

St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *bishop & doctor* (†373)

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FESTAL LETTER 1¹

(excerpt)

3. For the law was admirable, and the shadow was excellent, otherwise, it would not have wrought fear, and induced reverence in those who heard; especially in those who at that time not only heard but saw these things. Now these things were typical, and done as in a shadow. But let us pass on to the meaning, and henceforth leaving the figure at a distance, come to the truth, and look upon the priestly trumpets of our Savior, which cry out, and call us, at one time to war, as the blessed Paul saith; *We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities, with powers, with the rulers of this dark world. with wicked spirits in heaven.* At another time the call is made to virginity, and self-denial, and conjugal harmony, saying, ‘To virgins, the things of virgins; and to those who love the way of abstinence, the things of abstinence; and to those who are married, the things of an honorable marriage;’ thus assigning to each its own virtues and an honorable recompense.

¹ Written about 329

FESTAL LETTER 10²*(excerpt)*

And further, when the word is sown it does not yield a uniform produce of fruit in this human life, but one various and rich; for it bringeth forth, some an hundred, and some sixty, and some thirty, as the Savior teaches--that Sower of grace, and Bestower of the Spirit. And this is no doubtful matter, nor one that admits no confirmation; but it is in our power to behold the field which is sown by Him; for in the Church the word is manifold and the produce rich. Not with virgins alone is such a field adorned; nor with monks alone but also with honorable matrimony and the chastity of each one. For in sowing, He did not compel the will beyond the power. Nor is mercy confined to the perfect, but it is sent down also among those who occupy the middle and the third ranks, so that He might rescue all men generally to salvation. To this intent He hath prepared many mansions with the Father, so that although the dwelling-place is various in proportion to the advance in moral attainment, yet all of us are within the wall, and all of us enter within the same fence, the adversary being cast out, and all his host expelled thence.

² Written about 338

FESTAL LETTER 48³

(excerpt)

He is blessed who, being freely yoked in his youth, naturally begets children. But if he uses nature licentiously, the punishment of which the Apostle writes shall await whoremongers and adulterers.

For there are two ways in life, as touching these matters. The one the more moderate and ordinary, I mean marriage; the other angelic and unsurpassed, namely virginity. Now if a man choose the way of the world, namely marriage, he is not indeed to blame; yet he will not receive such great gifts as the other. For he will receive, since he too brings forth fruit, namely thirtyfold. But if a man embrace the holy and unearthly way, even though, as compared with the former, it be rugged and hard to accomplish, yet it has the more wonderful gifts: for it grows the perfect fruit, namely an hundredfold.

³ Written about 354