

St. Gregory of Nyssa, *bishop* († c. 395)

LETTER 3

(excerpt)

The Lord, as was meet and right, brought us safe through, accompanied as we had been by your prayers, and I will tell you a manifest token of His loving kindness. For when the sun was just over the spot which we left behind Earsus, suddenly the clouds gathered thick, and there was a change from clear sky to deep gloom. Then a chilly breeze blowing through the clouds, bringing a drizzling with it, and striking upon us with a very damp feeling, threatened such rain as had never yet been known, and on the left there were continuous claps of thunder, and keen flashes of lightning alternated with the thunder, following one crash and preceding the next, and all the mountains before, behind, and on each side were shrouded in clouds. And already a heavy cloud hung over our heads, caught by a strong wind and big with rain, and yet we, like the Israelites of old in their miraculous passage of the Red Sea, though surrounded on all sides by rain, arrived unwetted at Vestena. And when we had already found shelter there, and our mules had got a rest, then the signal for the down-pour was given by God to the air. And when we had spent some three or four hours there, and had rested enough, again God stayed the down-fall, and our conveyance moved along more briskly than before, as the wheel easily slid through the mud just moist and on the surface. Now the road from that point to our little town is all along the river side, going down stream with the water, and there is a continuous string of villages along the banks, all close upon the road, and with very short distances between them. In consequence of this unbroken line of habitations all the road was full of people, some coming to meet us, and others escorting us, mingling tears in abundance with their joy. Now there was a little drizzle, not unpleasant, lust enough to moisten the air; but a little way before we got home the cloud that overhung us was condensed into a more violent shower, so that our entrance was quite quiet, as no one was aware beforehand of our coming. But just as we got inside our portico, as the sound of our carriage wheels along the dry hard ground was heard, the people turned up in shoals, as though by some mechanical contrivance, I know not whence nor how, flocking round us so closely that it was not easy to get down from our conveyance, for there was not a foot of clear space. But after we had persuaded them with difficulty to allow us to get down, and to let our mules pass, we were crushed on every side by folks crowding round, insomuch that their excessive kindness all but made us faint. And when we were near the inside of the portico, we see a stream of fire flowing into the church; for the choir of virgins, carrying their wax torches in their hands, were just marching in file along the entrance of the church, kindling the whole into splendor with their blaze.

And when I was within and had rejoiced and wept with my people – for I experienced both emotions from witnessing both in the multitude, – as soon as I had finished the prayers, I wrote off this letter to your Holiness as fast as possible, under the pressure of extreme thirst, so that I might when it was done attend to my bodily wants.