fierce heart, fierce in opposition to evil and humble in doing good. He could not hold himself back from praising God, for he prayed to him by day and night, and honored him as much as he could. He knew no prayer but one, which he had every day in his habit and custom: *Miserere tui, Deus* or "Have mercy on your [servant], O God."

Our Lord, who sees everywhere, [2910] accepted his prayer gladly, since it came from the source that brings benefits to the tongue. From deep in the heart comes the root that extinguishes or illuminates the speech that each person expresses. This man performed his prayer from the heart, and for this reason he made no mistake, for he took it from the good of his heart. In this way he stood by the Lord God, [2920] and said and maintained his prayer. Every time that he said it, the Lord God illuminated his heart and his body and the place where he wished to fulfill his vow, so that he was filled entirely with all benefits and all delights. He lived a long time amid these benefits, until a Sunday in Advent when his master [2930] who wished very much to comfort him came to visit him.

He asked him about his situation, and the man replied to him, "Dear master, I have as much as any man can have. May the Lord God not wish that I have any other riches or possessions than always to be in this joy!"

"Friend," he said, "you must be blessed, inasmuch as you have given yourself to God! And what prayer do you say? [2940] Please tell me."

"I will tell you gladly. Thirty full years have passed in which I have maintained this prayer, which is very saintly, sweet, and dear: *Miserere tui, Deus.*"

"No one says this prayer, dear brother; from now on, don't say it any more. You ought to say *Miserere mei, Deus*, and learn it well. [2950] Leave off the other and take this other."

He was extremely distraught; he believed himself damned and lost. He said that he would not say it anymore because in saying it he would misspeak. Out of obedience he stopped it. At that point his master left him and went off to his dwelling place to carry out his penance. The other observed the prayer of his master, [2960] but the brightness did not come to him afterward as it had done before. He was extremely distressed at this, because he had lost it, but he did not know the reason. He could not eat or drink, sleep or rest, or be of any use. He lamented greatly, he grieved greatly; his affliction drained the color from him, and reduced his body to nothing, [2970] such that he came close to passing away. He continued so for fully half a year, until his master, who was extremely upset to see that he was in a sorry plight, came back to him. He comforted him very gently and stroked his brow and temples. He felt his pulse which was beating hard and fast.

"Brother," he said, "take with good will [2980] illness or health. The Lord God scourges his people: you are blessed if he takes you. If it comes to dying, you will die well by the rights of a good Christian. Be repentant, take confession, and receive extreme unction; and afterward, when you are thus prepared, put yourself into the hands of the Lord God; indeed, you would be untroubled by the Enemy, [2990] so I tell you by God. And what ill do you believe you have?"

"Master, it is easy to know. From when you departed from here, when you forbade me my prayer, I have not been healthy. In fact, I used to have, thanks to God, all benefits when I said it, and a brightness would come to me that would illuminate my entire heart, and it would restore me with all benefits [3000] so that the profits from it were mine. Never since have I been able to have benefits nor to see the saintly brightness."

The good man was moved by joy, for from what he heard, he recognized that God had great concern for him and loved him and his prayer. He spoke to him and preached to him and, as penance, charged him with resuming his prayer [3010] and saying it to his liking. He began it. Now the brightness came back to him so that the master saw it well and understood the joy and the benefits that the Lord God sent to him. He saw it completely openly, praised Jesus Christ for it from the heart, and said, along with the praise, "Jesus Christ, heavenly father, [3020] true in all things, the person who serves you from the heart is wise, inasmuch as he earns from it such great recompense; you show your generosity to this brother for his simplicity, for his simplicity, truly, as he makes a mistake in saying his prayer. Makes a mistake? What have I said? In truth, not at all, [3030] good sir, since it pleases you. On the contrary, he says it very well, I agree to that. I was wrong to fault him, for you know well his intention. Good fruit comes from a good branch. Noble-spirited God, powerful God, truly one hundred times more powerful *than any tongue could say*, neither heart nor tongue would suffice to describe your great gentleness, if they could live forever. So he is foolish who does not fear [3040] and believe in you, when from doing so such great joy comes to the person who pays heed to you and who takes care to serve you. I will never budge from here, and I will have my share of these great benefits that you grant to this saintly person who does not falter in serving you, and with him I will serve you, but I will be his slave and will be called his subject. [3050] I ought to love what you love; I ought to love it truly, for I see very surely my joy, honor, and benefit. He who loves me, *loves my dog.*"



So, the hermit did it; he stayed with his disciple, but he honored him as master, for he loved him and his conduct greatly. They were together for a long time, and [3060] they lived very honorably. God restored them every day by the prayer that the one would say. They existed in such great comfort that they yearned for nothing at all except this joy and this delight which came to them from the Holy Spirit. They served God in such saintly fashion that in compensation they might have the great joy of paradise [3070] when they passed away from the world. Thus the Lord God repays his followers and offers his realm as recompense.

By this tale you can recognize that no one can deceive God, for he knows all people and their inner intentions, those who have dirty thoughts, the hypocrites with pale faces who have *large, broad crowns* [3080] and large, trimmed copes, and who in their feigning adore God but in secret destroy him, and who have rotten and false hearts, abandoned to all wrongs, like a blighted pear, which is rotten and dried out inside but presents itself as pleasing outside and conceals its badness inside.

The impure and wicked work in this manner, [3090] who cover themselves in a lambskin, and have the devil in their bodies and cast out the Lord God. The Lord God does not care for such people. He wants all clean and without filth. He does not care for any ostentation nor for those who go about flattering him. The prayer of a good little man who puts his whole heart into saying it—God loves that prayer, God upholds it, [3100] and he remembers the one who says it. He gives himself to them, he grants to them earthly goods, and after death he bestows the joy of paradise and all consolations, just as he did to this good man. God restored him with his grace, because the man loved him surely and invoked him goodheartedly. So, each person should, no matter what anyone says, [3110] serve God without hypocrisy; and as soon as it inserts itself, you should recognize that it completely cancels the goods that a person creates with them. On the contrary, the vile hypocrite procures his torment and destruction by his hidden perfidy.

## B. “Goliard”

In the time when *Solomon*, who had within himself all manner of wisdom, was living, he said to his son in admonition, to protect his soul from affliction, “Dear son, I will tell you three things by which you will improve yourself forever, [11890] provided that you give thought to them. Keep in mind first from where you come, what you are, and where you will go when you pass away from the world. Nature made you of base *mud*, now you are a *chamber full of filth*, and when you depart from the world, you will be *eaten by worms*. Son, I have not said this for you alone; on the contrary, I have said it for me [11900] and for the whole world besides. So, we ought with intensity to perform all good deeds and uphold them, with regard to what will necessarily befall us. And know that the one who puts more thought into this will sin less, because he has sense and is such a person who strives for the joy of heaven.”

What I have said of Solomon is an exemplum and a sermon, [11910] and people tell it to you by way of a sermon. That person ought well to enter into affliction who turns his ear from his advantage and who destroys his soul for the sake of the world. The Enemy, into whose company he has put himself, destroys him altogether.

Make amends, by my counsel, you who see right before your eyes death, which draws you every day toward itself. It gives you an example and witness [11920] of its activity, and so it teaches you by those whom it takes every day, and so you ought to think that nothing can protect you from feeling sooner or later the venom that it has in its dart, by

which it will destroy the strong and the weak—but no one knows when it will be. So you ought all to fear death, from which no man or woman escapes; [11930] and so long as God loans you life, don't ever forget the words that Solomon said to his son; because of them, you will hold sin the more base. And outfit yourself with good so that you can bound from death upward into the joy of heaven, where the truly blessed are.

Of the [Goliard](#) Who Became a Monk to Steal the Abbey's Treasure

In bygone days there was in Egypt a cleric whom people called [Lechefrite](#), [11940] because he was a lecher leading a high life. From morning to night, the goliard went into taverns for good dishes and for [dice games](#). He was so intent on his high life that he spent on it whatever he had, such that he could not keep living and did not know how to do so or to pursue his high life. He thought a lot; he was very preoccupied about the pleasures to which he had become accustomed [11950] that he could no longer maintain. On the contrary, it was necessary for him to hold back from them. Habit led him to sin; poverty brought him back from it. If he entered a tavern, he could not pay what he owed there, for no one can frequent such a place if his wallet does not take care of him in it.

In that country there was an abbey of white monks, provided with holy men. [11960] The monastery was very well provided with crosses, books, and censers of gold and silver, with which they served the Lord God whom they had the duty to serve. The fool thought that he would become a monk there and that he would stay in peace within until he could rob the abbey to pay for his high life. So he took action to be received there. Stirred to carry out his undertaking, [11970] he strove much toward it and thought about it much, until the whole year went by without his being able to accomplish his deed.

One night he considered his misdeed and confessed his sin and said, "Jesus Christ, [king of majesty](#), I, who have been here a year already, have never said a good prayer; on the contrary, I have been intent on treachery, [11980] and to shame and deceive God, and to rob these saintly people who are full of the Holy Spirit, which rewards them and gives recompense to their simplicity and to their lofty life, so that the Holy Spirit is in their company, where it protects and sustains them and maintains them in doing all things rightly. And I would commit a wrong against such people? I would be more of a scoundrel than [Judas](#), who sold his lord wrongly, for which he [met a bad end](#). Will I do it? Not at all, in truth. Never, for coveting riches, will I betray God and his people. Already I have stolen one hundred [marks](#) of silver and spent them on my high life. By whom will they be returned? I don't know, and I will not be able to return them; on the contrary, I will die in my state of sin. [12000] To speak truly, I will not carry out anything of my scheme, but I will go off now soon, for I have no desire to remain any more in the abbey or in a cell."

Right away and in secret he decided to go now and to abandon himself to flight, until he heard [the Mass sound](#) and he said to himself that he would not stir before he had heard the Mass. [12010] When he heard the service, he directed his thought to the end that he would remain there within through the winter until summer returned. "But in summer, come what may, I will go off," he said, "without fail." Yet he had different thoughts once the winter had passed. He submitted to his earlier thought, came to the door, and said, [12020] "I am going off, I will not be here any longer. Alas, wretch, where will I go? I will go off! In truth, I will not do it. I have no surety or possession by which I could live two days. I hold myself a fool and a drunk to have thought such idiocy. If I go off, whatever I say, because of God I will indeed find nourishment. Do I fear that God, [12030] who [nourishes the birds](#) of the fields, will fail me? While the season is beautiful, I

want to play. Indeed, I will come back to my abbey when I have stretched out my life two or three years; I agree to that. I will go off; I do a wrong to no one."

He heard the Mass sound as soon as he decided to leave from there, so he said that he would hear his service, for he would succeed better after hearing it. [12040] When that Mass had been sung, the hour for eating the meal sounded. He went to eat; when seated at the table, he was very pensive that he had been so tempted and incited to do his worst.

What more will I tell you? The penitent remained in that order reluctantly until he had been there a good twenty years. [12050] "*Penitent*" comes from "to pain." The devil knew how to torment him, so that he was never in peace even a day that he did not have an opportunity for leaving. All the same, he kept guard over himself so that he did not leave even a day in twenty years, and he was ordained a priest until one night he was so tormented that he said for certain he would depart from there in the morning on the following day. [12060] When day broke, he made scant delay in his bed. He was all set on going from there, but beforehand he would say a Mass, so that God might protect him from sin and not pay attention to his foolish desire.

There was in the abbey an altar consecrated to the Virgin Mary where there was a painted image of the merciful saintly lady [12070] who held her son in her lap. He came forward, fully clad in vestments, and sang of the Holy Spirit. Just as he took the holy host and elevated it before him, the Virgin's son shot out his hand to the holy host and put it *into his own right hand*. [12080] At this the monk was dejected and grieving, and he was not slow to blame himself when the event befell him, and he said, "I have arrived at my rightful place, that I have deserved so holy a loss. Alas, disgraced: it is deserved, so I ought indeed to bear the burden of it. I admit to being guilty, and I confess from the heart, mouth, and clasped hands to you, God, who are a humane king, [12090] and to you, Holy Virgin and Mother. Hear me: if I have burdensome thoughts, I leave them, and I give you my word and vow, so long as I live, that I will not stir from here and that I will keep my heart intact, tongue unsullied, body clean, and soul pure to serve him and you, Lady. So I entreat your majesty, Lady, and the virginity [12100] in which the son of God took shelter, by which he fettered the death of hell, that you entreat of him for me that I may receive mercy from him."

While he was busy speaking, the infant restored the host to him, because of the promise he made and because of his clean conscience. Shedding tears of joy, he received it and then made use of it as he was supposed to do. [12110] Once he had taken off his vestments, he was as if downcast because of the fright he had had that had moved his flesh. He went right to bed now, holding his head between his hands, with contrite and moved heart.

The one who saw the miracle, who had assisted him in officiating, ran to his abbot to recount [12120] the miracle that he had seen, and the abbot, as soon as he could, came to him and comforted him; and the monk, who feared God, said to him while kneeling, "Dear Lord, may the savior reward you. Have the convent come to me. I say this because on this condition I will make confession before them all, I will tell the critical point [12130] that is inscribed within my heart. I am very impatient to tell it. I want to receive penance for it and, in telling it, to have shame."

The convent came there immediately, and before all, never seeking after falsehood or fraud, he recounted his conduct from start to finish, how and why he came there. He tells all that he recalls, [12140] and of the foolish heart that he had in him, and how he was supposed to leave there on that that day without any further delay when God made a portent because of which he was driven back forever; and because of these sins that he



was afraid, he had himself confessed before all as a base sinner and scoundrel that they should burn or hang: "People owe this to me, in return for my actions."

[12150] When the abbot heard the truth from his monk, and he recognized his great restraint, he said to him very openly, "Dear brother, you should know that to my knowledge you should have greater merit than I do, or all our convent does, because you have held back for twenty years and endured the great assaults [12160] that the devil has made on you. At first, he [accused you](#); now he excuses you and indeed says that he ought to have no hold over you. He is the Enemy and you, when you tread him underfoot in this way, the friend. The Lord God loves your life and you, utterly, along with this abbey. You will be abbot, and I will be your subject, prostrate before your feet [12170] so that you grant approval to me."

"I will not do it, in no way. I like better the cloister and the convent than honor that passes away [like the wind](#). I have not merited honor, according to the evidence of my life."

That monk, who thought to do well, recovered from his distress, so much did he repent and so much did he weep and pray before his altar, [12180] so much did he fast, so much did he strike himself that he submerged himself in love of God, that God held him tightly, thanks to these prayers that he loved. When the abbot died, the convent made haste together and they elected him whether he wanted or not, because of his morals and his renown. He could not decline the honor; he could not properly excuse himself from it. [12190] He comported himself very honorably and lived to improve himself, for he always strengthened his life, until God, who does not forget his followers, took him from the world and placed him in endless joy.

He is wise who makes a habit of good customs. He who habituates himself to the good and maintains himself in it, the Lord God bears him on his shoulders [12200] and, protecting him entirely and without a shadow of a doubt from misfortune, carries him. But he who holds to evil and gives himself to it, he surrenders himself to the death of hell, such that the evil in which he situates himself deprives him utterly of holy paradise. So everyone ought to strive to do good and to begin it. Know well that the beginning is the most difficult and the most painful. [12210] He who applies himself to good from the heart, the Lord God, who concerns himself with him, grants his grace to him and protects him, so that he has no fear of stumbling. And because you ought to make haste so that you can press on to erase your faults and to flee the great prisons of hell, from which no one can extricate himself once he has pressed his way into that state, [12220] so likewise you ought to hold fast to good from start to finish, for good that fails in midcourse is worth nothing at beginning or end. One kind of monks does good for a long time who then basely departs from it, and another goes astray in youth who later returns to the path of good, just as that monk did who in good subjected himself to great suffering. [12230] When he was there, he proved himself, such that by so doing he found endless joy.