

THE TENTH TO THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY
AFTER PENTECOST

FRATERNAL CHARITY — THE MORAL VIRTUES —
THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT —
THE BEATITUDES.

FRATERNAL CHARITY

PRESENCE OF GOD - Grant, O Lord, that I may understand the depth of meaning in the precept of fraternal charity.

MEDITATION

1. Jesus has given us as the foundation of all law, not only the precept of the love of God, "the greatest and the first commandment," but also the precept of the love of neighbor, and He expressly said that it is "like" to the first (*Mt 22,38.39*). That the precept of the love of God should be the basis of all Christian life is easy to understand, but it is not so easy to see that the same holds true of the precept of fraternal charity. However, Jesus has bound these two commandments so closely that the one cannot subsist without the other. He did not say that all is based on the first commandment, that of love of God, but "on these *two commandments* [the love of God and of neighbor] dependeth the whole law and the prophets" (*ibid. 22,40*). Why did He put the love of neighbor so close to the love of God as to make of it, with the latter, the one foundation of all Christianity? Because the virtue of fraternal charity is not love of the creature in itself and for itself, but it is love of the creature "*propter Deum*," that is, for God's sake, because of its relation to God. In other words, we must clearly understand that God commands us to love Him not only in Himself, but also in His rational creatures whom He has been pleased to create to His image and likeness. Just as a father wants to be loved and respected not only in his own person, but also in that of his children, so God wants to be loved in His creatures as well as in Himself, and He desires this to such an extent that He considers anything done to one of His creatures as done to Him. Jesus has said: "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me" (*ibid. 25,40*). Fraternal charity is of great importance, because it is in reality an extension of our charity toward God, an extension which embraces all men in relation to God, their Creator and their Father. For this

reason, the precept of the love of neighbor is inseparable from the precept of the love of God.

2. God is so insistent upon being loved in the neighbor that He makes this love the essential condition of our eternal salvation. When Jesus speaks to us of the last judgment, He gives no other reason for the justification of the good and the condemnation of the wicked than the doing of, or the omission of, works of mercy toward our neighbor. "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Why? "For I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me to drink..." (*ibid.* 25,34-35). I was hungry in the poor, I thirsted in your neighbor. If it is very consoling to know that God considers works of charity done to our neighbor as done to Himself, and rewards them as such, it is a matter of serious reflection to know that He also considers failures in charity toward our neighbor as if done to Himself, and so will punish them accordingly. Jesus, who is the personification of the goodness and infinite mercy of our heavenly Father, does not hesitate to pronounce the sentence of eternal damnation against those who have not loved, or helped, or consoled their neighbor. Why? Because : "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you do it to Me" (*ibid.* 25,45). God requires the concrete proof of our love for Him to be shown in the way we behave toward our neighbor. We cannot delude ourselves into thinking that we love God if we do not love our fellow men, who, like us, are the living images of our heavenly Father. What difference does it make if this image is sometimes disfigured by faults, by sin, or even by vices? It always remains the image of God which charity ought to make us recognize, venerate, and love in every man, regardless of his condition. We cannot be satisfied with an idealistic love for God. Our love must be realistic and actualized in our dealings with our neighbor : this is the unfailing proof of our love for God.

COLLOQUY

"O charity, you are as great as my God Himself, for God is Charity. You are so exalted that you reach the

throne of the Blessed Trinity. There you enter the bosom of the eternal Father, and from the Father's bosom, you go to the heart of the Incarnate Word, where you take your rest and are nourished. Thus the soul who possesses you seeks its nourishment and rest in God alone, after which it returns to earth, for you reach even to our neighbors, O charity, loving them not only as creatures, but as beings created by God to His own image and likeness. You do not stop at loving their bodies, that is, their exterior appearance, but you penetrate to the interior of their souls, which you love more than all else. You do not stop at God's gifts, but soar to the Giver and love all men only in Him.

“O charity, you are so sublime that you unite us to God! You can do all things and in the Church you form a trinity, as it were, similar to the Blessed Trinity; because just as the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God, and all three are united and are one and the same Being, so, by your virtue, O charity, this union reaches us, because you unite the soul to God, and one soul to another; in this invisible way, you form in the Church a kind of trinity. He who possesses you, O charity, nourishes himself with God, to such a point that he becomes like God through grace and participation.

“O my God, give me such perfect charity that I may know how to yield to my neighbor, helping and relieving him in all his needs, weaknesses, and troubles. May I know how to have prudent compassion for the faults of others” (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

THE MOTIVE FOR FRATERNAL CHARITY

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, teach me how to love You in my neighbor and to love my neighbor in You and for You.

MEDITATION

I. There are not two virtues of charity, one the love of God and the other love of the neighbor; for the charity by which we love God and the neighbor is one and the same. We love God because He is infinitely lovable, and we love the neighbor because faith teaches us to recognize in him a reflection of the loveliness of God. The motive for fraternal charity is the same as the motive for loving God, as we must always love God either directly in Himself or indirectly in the neighbor. Because fraternal charity has God for its ultimate object and last end, it is identical with the theological virtue by which we love God. Certainly God holds the first place! To Him, the infinite Good, we owe absolute preference above all other loves. The love of God, however, includes love of the neighbor, so that we love him in and for God, that is, because of his relation to God, and because he belongs to God. "God is the motive for loving the neighbor," says St. Thomas, "which proves that the act by which we love God is the same as that by which we love the neighbor. Hence the virtue of charity does not stop at the love of God, but it also includes love of neighbor" (II^a II^{ae}, q.25, a.1, co.). When one truly loves God, the neighbor is also loved, just as he is, in spite of his faults and the annoyance and trouble which he may sometimes cause; for instead of regarding these things, one looks much further and tries to see God in the brethren. With one's glance fixed on Him, and because of Him (*propter Deum*), all are loved without distinction or restriction.

Such a soul readily understands the profound logic of the Apostle's words : "If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he seeth, how can he love God whom he seeth not? And this commandment we have from God, that he who loveth God, love also his brother" (I Jn 4,20.21).

2. If I love my neighbor because he is congenial, renders me service or sympathizes with me, or because I enjoy his friendship, if I love him because of his fine qualities and pleasing manners, my love is merely human, and is not the love of charity. If I am good to my neighbor and help him because I am sorry for him or feel bound to him by human ties, my love may be called sympathy or philanthropy, but it cannot yet be called charity, because the characteristic of charity is to love one's neighbor "*propter Deum*," for God. My love becomes the virtue of charity only to the degree in which the love of God enters into it, only insofar as this love for my brethren is inspired by my love for God. The more my love is based on human motives alone—like congeniality, natural gifts, ties of blood—the more it is simply human love which has nothing of the merit and value of charity. "Love of neighbor is not meritorious if the neighbor is not loved because of God" (St. Thomas II^a II^{ae}, q.27, a.8). This is what St. Paul meant when he said : "If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor...and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (*1 Cor 13,3*).

It is easy to deceive ourselves, thinking we have great charity because we love those who love us, because we are very thoughtful and full of attentions toward those who think as we do, or who are close to us, while, in reality, it is a question of purely natural love into which the love of God hardly enters. "If you love [only] them that love you," Jesus said, "what reward shall you have?... Do not also the heathens this?" (*Mt 5,46.47*). If I want my love for my neighbor to be charity, I must transcend the natural and contemplate my neighbor in God, loving him in relation to God and because of God. Only in this way will my love for my neighbor be an act of the theological virtue of charity, the same act with which I love God; only thus shall I fulfill the precept of fraternal charity.

COLLOQUY

"As You, O God, have created man to Your image and likeness, so You have commanded us to love men with a love similar to that due to Your divinity. The reason why we love You, O Lord, is Your sovereignly high and infinite goodness, and the reason why we love men is because they

have all been created to Your image and likeness, so that we love them as holy, living images of Your divinity.

“ The same charity with which we love You, O Lord, is the source of the acts with which we love our neighbor. One same love holds for You, my God, as for our neighbor; it elevates us to the union of our spirit with You, my God, and it brings us back to loving society with our neighbor, but in such a way that we love him because he is created to *Your image and likeness*, created to share in Your divine goodness, to participate in Your grace and enjoy Your glory.

“ To love our neighbor with the love of charity is to love You, my God, in man, and man in You; it is to love You alone for the love of Yourself, and to love creatures for love of You.

“ O God of goodness! When we look at our neighbor created to Your image and likeness, should we not say one to another : See how much this person resembles the Creator? Should we not embrace him, caress him, and weep with love over him? Should we not give him many blessings? And why? For love of him? No, certainly not, for we do not know whether he, of himself, is worthy of love or of hatred. Then why? For love of You, O Lord, who created him to Your image and likeness, and made him capable of participating in Your goodness, grace, and glory. Therefore, O Love Divine, You have not only commanded us many times to love our neighbor, but You Yourself instill this love in our hearts ” (St. Francis de Sales).

CHARITY AND HUMILITY

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PRESENCE OF GOD - Give me, O Lord, humility with love; let humility guard charity in me, and may charity increase according to the measure of Your will.

MEDITATION

1. In the texts of today's Mass, the liturgy sketches the features of the Christian soul in its fundamental lines. First St. Paul shows us in the Epistle (*1 Cor 12,2-11*) a soul vivified by the Holy Spirit, who diffuses His gifts in it. The Apostle mentions charismatic gifts, that is, those special graces, such as the gift of tongues, of knowledge, of miracles, bestowed by the Holy Spirit with great generosity upon the primitive Church. Although these are very precious gifts, they are inferior to sanctifying grace and charity, which alone give supernatural life to the soul. Whereas charismatic gifts may or may not accompany sanctifying grace, they neither increase nor decrease its intensity thereby. St. Thomas notes that while grace and charity sanctify the soul and unite it to God, these miraculous gifts, on the contrary, are ordered for the good of another and can subsist even in one who is not in the state of grace. St. Paul also—and in the same letter from which the passage in today's Mass is taken—after enumerating all these extraordinary gifts, concludes with his famous words: "...all this, without charity, is nothing." Charity is always the "central" virtue, the fundamental characteristic of the Christian soul, and is also the greatest gift the Holy Spirit can give us. If the divine Paraclete did not vivify our soul by charity and grace, no one, not even the most virtuous, could perform the slightest act of supernatural value. "No man can say the Lord Jesus but by the Holy Ghost," the Apostle says. Just as a tree cannot bring forth fruit if it is deprived of its life-giving sap, so the soul which is not vivified by the Holy Spirit cannot perform acts of supernatural value. Note once again the great importance of

grace and charity; the smallest degree of them is worth more than all the extraordinary gifts which, although they can dispose souls to good, can neither infuse nor increase divine life in us.

2. The Gospel (*Lk* 18,9-14) presents us with another fundamental characteristic of the Christian soul : humility. Charity, it is true, is superior to it because it gives us divine life; yet, humility is of great importance because it is the virtue which clears the ground to make room for grace and charity. Jesus gives us a vivid and concrete example of this truth in today's parable of the Pharisee and the publican. The Gospel tells us explicitly that Jesus was speaking to some who "trusted in themselves as just and despised others." The Pharisee is the prototype, the perfect representative of this group. See him! how convinced of his justice, how puffed up by his own merits : I am neither a thief nor an adulterer, I fast and pay tithes. What more can one expect? But this proud man does not see that he lacks the greatest of all things, charity, so much so that he inveighs against others, accuses and condemns them : "I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, as also is this publican." Having no charity for his neighbor, he cannot have charity toward God. In fact, having gone into the Temple to pray, he is incapable of making the least little act of love or adoration, and instead of praising God for His blessings, he does nothing but praise himself. This man is really unable to pray because he has no charity, and he cannot have any because he is full of pride. "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (*Jas* 4,6). Therefore, the Pharisee returns home condemned, not so much by God who always loves to show mercy, as by his own pride which impedes the work of mercy in him.

The attitude of the publican is entirely different. He is a poor man who knows he has sinned, and he is aware of his moral wretchedness. He does not possess charity either, because sin is an obstacle to it, but he is humble, very humble, and he trusts in the mercy of God. "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" And God who loves to bend down to the humble, justifies him at that very moment; his humility has drawn down upon him the grace of the Most High. St. Augustine has said : "God prefers humility in things that are done badly, rather than pride in those which are done

well!" We are not justified by our virtues and our good works, but by grace and charity, which the Holy Spirit diffuses in our hearts, "according as He wills," yes, but always in proportion to our humility.

COLLOQUY

"O good Jesus, how often after bitter tears, sobs, and indescribable groanings, You have healed the wounds of my conscience by the unction of Your mercy and the oil of Your joy! How often after I have begun my prayer without hope, I have found my joy again in the hope of forgiveness! Those who have experienced this know that You are a real physician, who heals contrite hearts and solicitously tends their wounds. Let those who as yet have not had this experience, believe, at least, in Your words : 'The Spirit of the Lord hath anointed Me; He hath sent Me to preach to the meek, to heal the contrite of heart.' If they still doubt, let them approach You and learn, and they will understand what Your words mean : 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice.'

"O Lord, You said, 'Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you.' But what path should I take to reach You? The path of humility, for only then will You console me. But what consolation do You promise to the humble? Charity. In fact, the soul will obtain charity in proportion to its humility. O what sweet, delicious food is charity! It sustains us when we are weary, strengthens us when we are weak, and comforts us when we are sad. O Lord, give me this charity which makes Your yoke sweet and Your burden light" (St. Bernard).

THE EXTENT OF FRATERNAL CHARITY

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, make me understand that true charity allows of no exceptions, but embraces with sincere love our neighbor, whoever he may be.

MEDITATION

1. If charity were based on our neighbor's qualities, on his merits or his worth, if it were based on the consolation and benefits we receive from him, it would be impossible to extend it to all men. But since it is founded on the neighbor's relation to God, no one can be legitimately excluded from it, because we all belong to God—we are, in fact, His creatures, and, at least by vocation, His children, redeemed by the Blood of Christ and called to live in "fellowship" with God (cf. *I Jn 1,3*) by grace here on earth and by the beatific vision in heaven. Even if some, by their sins, have become unworthy of God's grace, as long as they live, they are always capable of being converted and of being readmitted to loving intimacy with their heavenly Father.

In the Old Testament, the great mystery of the communication of divine life to men was not revealed. Because Jesus had not yet come to establish these new relations between God and men, the law of fraternal charity did not demand this universal bond; the ancients would not have understood it. But since Jesus has come to tell us that God is our Father who wishes to communicate His divine life to us; since Jesus has come to offer us the grace of adoption as sons of God, the precept of charity has acquired a new breath. "You have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thy enemy. But I say to you : Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you : that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, who maketh His sun to rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust" (*Mt 5,43-45*). This is how Jesus Himself gave us the motive of universal charity : we should love all men because they are the children of our

heavenly Father; thus, we imitate His universal love for all those who are His creatures, chosen by Him to be His adopted children. Jesus also tells us to love our neighbor "*propter Deum*," for God's sake.

2. We very often find it difficult in practice to fulfill the precept of universal charity because our love for our neighbor is almost exclusively personal and subjective, and therefore, egoistic. In other words, instead of basing our love for our neighbor upon his relation to God, we make it depend upon his relation to ourselves. If our neighbor likes and respects us, shows consideration for us, lends us his services, we find no difficulty in loving him; or rather, we enjoy it and seek pleasure in it. But it is a very different thing if our neighbor is hostile toward us, or does not get along with us, if, even involuntarily, he causes us displeasure, if he does not think as we do, or does not approve of our actions. Judging by this conduct, we must admit that we have erred from the beginning, substituting for God, who is the true motive for loving our neighbor, our miserable self with our egoistic exigencies. We must also admit that in regard to fraternal charity, we are, unfortunately, almost always *egocentric* and very seldom *theocentric*. If our relations with our neighbor were really centered in God, we should know how to overcome our egocentric point of view, that is, our personal selfish one; and even though suffering from the wrongs, want of delicacy and rebuffs we might have received from our neighbor, we would never claim this as a motive for refusing him our love. Basically, it is always selfishness which leads us astray, and in this case, it closes the way to the practice of theological charity.

We should, therefore, conquer our selfishness and immediately go beyond the limited horizons of a love based on our own personal interests. Let us look higher; let us look at God, who repeats to us, as He did to St. Catherine of Genoa, "He who loves Me, loves all that is loved by Me." If our charity is arrested by the difficulties encountered in dealing with our neighbor, it is evident that our relations with our brethren are not regulated by our love of God, but by our love of self.

COLLOQUY

“ O Jesus, I know I have no enemies; but I do have my natural likes and dislikes : I may feel drawn toward one sister, and may be tempted to go a long way in order to avoid meeting another. However, You tell me that this last is the sister I must love and pray for, even though her manners might lead me to believe that she does not care for me. ‘ If you love them that love you, what thanks are to you? For sinners also love those that love them.’ And You teach me more, that it is not enough to love; we must also prove our love. We take a natural delight in pleasing friends, but that is not charity; even sinners do the same.

“ From all this I conclude that I ought to seek the companionship of those sisters for whom I feel a natural aversion and try to be their good Samaritan. It frequently takes only a word or a smile to impart fresh life to a despondent soul. Yet it is not merely in the hope of bringing consolation that I wish to be kind; if it were, I should soon be discouraged, for often well-intentioned words are totally misunderstood. Consequently, in order that I may lose neither time nor labor, I shall try to act solely to please You, O Jesus, by following this precept of the Gospel : ‘ When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends nor thy brethren, lest perhaps they also invite thee again, and a recompense be made to thee.’ ”

“ O Lord, what can I offer to my sisters but the spiritual feast of sweet and joyful charity? Teach me to imitate St. Paul who rejoiced with those who rejoiced. It is true he also wept with those who wept, and at the feast which I desire to provide, tears must sometimes fall, but I shall always do my best to change them into smiles, since Thou, O Lord, loveth the cheerful giver ” (T.C.J. *St*, 10 – 11).

THE MEASURE OF FRATERNAL CHARITY

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, make me understand the full meaning of Your words : "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (*Mt 22, 39*).

MEDITATION

1. When Jesus gave the precept of fraternal charity, He Himself set its measure : "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (*Mt 22,39*). This measure is so great that it would be difficult to exceed it, when we consider how much every man is inclined to love himself. The good that each of us desires for himself is so great that if we could succeed in desiring just as much for our neighbor—for any neighbor—our charity would be truly magnanimous. Jesus has said, "And as you would that men should do to you, do you also unto them in like manner" (*Lk 6,31*), which, in practice, signifies that we treat others exactly as we wish to be treated ourselves; for example, showing, toward our neighbor, the same consideration of thought, word, and deed, as we would desire for ourselves; serving and pleasing others, accommodating ourselves to their wishes, as we ourselves would wish to be served, pleased, and condescended to. Alas! our self-love incites us, instead, to use two different measures : one, very large—even exaggerated—for ourselves; the other, very small—even miserly—for our neighbor. The attentions we receive from others always seem to be so trifling, and how easily we complain that we are treated thoughtlessly! Yet how very far we are from showing such thoughtfulness toward our neighbor; although in retrospect, we always think we have done too much. We are very sensitive to the wrongs done us; and even when, in reality, they are slight, we consider them as almost unbearable; whereas we consider as mere nothings the things by which we offend others so freely. The greatest enemy of fraternal charity is self-love, which makes us too sensitive and demanding in what refers to ourselves, and very careless in what refers to others. For the sake of virtue we should force ourselves to cultivate the same thoughtfulness toward

our neighbor as we instinctively feel is due to us, and this, not so much for our neighbor himself, as for God, who wills that we act in this way and whom we must see in our neighbor. If we were really convinced that God is present in our brethren and that in them He is awaiting the delicacy of our love, how could we think it too much to love them at least as much as we love ourselves?

2. The love which each one of us bears to himself is not a theoretical nor abstract love, but a very definite and concrete one. It includes our person with all its peculiarities, needs, tastes, and feelings. We are so ingenious in justifying our own way of thinking, in maintaining our rights, in defending our cause, and in excusing our faults : how much understanding and sympathy we show in this realm! Yet, this is the attitude we should have toward our neighbor also. To love others for God does not mean that we confine ourselves to a general, platonic love, embracing them altogether as a group, without taking into account individual persons. No, it is necessary to love each one individually, in the actuality of his own personality, adapting ourselves to his feelings, tastes, and mentality, compassionating his faults, and concealing them just as carefully as we do our own. We must desire and seek his good, not by words alone but by deeds, just as we do for ourselves. And as we do not cease to love ourselves even though we have defects, so our love for our neighbor should be such as not to be lessened by the deficiencies we may find in him.

The first and greatest good we should wish for our neighbor is that which we should wish for ourselves : eternal salvation, sanctity, grace, and the ineffable joy of being a child of God, of sharing in His divine life, and enjoying Him in Heaven for all eternity. We should have a real, practical desire for this good, not contenting ourselves with simply sighing for it, but working with all our strength to obtain it—more by prayer, hidden sacrifice, and good example, than by words alone.

However, our first duty of striving for our neighbor's spiritual welfare should not be an easy excuse for dispensing ourselves from our obligation to help him in his material needs.

How often, alas! at the sight of the needs of others, our charity is limited to empty words and sterile compassion!

Whereas, to carry out the command of Jesus, we must translate our charity into practical, effective help, as we would wish to be helped in our personal needs. "All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them. For this is the law and the prophets" (*Mt 7,12*). How we need to penetrate the profound meaning of these words, in order to apply them to all our relations with our neighbor, excluding no one!

COLLOQUY

"O most merciful Lord Jesus, love for our neighbor is well-ordered when he is loved for Your sake, because You have created him and have commanded that he should be loved with a proper, well-regulated love. If we love our parents and the members of our family more than we love You, our love is not well-ordered, and anyone who loves like this is unworthy of You. We have received a twofold commandment : to love God and to love our neighbor; but although the commandment is twofold, only one love is prescribed, for the love with which You are loved is not different from the love with which our neighbor is loved for Your sake; nor can he love You who errs in the way he loves his neighbor.

"O Lord Jesus Christ, if I want charity to be well ordered in me, I must love both You and my neighbor; I must love You with all my heart, all my soul, all my mind, and my neighbor as myself, in such a way that I shall not do to others what I would not want to have done to myself and I shall give to others the same benefits that I desire for myself.

"Teach me, O most benign Lord, to meditate on these truths, to remember them, and to practice them with all my strength. By my love for my neighbor I shall know whether I love You, O Lord, for he who is neglectful in loving You, does not know how to love his neighbor either. O most merciful Lord Jesus Christ, what shall I say and what shall I do, who on account of the hardness of my heart do not love my neighbor for Your sake; I have often sinned, trying to get something I thought I needed for myself or in trying to avoid something disagreeable. Thus there is no true love in me. Deign to help me, O merciful Lord Jesus Christ, You who are the source of charity and true love, genuine love; pardon my sins and in Your mercy give me a share in Your immense

clemency. Oh! help me to be converted entirely to You, so that I may live with You in ordered charity, eternally! (Ven. Raymond Jourdain).

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THE NEW COMMANDMENT

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, grant me the grace to understand Your new commandment, the commandment of fraternal charity.

MEDITATION

1. The commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (*Mt 22,39*), requires strong, solid virtue, but it does not yet reach the greatest perfection of love. The highest ideal was proposed to us by Jesus shortly before His death, in those last moments in which He recommended to His dear ones what He had most at heart : "A new commandment I give unto you...as I have loved you, that you also love one another.... This is My commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you" (*Jn 13,34 - 15,12*). In these words, Jesus raised the precept of charity to a truly new perfection : that of loving others, not only as we love ourself, but as He loves us and as He loves them. This perfection was so dear to Him that He called it *His* commandment, the commandment which He most loved and the observance of which was to be the unfailing mark of His closest friends : "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples" (*ibid. 13,35*). With a master stroke, Jesus made us pass from one standard of charity to the other—from the high, certainly, but still too human one, based on our love of self to the divine standard based on God's infinite love for us. It is no longer a question of fixing our eyes on the love we have for ourself, in order to nourish a similar love for our brethren, but one of fixing our gaze infinitely higher, on the heart of Christ, the heart of God, to penetrate the secret of His infinite love for men that we might emulate it. Our fraternal charity will not

be perfect until it becomes the reflection, or better still, the continuation of the love of Jesus for each of His creatures. We must try to love each one of our companions—even the least congenial, even those who do not love us—as Jesus loves him. And Jesus loves him so much that He has given His life for him; so much, that every day He renews this immolation for him on the altar, and for him remains truly present in the Eucharist, ever ready to nourish him with His immaculate Flesh. What excuse can we find for our lack of charity toward our neighbor when we compare it with the charity of Jesus?

2. Considering the "new commandment," St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus said, "Oh! how dearly do I cherish it, since it proves to me that it is Thy will, O Lord, *to love in me* all those Thou dost bid me love" (St, 10). The Saint understood that we would not reach the perfection of fraternal charity if we did not try to love our neighbor as Jesus loves him; but sensing how difficult this might be for us, she rejoiced, thinking that if Jesus gave us this commandment, it is because He wishes to lead us to such heights. And, in fact, this is so, provided we leave Him free to work in us, provided we offer Him all the energy of our heart, pure and entire, that He may use it to surround our brethren with the same delicate attentions He once gave the people of Palestine. He did it personally then; today He wishes to do it by means of us. In this way our love for our neighbor will truly become a renewal of the love of Jesus; we shall communicate to each person with whom we come in contact something of the infinite tenderness of the heart of Christ. But to reach this, we must cleanse our heart from every trace of egoism, every feeling of personal like or dislike. We must also try to fathom more and more the depths of the mystery of the love of Jesus for us. Jesus loves us just as we are, in spite of our faults, our dull minds and our stubborn wills; He loves us in spite of our sins. Furthermore, He became incarnate for us, sinners as we are, and died on the Cross for us. Our lack of natural gifts, our faults, even our sins, never make Him reject us; He is always seeking us, always surrounding us with His grace, always entreating, inviting us to become saints. Even the souls of the greatest sinners are dear to Him; He is continually pursuing them with His love. He surrounded the traitor, Judas, with the tenderness

of His love until the very end. He called him by the sweet name of friend and received his kiss. Jesus loves us, not because we are perfect, but because we are the children of His heavenly Father; not because we are good, but because in us, His creatures, the lambs of His flock, He sees the image of His Father. Then, how can we be satisfied to love only those who are good, whose company is agreeable and whose friendship gives us pleasure? If Jesus treated us as we treat others, we would have very little hope of enjoying His understanding, His mercy, and His friendship.

COLLOQUY

"In the Old Law, when You told Your people to love their neighbor as themselves, You had not yet come down upon earth, and knowing full well man's strong love of self, You could not ask anything greater. But when You gave Your Apostles a new commandment—*Your commandment*—You not only required us to love our neighbor as ourselves, but would have us love even as You do, and as You will do until the end of time.

"O my Jesus! You never ask what is impossible: You know better than I how frail and imperfect I am; You know that I shall never love my sisters as You have loved them, unless You love them Yourself within me, my Jesus. It is because You desire to grant me this grace, that You have given a new commandment, and dearly do I cherish it, since it proves to me that it is Your will *to love in me* all those that You bid me love!"

"When I show charity toward others I know that it is You who are acting within me, and the more closely I am united to You, the more dearly I love my sisters" (T.C.J. St, 10).

"O Christ, Your words form a new canticle: 'A new commandment I give unto you!' And what else does this Your commandment contain but love and charity; You wish us to love others as You, who are Love, love them! You say to us, 'Love them as I have loved you,' not 'as I love Myself,' for whereas You exercised justice upon Yourself, You have loved us in an act of mercy, meekness, and infinite compassion; and You wish us to love others in the same way" (St. Mary Magdalene dei Pazzi).

JUDGE NOT

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, keep me from judging and criticizing my neighbor; give me kind, loving thoughts about everyone.

MEDITATION

1. "Judge not, that you may not be judged" (*Mt 7,1*). Charity to our neighbor begins with our thoughts, as many of our failings in charity are basically caused by our judgments. We do not think highly enough of others, we do not sufficiently consider their manifest good qualities, we are not benevolent in interpreting their way of acting. Why? Because in judging others, we almost always base our opinion on their faults, especially on those which wound our feelings or which conflict with our own way of thinking and acting, while we give little or no consideration to their good points.

It is a serious mistake to judge persons or things from a negative point of view and it is not even reasonable, because the existence of a negative side proves the presence of a positive quality, of something good, just as a tear in a garment has no existence apart from the garment. When we stop to criticize the negative aspect of a person or of a group, we are doing destructive work in regard to our own personal virtue and the good of our neighbor. To be constructive, we must overlook the faults and recognize the value of the good qualities that are never wanting in anyone.

Moreover, do we not also have many faults, perhaps more serious ones than those of our neighbor? "And why seest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and seest not the beam that is in thy own eye"? (*ibid. 7,3*). Let us seriously study these words of Jesus, for very often, in spite of our desire to become saints, some remnant of that detestable spirit of criticism remains hidden in our heart. In considering our faults and those of others, we still retain something of this twofold measure which makes us judge the faults of others differently from the way in which we judge our own. What great progress we should make in fraternal charity, in attaining our own perfection, if instead of criticizing

the faults seen in others, we would examine ourselves to see if there is not something similar—or perhaps worse—in us, and would apply ourselves to our own amendment! St. Teresa of Jesus said to her nuns, “Often commend to God any sister who is at fault and strive for your own part to practice the virtue which is the opposite of her fault with great perfection” (*Way*, 7). This is one of the best ways of helping others to correct themselves.

2. Judgment belongs to God; it is reserved to Him alone, for He alone can see into our hearts, can know what motives and intentions make us act as we do. “Man sees the face, but God sees the heart” (*1 Sm 16,7*). Therefore, anyone who judges another—unless he is obliged to do so by his office, as superiors are—usurps, in a sense, God’s rights and puts himself in the place of God. To presume to judge one’s brethren always implies a proud attitude toward God and toward the neighbor. Besides, one who is quick to judge others lays himself open to committing great errors, because he does not know the intentions of others and has not the sufficient prerequisites for formulating a correct judgment.

In the face of an act which is blameworthy in itself, we are evidently not obliged to consider it good; nevertheless, we must excuse the intention of the one who committed it and not simply attribute it to a perverse will. “If our neighbor’s acts had one hundred facets, we should see only the best one; and then, if the act is blameworthy, we should at least excuse the intention” (*T.M. Sp*).

Every day I too commit many faults; I too fall into many defects, but this does not signify that all these stem from bad will. My faults are often committed inadvertently, through frailty; and because I detest these failings of mine, the Lord continues to love me and wants me to retain complete confidence in His love. He regards others the same as He does me; therefore, I have no right to doubt my neighbor’s good will simply because I see him commit some faults, nor have I the right to diminish, for this reason, my love and esteem for him. Perhaps that person who seems so reprehensible has already abhorred his faults and wept over them interiorly far more than I have over mine; God has already forgiven him and continues to love him. Should I be more severe than God? On this point it will be well to remember that God will treat me with the same severity

that I show to others, for Jesus has said, "For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged, and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again" (*Mt 7,2*).

COLLOQUY

"O Jesus, You are my Judge! I shall try always to think leniently of others, that You may judge me leniently—or not at all, since You say : 'Judge not, that you may not be judged.' This is why, when I chance to see a sister doing something seemingly imperfect, I do all I can to find excuses and to credit her with the good intentions she no doubt possesses.

"O Jesus, You make me understand that the chief plenary indulgence, which is within reach of everyone, and can be gained without the ordinary conditions, is that of charity, which 'covereth a multitude of sins'" (cf. *T.C.J. St, 10 - 11 - C*).

"Teach me, O Lord, not to judge my neighbor for any fault I may see him commit, and if I should see him commit a sin, give me the grace to excuse his intention which is hidden and cannot be seen. But even if I should see that his intention was really bad, give me the grace to excuse my neighbor because of temptation, from which no mortal is free" (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

"O Lord, help me not to look at anything but at the virtues and good qualities which I find in others and to keep my own grievous sins before my eyes so that I may be blind to their defects. This course of action, though I may not become perfect in it all at once, will help me to acquire one great virtue—to consider all others better than myself. To accomplish this, I must have Your help; when it fails, my own efforts are useless. I beg You to give me this virtue" (*T.J. Life, 13*).

BE YE MERCIFUL

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, may the consideration of Your infinite mercy dilate my heart, that I may learn how to treat others mercifully.

MEDITATION

1. Jesus revealed to us the mystery of His heavenly Father's merciful love not only for our own consolation and personal benefit, not only to give us absolute confidence in God, but also to teach us to be merciful to our neighbor. "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (*Lk 6,36*). Good attracts good, goodness engenders goodness, kindness inspires kindness; therefore, the more a soul penetrates the mystery of infinite mercy, the more it will be incited to emulate it. When we feel irritated with someone and little disposed to indulgence and pardon, we ought to plunge with all our strength into the consideration of the infinite mercy of God, in order to stifle all harshness, resentment, and anger in ourselves. If we had but the slightest experience of our own wretchedness, it would not be difficult for us to realize that there is no moment of our lives in which we do not need the mercy of God. Our merciful Father is so forbearing that He never casts us off despite all our falls, never reproaches us about the many times He has forgiven us, never refuses us His paternal embrace of love and peace. Nothing softens a soul more, making it full of good will toward others, than this consideration. Oh! if others could see in our attitude toward them a reflection of God's infinite mercy!

Peter had not yet completely understood the deep mystery of merciful love when he asked Jesus if it were enough to pardon his neighbor seven times. Jesus' reply must have sounded like an exaggeration to him: "I say not to thee, till seven times, but till seventy times seven times" (*Mt 18,22*). Later, Peter's heart was completely changed when he experienced the goodness of Jesus, who, without a single word of reproach, forgave him his threefold denial so generously. This man, who was so impetuous, so quickly

moved to anger, and so ready to threaten, was later to give to the primitive Church this gentle exhortation to goodness and pardon : "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one on another, being lovers of the brotherhood, merciful...not rendering evil for evil, nor railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing : for unto this are you called" (*1 Pt 3,8.9*). How can we fail to hear in these words an echo of the words of Jesus : "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you" (*Mt 5,44*)?

2. We notice in the Gospel how the words of Jesus, generally so mild and loving, even when addressed to the greatest sinners—like Mary Magdalen, the woman taken in adultery, and even Judas—become exceptionally severe and almost harsh, when He speaks of failures in fraternal charity. God loves us infinitely, and He has but one desire : to pour out upon our souls the torrents of His boundless mercy; yet His love and mercy seem to vanish and are replaced by severity in the measure that He finds us harsh and exacting toward our neighbor. We need God's mercy so much; we have such need of His mild judgment, His pity, forgiveness, and mercy. Why, then, do we not do as much for others? Perhaps because they have offended us, have made us suffer? And have we never offended God? Have we not, by our sins, contributed to the most bitter Passion of Jesus? Too often we are like the cruel servant in the parable who, having received pardon from his master for a big debt, was not willing to pardon a trifling debt which one of his companions owed to him, but cast him into prison until he could pay the last cent. How can we expect mercy and forgiveness from God if we are so exacting with our neighbor? Let us not forget the words we repeat every day in the *Our Father* : "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Let us act in such a way that these words will not be our own condemnation, for Jesus has said, "For if you will forgive men their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your offenses. But if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offenses" (*ibid.*, 14.15). It depends, therefore, on ourselves, whether we shall one day be judged with more or less mercy.

"In the evening of life, we shall be judged on love" (*J.C. SM I*, 57), that is, we shall be judged on our love for God and for our neighbor.

COLLOQUY

" O Jesus, how much You esteem this mutual love of ours for one another! You could have taught us to say, ' Forgive us, Lord, because we are doing a great deal of penance, we pray often, we fast, or because we have left all things for Your sake and we love You greatly,' or ' Forgive us because we would lose our life for Your sake ' or other words of the same kind; but You said only, '*Forgive us, as we forgive!*'

" This is a truth which we should consider carefully. You, O Lord, have willed to bind a grace so great—in such a serious and important matter as pardoning our sins which have merited eternal fire—to such a simple condition as our forgiveness of others. But what about one as poor as I, who have had so few occasions for forgiving others and so many for being forgiven? O Lord, take my desire to do so, for I believe I would forgive any wrong if You would forgive me. But at this moment I see that I am so guilty in Your sight that I feel that those who injure me are treating me too well.

" As I have so few even of these trifling things to offer You, O Lord, Your pardoning of me must be a free gift : here is abundant scope for Your mercy!

" But are there, perhaps many others who are like myself and have not yet understood this truth? If there are any such, I beg them in Your Name, O Lord, to remember this truth often and to pay no heed to little things about which they think they are being slighted. Sometimes we get to the point of thinking that we have done something wonderful because we have forgiven a person for some trifling thing. Then we ask You, O Lord, to forgive us as people who have done something important, just because we have forgiven someone. Ah, Lord! grant us to understand how little we understand ourselves and how empty our hands are! Deign to pardon us, but only by Your mercy!" (T.J. Way, 36).

THE MANTLE OF CHARITY

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, teach me to cover the defects and faults of others with the mantle of charity.

MEDITATION

1. "Do not speak against one another, my brethren. He that speaks against a brother...speaks against the law" (*Jas 4,11*), that is, he contradicts the evangelical law of fraternal charity. To speak evil of our neighbor does not necessarily mean that we spread unjust suspicions about him or accuse him of faults and wrong deeds which he has not committed. It is sufficient to mention needlessly the faults of others, even though they be real and known to all. To do this is to act contrary to charity, because it fixes our own attention, and that of others, on the imperfections of the neighbor, rather than on his good qualities. As a result, we lessen in the mind of the listener the esteem due to our neighbor. Quite different is the behavior of charity, which as Holy Scripture says, "covereth all sins" (*Prv 10,12*), and tries to hide the failings of others rather than draw attention to them. How instinctively we hide our own faults and blunders, not wishing them to be a subject of conversation. We should employ the same skill in concealing the faults of others. We are so sensitive about things said against us; how can we think that it is a wholly indifferent thing to speak with so much liberty about our neighbor's faults, under the pretext that what we say is true and already known? Are not our faults equally true, perhaps, and evident to all who approach us?

Fraternal charity means loving our neighbor for God's sake, because he belongs to God and is the work of His hands. As a mother does not care to have her children's faults spoken of, nor an artist like to have his works criticized, neither is God pleased to have us talk about the faults of His creatures. Therefore, we must not only strictly refrain from speaking about the faults of others, but we must also avoid paying attention to those who do talk about them.

St. John of the Cross says, "Never listen to the weaknesses of others, and, if anyone complains to thee of another, thou mayest tell him humbly to say naught of it to thee" (*SM II*, 61, 7).

2. St. Teresa of Jesus wrote to her daughters : "To be glad when your sisters' virtues are praised is a great thing, and when we see a fault in someone, we should be as sorry about it as if it were our own and try to conceal it from others" (*Int C V*, 3). This is the true attitude of a delicate fraternal charity. Besides, it is what we do spontaneously for our friends. Why should we not try to do it for everyone, since charity is universal. But, very often the devil, the enemy of charity, stirs up conflicts within us and tries to make us do the opposite. Even the saints have had temptations of this kind; but whereas we succumb to them so frequently, they reacted courageously and made of them an opportunity to practice charity more zealously. This was the strategy which St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus used : "Should the devil bring before me the defects of a sister, I hasten to look for her virtues and good motives. I call to mind that though I may have seen her fall once, she may have gained many victories over herself which in her humility she conceals, and also that what appears to be a fault may very well, owing to the good intention that prompted it, be an act of virtue" (*St.*, 10).

If we feel a natural aversion toward any person, or if a certain person has done us some wrong, we see that person's defects far more easily than we see his virtues; the former are magnified in our eyes and the latter minimized. It will also be easy for us to put a wrong interpretation on whatever he says or does. This is the time to be especially watchful, to fight against the malevolent thoughts that spontaneously come into our mind, and not to permit ourselves to speak of them to others. We should oppose these thoughts, too, by positive acts of charity: praying particularly for this person, seizing every possible opportunity to render him some service, and acting in an especially kind and friendly manner toward him. The mantle of charity must be wide enough to cover, not only the faults of our friends, but even those of our enemies, and those who annoy us. Charity makes no distinction of persons, but has equal good will for all, because it sees and loves only God in all.

COLLOQUY

" If I wish to know whether I possess true charity, I must examine myself and see if when I speak about any of my neighbors, I am more ready to mention his virtues than his faults. Even if I do not speak ill of him, it is very wrong, nevertheless, to listen to detraction, because by remaining silent, I show my approval of what I hear. Therefore, O my God, whenever anyone comes to tell me some fault of another, I will not listen, but will tell him to pray for that person, and for me—that I may correct my own faults. Then it will be easier to speak about it to the guilty person than to talk about it to others; otherwise, instead of remedying it, I would be committing many more faults, and graver ones than those of the person spoken about.

" If my eye were pure, O Lord, I would very easily see how I ought to practice love toward my neighbor. If I knew that both of us had the same fault, I should go to him and ask his advice as to how I could correct it. In order to advise me correctly, he would think about this fault and would soon see that he too was guilty of it, and in this way we should both learn how to correct it. One whose eye is pure knows how to deal lovingly with his neighbor.

" O Lord, if I love my sister, then even when I am singing Your praises, I should interrupt them to help her when she needs help. If this is my duty as to her physical welfare, how much more is it my duty when it is a question of her spiritual needs? If I am obliged to take care of her for a night or two when she is ill, is it not more important for me, if I have real charity, to forget my weariness, and keep vigil a night or two, weeping for my sister's faults, even though they are slight? I must also pray that she will have all the virtues and strive to help her acquire them. Besides virtue and health of soul, I must also pray that she will gain much merit, and by Your grace, O Lord, become completely transformed in You " (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

BAPTISMAL GRACE

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PRESENCE OF GOD - Grant, O Lord, that the grace of holy Baptism may reach its full development in me.

MEDITATION

1. The healing of the deaf-mute, as narrated in today's Gospel (*Mk 7,31-37*), is a figure of baptismal grace. We, too, were once taken before Jesus in a condition similar to that of the poor man in Galilee. We were deaf and dumb in the life of the spirit, and Jesus, in the person of the priest, welcomed us lovingly at the baptismal font. The priest made the same gesture over us and said the same word as did the divine Master in the Gospel : "*Ephpheta*," "Be thou opened!" From that moment the hearing of our soul was opened to faith and our tongue was loosed to give praise to God. We were enabled to listen to the voice of faith—to the exterior voice of the teaching Church and to the interior voice of the Holy Spirit, urging us to do good; from that moment, we could open our lips in prayer : in praise, adoration, and petition. But later the noise of the world deafened and distracted us; likewise, the tumult of our passions deadened our capacity to listen to the voice of God. Then, too, idle conversations about worldly things and great anxiety over various events in our life have left us unable to pray sincerely and earnestly. But Jesus wishes to renew the grace of our Baptism today and to repeat the all-powerful word "*Ephpheta*." How greatly we need Him to reopen our ears to His voice and to make us more attentive and sensitive to His call! "In the morning He wakeneth my ear that I may hear Him as a master; I do not resist, I have not gone back," says Isaias (50,4.5). This is the grace we must ask of Our Lord today, that we may not only hear His voice, but may follow it, without resistance. The more faithfully we follow it, the more sensitive we shall become to its slightest whisper. At the same time let us ask

for the grace of always being ready to give praise to the Lord, to call upon His mercy, to ask His pardon humbly, accusing ourselves of our faults sincerely and with sorrow.

2. Those who were present when Jesus performed this miracle wondered at it, saying, "He hath done all things well; He hath made both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak." Certainly, Jesus has done all things well; He has arranged everything in the best way possible for our sanctification. He has prepared for us all the graces we need, and not only in sufficient measure, but even superabundantly. Unfortunately, however, we do not always cooperate with His grace; many times pride, egoism, and all our other uncontrolled passions turn to evil what God has planned for our good. If we had accepted lovingly and with resignation that difficulty, that trial, or disappointment which God had permitted for the sole purpose of providing us with an opportunity to practice virtue, we should have made great progress; but by giving way to impatience, by protesting and complaining, we rather added to our failures and infidelities. We should cooperate with grace more readily and strive to maintain our soul in an attitude of open docility to all the invitations to virtue which God is continually sending us by means of the different circumstances of life.

Today's Mass, and especially the Epistle (*1 Cor 15,1-10*), offers us a splendid model of cooperation with grace. It is St. Paul, the Apostle, who in his humility calls himself "the least of the Apostles," who says most sincerely : "By the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace in me hath not been void." St. Paul realizes that, if he became an Apostle, instead of the persecutor which he had been, it was not because of his own merits, but solely by the grace of God; he attributes nothing to himself, but all to God. At the same time, he is conscious of his personal correspondence, the correspondence which is always the fruit of grace, but which also includes, as an indispensable element, our free adherence to it. Consequently, we must have an attitude of profound humility as the basis of our correspondence to grace; that is, we must clearly realize that whatever good is in us is due only to God. This attitude of humility must be accompanied by a voluntary, continual assent of our will to God's invitations. We cannot give this assent without the help of grace, and yet it depends on us; it is entirely in our hands. Therefore, like

St. Paul, we can attribute nothing to our own merits, but should say with him, " By the grace of God, I am what I am." Our willing adhesion to grace, however, will give us the right to add, " and His grace in me hath not been void." But only steady, faithful, generous adhesion will give us that right.

COLLOQUY

" Henceforth, O Lord, it is You alone whom I love, follow, seek, and serve; You alone have the right to command, and to You alone do I wish to be subject. Command, I beg You, and demand of me anything You wish; heal and open my ears, that I may hear Your commands; cure and open my eyes, that I may see the signs of Your will; take away my dullness that I may be able to contemplate You, and thus, I hope, accomplish faithfully whatever You ask of me.

" O God and most merciful Father, receive this Your fugitive child. All that I have had in the past has been sufficient for me; I have had enough of being the plaything of vain, deceitful things. Now I am running away from this tyranny; receive me as Your servant, as they received me when I ran away from You to them. I know I need to return to Your house; behold me knocking at the door; open to me; show me how to reach You. I have nothing but my will : I know only one thing—that I must despise the ephemeral and trivial and seek the immutable and eternal.

" My desire is to return to You, and I ask You for the means to obtain my desire. If You abandon us, we perish, but You do not abandon us; for You are the Sovereign Good, and no one has ever truly sought You and not found You.... O Lord, You know that I have the will but not the power, and I cannot even will what is good without You, nor can I do what I will to do if Your power does not help me; and what I can do, I often do not wish to do, unless You make Your will triumph on earth as in heaven. I implore but one thing of Your sovereign mercy : that You convert me entirely to You and keep me from resisting the grace which leads me to You" (St. Augustine).

BEAR YE ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

PRESENCE OF GOD - Give me, O Lord, prompt, attentive charity for the needs of others, a charity which, for the love of You, knows how to make itself all things to all men.

MEDITATION

1. Everyone has some burden, more or less heavy, to bear : physical or moral weakness, the press of duties and responsibilities, fatigue or other troubles which weigh on his shoulders. Everyone feels the need of a friendly hand to help him carry this weight. This hand should be held out to him in fraternal charity, which for the love of God, knows how to be all things to all men. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so you shall fulfill the law of Christ" St. Paul exhorts us (*Gal 6,2*). A Christian knows that he is not isolated, but is a member of a unique body, the Mystical Body of Christ. "So we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (*Rom 12,5*). This knowledge of his solidarity with the brethren makes a Christian live, not enclosed in the tiny circle of his own interests, but with his heart open to the needs and interests of others. The mystery of our incorporation in Christ is more than an individual fact; by its very nature, it is a social fact. Incorporation in Christ by grace and charity connotes reciprocal incorporation among brethren, like the branches of a vine, which, sprung from the same stock, are so closely united one to another that they live, grow and develop together. Love for Christ is the vital expression of our union with Him; the closer this union becomes, the more our love increases; so too, fraternal charity is the vital expression of our reciprocal union with the brethren in Christ, to such a point that if this charity were not living and operative, we could have to say that our union in Christ and with Christ was very weak or even absolutely null.

If charity and grace unite us to Christ in such intimate and vital relations, it is evident that we must live this union, first with Him who is our Head, and then with our brethren,

who like us have also been engrafted into Christ. Hence there will be a supernatural affection which will bind us to one another and make us one heart and one soul, ready to labor and suffer for one another, to help and sustain one another. "Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep" (*Rom* 12,15). Thus the Apostle teaches us to share the joys and sorrows, the cares and anxieties of others as if they were our own. They are, in fact, our own, because they are the joys, sorrows, cares, and anxieties of that one Mystical Body of Christ to which we belong and which, therefore, is *ours*.

2. Bearing one another's burdens also means enduring the faults of others calmly and kindly. Faults are the inevitable consequence of human limitations. The *Imitation of Christ* tells us, "what a man cannot amend in himself or others, he must bear with patience till God ordains otherwise" (I, 16,1). In the last months of her life, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus wrote, "Now I know that true charity consists in bearing all my neighbor's defects, in not being surprised at mistakes, but in being edified at the smallest virtues" (*St*, 10).

Not without reason does St. Paul say, "charity beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (*1 Cor* 13,7). Charity always believes in the good will of others, even though it may be accompanied by faults; it always hopes in the good which it knows how to discover in every creature, although it may be eclipsed by many deficiencies. What is more important, charity supports everything, never finding any burden too heavy. To support, according to the etymology of the word, means "to place oneself under a weight to carry it." Charity feels that it must stoop with love to take up the burdens of others, particularly those burdens which all avoid because they are troublesome. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus notes that certain people are left alone because of their natural imperfections, such as sensitiveness, or lack of judgment or education. "Defects of this kind are, I know, incurable.... From all this I conclude that I ought to seek the companionship of those sisters for whom I feel a natural aversion, and try to be their good Samaritan" (*St*, 11). Behold the charity which, instead of fleeing, seeks out those who are suffering through natural and moral imperfections, and busies itself with them

so lovingly that they never guess how painful the effort is, nor how troublesome their defects are to others. Charity bears all things, endures all things with a smiling, serene face, never showing itself annoyed or crushed by the burden it bears.

COLLOQUY

" O Lord, teach me to love my neighbor with all my heart, not merely as myself, but more than myself, thus obeying Your commandment : ' Love one another, as I have loved you. '

" Just as You, O Lord, have always preferred us to Yourself, and do so still, making Yourself our Food in the Blessed Sacrament, so You wish us to have such great love for one another that we always prefer our neighbor to ourselves; and as You have done all that You could for us, so You want us to do all we can for one another. Grant, then, O Lord, that, without giving You any offense, my love for my neighbor may be so firm, cordial, and strong, that I will never refuse to do or endure anything for his sake. Teach me to love him with my deeds, obtaining for him all the good I can, both for his soul and for his body, to pray for him, and to serve him lovingly whenever I have the opportunity. If my love were to consist only in pleasant words, it would amount to very little, and I would not be really loving my neighbor as You have loved us. To attain the perfection of love, it is not enough for me to work for my neighbor; I must also do what he wants in the way that pleases him, without showing any displeasure. By doing this, I shall acquire greater merit, because I shall be practicing the highest degree of self-renunciation " (St. Francis de Sales).

CHARITY IS NOT SELFISH

PRESENCE OF GOD - O God, who hast loved me from all eternity and always lovest me in a disinterested way, teach me to love without calculation or measure.

MEDITATION

1. Charity "seeketh not her own" (*1 Cor 13,5*). Attention to the needs and sorrows of others, with a constant readiness to give one's help, is no justification for expecting a like return. "Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing thereby; and your reward shall be great, and you shall be the sons of the Highest; for He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil" (*Lk 6,35*). Charity does not give in order to receive; it gives without counting the cost and without measure, for it knows that the honor of serving and loving God in His creatures is ample reward. Charity loves, serves, gives, and spends itself lavishly, solely for the sake of loving and serving God in others, for the joy of imitating His infinite generosity, for the joy of feeling itself the child of the heavenly Father who bestows His favors upon all without distinction. What greater reward can there be than to be able to call ourselves, and to be in all truth, children of God! To enjoy this reward, charity seeks to fly from every earthly recompense and hides the good it does. "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth" (*Mt 6,3*). It seeks by preference to benefit those from whom it can expect nothing in return: "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren... lest perhaps they also invite thee again and a recompense be made to thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind; and thou shalt be blessed, because they have not wherewith to make thee recompense" (*Lk 14, 12-14*). How the logic of the Gospel differs from the logic of human calculations!

Whenever a strong desire to give ourselves to God arises in our heart, it is accompanied by a similar longing to give ourselves to others solely for love of God. Then we no longer

distinguish between serving God and serving others : we see God in everyone, we give ourselves to them in order to give ourselves to God, and we give ourselves to all as we would give ourselves to God. This was the attitude in the heart of St. Paul when he exclaimed : " But I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls, although loving you more, I be loved less " (*2 Cor 12,15*).

2. " Charity is patient, is kind...is not provoked to anger " (*1 Cor 13,4.5*). Charity is never wearied, is never impatient with the ungrateful, is not irritated when repulsed, but perseveres in loving and doing good. Charity does not look for gratitude, is not ungracious. It is not offended when it meets with a lack of refinement or consideration; but, in spite of the coldness and hostility which it may encounter, it continues its one work : to give itself, and to give itself always, for the love of God. At the same time, however, charity is not insensible to ingratitude and offenses; on the contrary, the more a heart is refined in love, the more sensitive it is to everything which is opposed to love.

But it does not make use of its sensitiveness to defend its own rights, to protest against the ingratitude of others, or to demand some degree of justice; it sacrifices all these to God for the benefit of those who have caused its suffering. This is the characteristic of charity : it does not permit itself to be " overcome by evil," but it " overcomes evil by good " (*Rom 12,21*).

We all know, however, how difficult this is, how hard for selfish, demanding nature. Sometimes, just when one is about to perform an especially delicate act of charity for another, a strong feeling of antipathy toward that person arises from the sensitive part of the soul because of the absence of some sign or token of respect or consideration. This is manifestly a temptation which must be overcome as soon as it appears, that it may not take root. Anyone who would yield to these feelings and act accordingly, under the pretext of justice or of teaching a lesson, would soon become very exacting to the great detriment of charity. In community life especially, patient charity must be practiced, the charity which knows how to pass over wrongs, little or great, misunderstandings and offenses; one which knows how to accept calmly every pinprick, without even appearing to feel it or trying to show others that they have hurt us.

With the help of God's grace and by struggling against the resentments of self-love, we shall attain to that charity which is completely forgetful of self; then we shall be good to those around us, "not justices of the peace, but angels of peace" (*T.C.J. C.*).

COLLOQUY

"O eternal God, the soul who truly loves You spends itself for its neighbor and cannot do otherwise, for its love for You and its love of neighbor are one and the same thing; the more the soul loves You, the more it loves its neighbor, because love of neighbor has its source in You."

"You have given us this means of proving and practicing virtue, O Most High God, so that, since we cannot benefit You, we can benefit others. Therefore, a soul in love with You, most amiable Lord, never ceases to spend itself in doing good to others, striving to discover their needs and hastening to help them."

"O God, eternal Trinity, You ask us to love You with the same love with which You love us. This we cannot do, for You loved us when we were as yet Your enemies; and however great our love for You, we would always owe You this love, as due to You; it is therefore, not gratuitous, because You loved us first. As it is impossible for us to give You the love You desire, You have given us our neighbor, that we may do for him what we cannot do for You, that is, love him without having been loved by him—gratuitously—without expecting any benefit from it."

"Teach me, O Lord, to love my neighbor even when not loved by him, to love him with no concern for my own benefit, but solely because You love me, solely to repay Your gratuitous love. Then I shall fulfill the commandment of the law: to love You above all things, and my neighbor as myself" (cf. St. Catherine of Siena).

CHARITY ADAPTS ITSELF TO EVERYONE

PRESENCE OF GOD - O God, who adapted Yourself to my misery to the point of becoming man, teach me to adapt myself to others.

MEDITATION

1. Charity has no rigid requirements; it does not expect, and even less pretend, that others should adapt themselves to it, but it is always ready to accommodate itself to the neighbor. God adapted Himself to us when He became man; yet, we do not know how to come down from the little pedestal of our personality to adapt ourselves to the mentalities, preferences, and needs of our brethren. We excuse ourselves by saying, "They are wrong; they are rude and ungrateful, they do not understand my needs, my sensibilities...." How we deceive ourselves! How petty we are in our demands on others! Let us look at the Son of God, the eternal Word, who did not disdain to put Himself on our level, to the extent of taking on our mortal flesh and living a human life in the midst of us. During His earthly life, He did not choose for His companions intellectual men of refined education; He chose ignorant fishermen of rude mentality, men of simple tastes who knew very little about the refinements of life. He lived with them and adopted their ways quite naturally, without any singularity aside from His unlimited charity.

Certainly, we cannot conform to the desires of our neighbor when there is question, however slight, of something in opposition to the honor of God and the observance of His law. To do so in such cases would be palpable weakness. But there are many other occasions when it is simply a matter of not insisting upon our personal feelings, our point of view, our own tastes, but of effacing ourselves, and considering the mentality and tastes of others. Then condescension is solid virtue, and far from being weakness, it is a beautiful proof of moral strength, of that strength which knows how to overcome self and sacrifice its ego for the love of God. Lasting charity and perfect harmony are not possible without this

flexibility which makes us capable of adapting ourselves to others. When we have firmly resolved to overlook all differences of temperament, mentality, education and tastes, when we are determined to give up our own ideas to accommodate ourselves to the ideas and desires of others, then only can it be said that the goal of fraternal charity has been attained.

2. We find in the Gospel most beautiful examples of this condescension. "And if a man will contend with thee in judgment, and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him. And whosoever will force thee one mile, go with him other two. Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not away" (*Mt 5,40-42*). The divine Master strongly exhorts us to patience, meekness, and the renouncement of our rights, so as to put ourselves humbly at the service of our neighbor, sacrificing ourselves generously for him, for his interests and his joy. Instead of quarreling and arguing with a troublesome person, Jesus teaches us to yield always, even if that person's demands are unreasonable. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus comments on this passage in the Gospel : "It seems to me that to give up one's cloak is to renounce every right, and look upon oneself as the slave of all.... Hence, it is not enough for me to give to the one who asks, I ought to anticipate the wish; I should show myself honored by the request for service, and if anything set apart for my use be taken away, I should appear glad to be rid of it" (*St. 10*). However, the Saint has no illusions : she knows very well that our being asked in a tactless way or with a pretentious, commanding tone to render some service, to do a favor, or to give some object, will bring forth resentment and protests from our self-love, "There is an inward rebellion unless we are perfect in charity. We find no end of reasons for refusing" (*ibid.*). But he who wishes to have perfect charity does not yield to these interior rebellions; doing violence to himself, he graciously places himself at the disposal of his neighbor.

If we frequently refuse to do what is asked of us, it is a sign that our charity is still very weak. We should not easily take refuge in excuses : "I have no time...this is an unreasonable request...she ought to learn to do things for herself," and the like. Sometimes it is necessary to refuse to render a service because we really cannot do it or because it

would prevent us from fulfilling our duties. Even in these circumstances, however, charity should make us avoid all discourteous ways which would mortify and humiliate others. "When charity has taken root in the soul, it shows itself outwardly, and there is always a way of refusing so graciously what one cannot give, that the refusal affords as much pleasure as the gift itself" (*ibid.*).

COLLOQUY

"O my God, it is impossible for me not to love Your creatures, since You have commanded me to do so. You are Love, and love made You create man, so that he, too, might share Your love. We were all created out of love, by love, and with love, so that we might enjoy You, O God, who are Love. How then can I help loving this neighbor of mine?

"Tell me, I beseech You, O Christ, in what way should I love my neighbor. You give me the lofty ideal of loving him as You Yourself have loved him. For human creatures You left, at least in appearance, Your Father's bosom; You left, or rather, You hid, Your power, wisdom, and infinite purity to live in contact with the impurity of creatures. And I also, for my neighbor's sake, must leave myself and my love for creatures, and be ready to shed my blood for their salvation if necessary.

"O charity! How beautiful and pleasing to God you are! Like the pelican, you give your own blood, not only for your children, but even for your enemies. Yet, in truth, he who possesses you considers no one his enemy but esteems them all as his dearest friends and would give his very life for the soul of his neighbor if he sees it necessary.

"O love of neighbor so little known! O God, who can read our hearts, You know whether they are filled with love or hate when we pretend to love our neighbor while we offend him. Oh! how different Your judgments are from ours! You teach me that, for love of my neighbor, I ought to know how to sacrifice my comfort, listen to the little and the poor in their bodily and spiritual needs, and answer them peacefully and with meekness" (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

MILDNESS

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, who art mildness itself, teach me meekness of heart and mildness in my dealings with others.

MEDITATION

1. Mildness is the flower of charity, a participation in that infinite sweetness with which God guides and governs all things. There is no one who has a greater desire for our good, for our sanctification, than God; yet He never uses harshness, severity, or violence. With a sovereignly gentle power He sustains our efforts, always respecting our liberty, always waiting for our acceptance of grace with infinite patience and mildness. The Gospel describes the mildness of Jesus in these words : " He shall not contend, nor cry out, neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets. The bruised reed He shall not break : and the smoking flax He shall not extinguish " (*Mt* 12,19.20). The Pharisees murmured because they saw Him eating with publicans and sinners. He said to them : " Go then and learn what this meaneth : I will have mercy and not sacrifice. For I am not come to call the just, but sinners " (*ibid.* 9,13). The Apostles were ready to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans who rejected the Master, but He rebuked them, saying, " You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of Man came not to destroy souls, but to save " (*Lk* 9,55.56). And to souls fighting against their miseries, feeling the weight and weariness of the daily struggle, He says : " Come to Me, all you that labor, and are burdened, and I will refresh you...for My yoke is sweet, and My burden light " (*Mt* 11,28.30). Our Lord's infinite charity makes His yoke sweet and His burden light, radiating as it does, sweetness and mildness everywhere.

Fraternal charity should expand in this spirit of sweetness and soothe the wounds of others rather than aggravate them. It should facilitate the accomplishment of duties, making them easier rather than more difficult. Charity uses this mildness with everyone, even with those who are stubborn,

or slow in their response to kindness, and with the weak who fall repeatedly into the same faults. Given but a little good in a person, we must surround this little with the loving care that will help it develop, for one who has learned the mildness of Jesus "will not extinguish the smoking flax."

2. Our charity is sometimes put to a hard test in our contacts with others; and the irritating behavior of some individuals can arouse feelings of anger and indignation despite our resolutions to be mild. We should not allow ourselves to become discouraged, as these spontaneous reactions are very often independent of our will. We are not, however, justified in giving way to them under the pretext that it is too hard to resist and that we are carried away in spite of ourselves. We can always subdue these impulses of passion; and the quicker, more energetic and mild our reaction is, the greater will be our success in overcoming them. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus taught a novice : " Whenever anyone exasperates you, even to the point of making you angry, the way to regain peace of soul is to pray for that person and to ask God to reward her for giving you an opportunity to suffer." And she suggested that the novice forestall these occasions by trying to "soften her heart in advance."

Furthermore, if we reply angrily to another's anger, we shall only be fanning the flames, when we should be making every attempt to extinguish them by mildness and meekness. Mildness, however, is not condescension to evil, and much less, connivance with it. There are times, as the Gospel teaches, when fraternal correction is required; in such cases it becomes a real act of charity. But to make it truly so, it must never be done with the intention of humiliating, of mortifying, and still less, of offending the guilty one; nor should it ever be inspired, even indirectly, by personal reasons : to insure respect for our rights or opinions, or to revenge ourselves for some previous slight given to us. In these cases, the correction, far from being an act of charity, is completely contrary to this virtue; and instead of doing good, it will rather produce the opposite effect. Only a sincere dispassionate desire for the good of others can make fraternal correction charitable and efficacious; it should be made with so much kindness that the person concerned feels our love for him far more than the humiliation of being

corrected. This is the way Jesus treated sinners; all were cured by His love and mildness.

COLLOQUY

“ O Lord Jesus, when You died on the Cross Your heart was so filled with kindness toward us and You loved us so tenderly, even though we ourselves were the cause of Your death, that You had but one thought : to obtain pardon for Your executioners, even while they tortured You and cruelly insulted You. Help me, I beg You, to endure my neighbors, faults and imperfections with kindness.

To those who despise me or murmur against me, teach me to reply with humility, mildness, and a steadfast kindness of heart, never defending myself in any way. For love of You, I desire to let everyone say what he wishes, because words are not of value but love is, and he who loves more will be more loved and glorified. Help me, then, my Jesus, to love You; help me to love creatures for love of You, especially those who despise me, without letting myself be disturbed by their contempt, but applying myself to the practice of humility and mildness; then You will be my reward.

“ Teach me to comport myself always with mildness and sweetness, and never to disrupt peace with anyone. All that I can do and obtain with love I will do, but what I cannot do or procure without a dispute, I will let it be. Help me to make use of the repugnances and aversions I encounter in my contacts with others to practice the virtue of mildness, and to show myself loving with all, even with those who are opposed to me, or who are a cause of aversion.

“ Finally, I purpose with Your help, O most lovable God, to apply myself to acquire kindness of heart toward my neighbor by thinking of him as Your creature, destined to enjoy You some day in Paradise. Those whom You tolerate, O Lord God, it is but just that I, too, tolerate them tenderly and with great compassion for their spiritual infirmities ” (St. Francis de Sales).

LOVE OF NEIGHBOR AND LOVE OF GOD

PRESENCE OF GOD - Make me understand, O Lord, that the surest sign of my love for You is a sincere love for my neighbor.

MEDITATION

1. A soul who lives for God sometimes needs to be reassured that its love for Him is not an illusion. What criterion will give it the greatest certitude? St. Teresa of Jesus says, "We cannot be sure if we are loving God, although we may have good reason to believe that we are, but we can know quite well if we are loving our neighbor. And be certain that, the farther advanced you find you are in this, the greater the love you will have for God" (*Int C V*, 3). This is an indisputable argument because the virtue of charity is but one; and while it is difficult to verify our love for God, it is impossible to deceive ourselves about our love for our neighbor. We have no need of any great insight to know whether we are charitable, patient, forgiving, and kind to others, and precisely from the way we behave toward them can we deduce the measure of our love for God.

Sometimes we can deceive ourselves thinking we love God very much because we experience certain spiritual joys during the time of prayer. We believe that we are ready to confront any sacrifice for the love of God because we feel ardent desires arising within us. St. Teresa of Avila, with keen psychological insight, warns souls of the pitfalls into which they may fall and puts them on their guard : "No, sisters, no; what the Lord desires is works. If you see a sick sister to whom you can give some help, never be affected by the fear that your devotion will suffer, but take pity on her : if she is in pain, you should feel pain too; if necessary, fast so that she may have your food, not so much for her sake as because you know it to be your Lord's will" (*ibid.*). This is real love, and it was exactly in this sense that St. John the Evangelist said in his first epistle, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren" (3,14). He did not say, *because we love God*, but *because we*

love the brethren, for fraternal charity is the most certain sign of true love for God.

2. St. Teresa of Jesus wrote : " So dearly does His Majesty love us that He will reward our love for our neighbor by increasing the love which we bear to Himself, and that in a thousand ways : this I cannot doubt " (*ibid.*). Here is a beautiful affirmation, and one worthy of faith, which will incite us to practice fraternal charity enthusiastically; it will make us sense with what good reason the Saint said : " If you understood the importance of this virtue to us all, you would strive after nothing but gaining it " (*ibid.*).

A soul that really loves God has but one desire : to grow in love for Him; and the infallible means of doing so is to practice fraternal charity with great care. Such soul ardently aspires to be united with God, and here is the royal way : union with the brethren. We should always remember that the virtue of charity is a certain participation not only in the infinite charity with which God loves Himself, but also in the immense love which He has for His creatures. The more we love the brethren, the more do we enter into that stream of love with which God surrounds all men, and still more do we participate in His attitude of benevolence, goodness, and infinite charity. This is how charity unites us with Him who is charity by essence : *Deus caritas est*, " God is charity, and he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him " (1 *Jn* 4,16). On the other hand, when we are at fault in fraternal charity, we withdraw from God, from His attitude of infinite charity, which is the same thing as withdrawing and even separating ourselves from Him. Therefore, the Apostle exhorts us : " Dearly beloved, let us love one another, for charity is of God. And everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is charity. He that loveth not, abideth in death " (*ibid.* 4,7.8 – 3,14). Supernatural love for our neighbor is vastly different from love that is merely human. Far from drawing us away from divine love, it impels us toward God with ever increasing force, and unites us more and more closely to Him.

COLLOQUY

"O Lord, the surest sign of my love for You is the degree of perfection with which I keep the commandment of charity toward my neighbor. As this is most important, I must strive to know myself better, even in the very smallest matters, taking no notice of all the fine plans that come crowding into my mind when I am at prayer, and which I think I will carry out and put into practice for the good of my neighbor, in the hope of saving even one soul. If my later actions are not in harmony with these plans, I can have no reason for believing that I should ever have put them into practice. Nor should I, my God, imagine that I have attained to union with You, and love You very much, because of the devotion and spiritual delights which I may have had in prayer. I ought rather to ask You to grant me this perfect love for my neighbor and then allow You to work. If on my side I use my best endeavors and strive after this love in every way I can, doing violence to my own will so that the will of others may be done in everything, even foregoing my own rights; if I forget my own good in my concern for theirs, however much my nature may rebel; if I try to shoulder some trial, should the opportunity present itself, in order to relieve my neighbor of it, You certainly will give me even more than I can desire. But I must not suppose that it will cost me nothing. Besides, Lord, did not the love You had for us cost You, too? To redeem us from death, You died such a grievous death as the death of the Cross" (*T.J. Int C V*, 3).

PRUDENCE

PRESENCE OF GOD - Show me, O Lord, the way of true prudence.

MEDITATION

i. If we wish to attain union with God, our whole life should be directed toward Him; and as our life is made up of many acts, we should see that each one is a step forward on the way that leads to Him. Supernatural prudence is that virtue which suggests to us what we should do and what we should avoid in order to reach the goal we have set for ourselves. If we wish to reach union with God, prudence tells us to conform ourself in everything to His will, to detach ourself from all things, even the least, if it be contrary to His divine will. If we wish to become a saint, we must perform these acts of charity and generosity without recoiling from the sacrifice. If we wish to become a soul of prayer, we must strive to be recollected, to avoid useless conversation, to mortify our curiosity, and to apply ourself diligently to prayer. Thus prudence prescribes what we ought to do and what we ought to avoid, whether in view of our final end—union with God, sanctity—or in view of an immediate goal—such as the acquisition of particular virtues—which, however, always must be ordered to our final end.

The parable of the wise and foolish virgins effectively demonstrates the need of this virtue. They all slept while waiting for the bridegroom to come; when he arrived, the first five were admitted into the banquet hall, the other five were refused simply because they had not had the prudence to provide themselves with sufficient oil to fill their lamps. And the parable concludes : " Watch ye therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour " (*Mt 25,13*). Supernatural prudence counsels us first of all to make good use of the time God gives us and the opportunities He offers us to practice virtue, because " the night cometh, when no man can work " (*Jn 9,4*). When, through indolence or carelessness, we miss an opportunity to do a good deed,

it is lost forever; others may present themselves later, it is true, but that one will never return again.

2. The future is in the hands of God; all we have at our disposal is the present moment with its actual circumstances. Therefore, true supernatural prudence consists in setting the highest value on each fleeting moment in view of our eternal goal. Human prudence values time as a means to accumulate earthly goods; supernatural prudence values it as a means to accumulate eternal goods. "Lay not up to yourself treasures on earth...but lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither the rust nor moth doth consume.... Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you" (*Mt 6,19.20.33*). These are the chief rules of prudence, dictated by Jesus Himself.

St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus said to a religious who told her that she disliked doing a certain act of charity which required a great spirit of sacrifice, "I would have been glad to do it, since we are on earth to suffer. The more we suffer, the happier we are. Oh! how little you know about regulating your affairs!" (*Unedited Souvenirs*). Supernatural prudence teaches us exactly how to regulate our affairs, not in view of earthly happiness, but of eternal beatitude; not in view of our own selfish interests, but in view of our progress in the way of perfection; and above all in view of the glory of God and the good of souls.

Supernatural prudence does not judge things according to their human value, according to the pleasure or displeasure they give us; but it evaluates them in the light of faith, in the light of eternity. "Quid hoc ad aeternitatem?" (St. Bernard). "Quod Deus non est, nihil est" (*Imit. III, 31,2*). What is this worth in the light of eternity? Whatsoever is not God, is nothing.

Christian prudence is opposed to the prudence of the flesh, which resolves everything with an eye to earthly happiness, without any regard for the law of God. "The wisdom of the flesh is an enemy to God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither can it be" (*Rom 8,7*). Supernatural prudence far surpasses natural prudence which is not bad, but which is incapable of directing our actions to their supreme end, since it looks only to earthly goals.

COLLOQUY

"O my God, a soul who loves You listens no more to the suggestions of human prudence. Faith and love alone influence her, making her despise all earthly things, holding them to be worthless, as indeed they are. She cares not for any earthly good, being convinced that all is vanity. When she finds that by doing something she can serve You better, she listens to no objections but acts at once, for she understands that her profit consists entirely in this" (cf. T. J. *Con*, 3).

"O Lord, if I wish to be a saint, I must live entirely on a supernatural plane, always remembering that '*whatsoever is not God, is nothing*,' as the author of the *Imitation* says; consequently, I must leave all things or make use of all to come to You.

"If I do not watch over myself, I can materialize even spiritual things by considering everything superficially, under its human aspect. Alas! O Lord, I know that at times I have acted in this way.

"Oh no! a life spent for You is so great, so beautiful! But it is not great because of any extraordinary deeds, but rather because of the love and fidelity with which I must inform even the least important duties, which transforms these least actions, as well as all my daily occupations; it is great because of the apostolic intentions which vivify my prayers and sacrifices. Teach me, O Lord, to give the greatest amount of love to each instant, to make eternal every passing moment, by giving it the added value of charity" (cf. Sr. Carmela of the Holy Spirit, O.C.D.).

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, impress upon my heart Your commandment of charity and the example You gave of it.

MEDITATION

I. "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, who also stripped him, and having wounded him, went away, leaving him half dead" (*Lk 10, 23-37*). That unfortunate man represents each one of us. We too have encountered robbers on our way. The world, the devil, and our passions have stripped and wounded us. Who can say that he does not have in his own soul some wound, more or less deep, left by temptation or sin? But, on our route, there was also a good Samaritan, rather the Good Samaritan par excellence, Jesus, who, moved by compassion for our state, brought us help. With infinite love He bent over our open wounds, curing them with the oil and wine of His grace. The oil represents its gentleness and the wine its vigor. Then He took us in His arms and brought us to a safe place, that is, He entrusted us to the maternal care of the Church, to which He has consigned the price of our ransom, the fruit of His death on the Cross.

The parable of the good Samaritan thus delineates the story of our redemption, a story which is ever in action and which is renewed every time we draw near to Jesus, humbly and regretfully showing Him the wounds of our souls. It is actuated in a very special way in the Mass, where Jesus presents to the Father the price of our salvation, and renews His immolation for our benefit. We should go to Mass in order to meet Him, the Good Samaritan, to invoke and receive His sanctifying action. The more we recognize our own misery and our need of redemption, the more will Jesus apply the fruits of redemption to us. When He comes to us in Holy Communion, He will heal our wounds, not only our exterior wounds, but our interior ones also,

abundantly pouring into them the sweet oil and strengthening wine of His grace.

This is how Jesus treats us, this is how He has treated mankind, which, by sin, had become a stranger, yes, an enemy to Him and even rejected Him, the Son of God!

2. Jesus, who by His redemptive work, had given us the highest example of a most merciful and compassionate charity, could fittingly conclude the parable of the good Samaritan with these words : " Go, and do thou in like manner "; and He might have added, as He did to His Apostles on the evening of the Last Supper : " For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also " (*Jn 13,15*).

To the scribes and Pharisees, the word *neighbors* meant friends, or at most, the Israelites, but never the pagans or the Samaritans. However, the Savior went beyond this narrow interpretation and suggested an act of charity to an enemy as a concrete example of the charity which was commanded by the law. The good Samaritan brought help to a poor Jew who had been left unaided and abandoned by a priest and a levite, his own fellow countrymen; he did not take into account the hatred the Jews had for his people. This universal charity is to be the distinctive mark of the new religion established by Christ. St. James wrote : " Religion clean and undefiled before God and the Father is this : to visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulation " (*1,27*). There is no true religion without charity toward our neighbor, and above all toward a suffering neighbor. The scribes and Pharisees, and even their priests, who had reduced religion to mere exterior formalism while neglecting the duties of charity with such unconcern, found themselves condemned by the parable of the good Samaritan. Unfortunately, even among Christians, there are found devout persons who are scrupulous about omitting a single exercise of piety but have no hesitation about abandoning those who suffer; they have not grasped the real inner meaning of religion, but have stopped at the exterior practices. Religion gives us an intense realization of our relationship with God : He is our Father and we are His children; but if we are all children of the same Father, how is it that we do not consider ourselves brothers? True piety consists in the realization of our divine sonship and of our brotherhood with all men,

without exception. And he who truly feels himself a brother will never be heedless of the needs and sufferings of others.

COLLOQUY

"O Lord, the more I understand the love You have for us, the more shall I be willing to put aside my own pleasure and profit in order to please You by serving my neighbor.

"Then I shall not consider at all what I may lose : I shall have my neighbor's good in mind and nothing else. In order to give You greater pleasure, my God, help me to forget myself for others, and if need be, even give up my life as did many martyrs" (*T.J. Con*, 7).

"O charity, you are the sweet, holy bond uniting the soul to its Creator : you unite God to man and man to God. You kept the Son of God nailed to the wood of the holy Cross. You unite those whom discord keeps apart. You enrich with virtue those who are poor, because you give life to all the virtues. You bring peace and suppress hatred and war. You give patience, strength and perseverance in return for every good and holy work. You are never weary, you never turn aside from the love of God and neighbor, either because of weariness, pain, contempt, or insult.

"O Christ, sweet Jesus, give me this holy charity, that I may persevere in doing good and never give it up; for he who possesses charity is founded on You, the living rock, and by following Your example, he learns from You how to love His Creator and his neighbor. In You, O Christ, I read the rule and doctrine which are right for me, for You are the way, the truth, and the life. If I read You, I shall follow the right path and shall occupy myself solely with the honor of God and the salvation of souls" (St. Catherine of Siena).

PRUDENT JUDGMENT

PRESENCE OF GOD - Help me, O God, to judge with rectitude so that I may be able to act accordingly.

MEDITATION

1. The first duty of prudence is to help us choose the best means for attaining our final end. Many times the choice is easy, and presents itself spontaneously to a mind accustomed to making judgments and acting in the light of eternity. At other times, however, it is difficult and perplexing, as for example, when it concerns choosing one's vocation or profession, or solving complicated problems in which elements independent of one's own will must be considered. In these cases we must take time to examine everything carefully and to consult prudent, experienced persons; to act hastily would show a want of prudence. In the Gospel, Jesus Himself tells us about the prudent man who "having a mind to build a tower, first *sits down* and reckons the charges that are necessary, whether he have wherewithal to finish it" (*Lk 14,28*). The time spent in these examinations and calculations as dictated by prudence is not time wasted. Quite the contrary! When facing serious decisions, we must realize that God Himself often wants us to wait patiently until circumstances clearly manifest His will to us. In this waiting we should give a large place to prayer, begging Our Lord for the light which our own prudence cannot give us. In fact, prudence, even though it is an infused supernatural virtue, is always a virtue exercised by human faculties and, therefore, is affected by human limitations; however, to help it, God has given us a special gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of counsel, the actuation of which does not depend on us but is obtainable by prayer.

After using all the means suggested by supernatural prudence, we arrive at a decision. Prudence then commands us to put it into effect with courage and diligence, without needless delays on our part and without being discouraged by the difficulties we may meet.

2. In order that our judgments and choices may be prudent, we must know how to free them from elements which are too subjective, such as our personal attractions and interests, our natural likes and dislikes. Sometimes we can deceive ourselves into thinking that we are judging a situation or deciding to do something solely for the glory of God or for the good of our neighbor, when, in fact, if we examined ourselves thoroughly, we would perhaps see that the motives which prevailed in our judgment or in our deliberations were egoistic and dictated by our own personal interests. Hence, even prudence requires that we cleanse our hearts from all these human motives, and that we practice detachment and renunciation. After Jesus had spoken of the prudence necessary for the man who wished to build a tower, and for the king who was about to make war against another king, He said : " So likewise everyone of you that doth not renounce all that he possesseth, cannot be My disciple " (*Lk 14,33*). In other words, the prudence needed by one who wishes to be a true follower of Christ, consists in the renunciation of all that can be an obstacle to the attainment of eternal life; it consists in that renunciation of self which frees the heart from selfish personal impulses. Only this renunciation will permit the soul to triumph over the spontaneous reactions of self-love, the impulses of egoism, thus allowing it to form right judgments and impartial decisions.

Above all, in the case of important judgments or decisions which would affect our neighbor or about which we have a personal bias, prudence requires a conscientious examination as to whether we are really moved by supernatural motives, independent of human considerations. Finally, when something has greatly disturbed us, prudence will teach us to suspend all judgment and deliberation until calm has returned; otherwise, we would be exposing ourselves to act by passion rather than by a sincere love of the good.

" Love is prudent, circumspect, upright," says the *Imitation of Christ* (*III, 5,7*), which means that prudence is the indispensable characteristic of all genuine virtue.

COLLOQUY

" O God, one work performed with prudence is more pleasing to You than many done carelessly and impru-

dently, for this virtue thoroughly examines and weighs every action so that it may be turned to Your honor and glory.

“True and supernatural prudence belongs to You and is in You, O Lord. Few there are in whom we find it, because many seek it through cunning, using their own wisdom to scrutinize Your designs; thus they lose their time and find nothing. Anyone who really desires to possess prudence must come to You, the Incarnate Word; he will find it in You, together with all the other virtues, but vastly different from human prudence, which tends to what exalts and not to what abases. In You he will find the prudence which teaches us to humble and abase ourselves, as You willed to humble and abase Yourself, in order to show us the way which leads to salvation. You, O Lord, have said : ‘If you wish to be My disciple, renounce yourself, take up your cross and follow Me.’ Oh! this is prudence in the highest degree! Yet to human prudence it looks like utter madness. For, O crucified Christ, to the wise ones in this world it is the height of madness to take up one’s cross and follow You! But You teach me that the foolishness of the cross is supreme wisdom, and to deny oneself is supreme prudence. What wiser folly can there be than to take up the cross with You and follow in Your footsteps? And what greater prudence can there be than to die to self in order to find life in You, from whom everything receives life?” (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

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PRUDE NCE AND RECTITUDE

PRESENCE OF GOD - Teach me, O my God, the prudence which leads to You by the straight path of duty and truth.

MEDITATION

1. Prudence is not limited to suggesting good works to be done in order to attain sanctity, but it remains with us while we do these works, and enlightens us as to the best

conduct to observe therein, according to the circumstances of the moment. For example, prudence tells us when to speak and when to be silent, when to act and when to wait, when to yield and when to resist, when and how to practice this or that virtue. Thus prudence is the great regulator of our whole life; it has been well termed the "*auriga virtutum*," as it directs the exercise of all the other virtues. Prudence regulates the moral virtues that we may always observe a golden mean in our conduct by avoiding culpable excess in either direction—too much assurance or overtimidity, excessive activity or passivity, seeking our ease or performing penances which ruin our health. On the other hand, in the case of the theological virtues, for which there is no question of a golden mean, it is the task of prudence to direct us as to when and in what way they are to be practiced. Thus, for example, prudence will point out the dangers that threaten our faith and the way to avoid them; it will show us how we can have complete confidence in God, without fear of being presumptuous; it will teach us how to love God with all our heart, without prejudice to fraternal charity or the fulfillment of our duties; finally, it will tell us how to practice fraternal charity with great devotedness, avoiding any harmful imprudences.

We can truly say, therefore, that prudence is extremely useful and necessary in all things; it is the salt that ought to season all our acts. A soul detached from itself, centered on God alone, a recollected soul that does not let itself be distracted by the noise of the world, will easily and almost spontaneously follow the path of supernatural prudence, and by so doing, will reach God by a straight path, without deviations or loss of time.

2. "True, perfect prudence counsels, judges, and commands with *rectitude*, having in view the final end of the whole of life" (St. Thomas, II^a II^{ae}, q.47, a.13, co.). The great difference between supernatural prudence and worldly prudence lies, not only in the vast divergence of the ends aimed at, but also in the choice of means to be used. While the latter does not scruple to use illicit means or to follow the tortuous path of falsehood, trickery, or deceit, Christian prudence repudiates immediately any means which, even in the slightest degree, is contrary to God's law, and it follows the path of rectitude. Christian prudence

may also suggest that we delay to a more suitable time the execution of a plan, good and holy in itself; it may caution us to refrain from revealing our intentions to everyone or to keep silence about certain things. However, it will never ask us to fail in our duty or to trifle with the truth. When Jesus said that "the children of this world are wiser than the children of light" (*Lk* 16,8), He certainly meant to remind us to be more prudent and circumspect in doing good, but He had no intention of encouraging us to use the illicit means which the children of darkness use so freely. We should not think that our prudence is outdone by the prudence of the world because we make use of honorable means only. In opposing the intrigues and deceptions which we can in no wise reciprocate, we have at our disposal a much more powerful means, one which will always be victorious: recourse to God by prayer and sacrifice.

When Jesus sent His disciples out into the world which was full of the ambushes of evil, He told them, "Be ye therefore, wise as serpents and simple as doves" (*Mt* 10,16). By mentioning the two virtues, prudence and simplicity, together, He clearly shows that they must never be separated from one another, nor should one be used as a pretext for failing in the other. Prudence should never lack simplicity—and here is meant the exclusion of all those means based on untruthfulness—but at the same time, simplicity should never lack prudence.

COLLOQUY

"O prudence, you are like a high mountain. Those whom the mountain shelters, live a healthy life and enjoy its pure air. From its height, they see and foresee everything they should do. So also, my God, the prudence which proceeds from You keeps the soul high above the clouds of passion and human considerations; it invigorates her virtue, and causes her to honor You in all her works, making her foresee everything, so that she can arm herself against temptation. O my God, give me this true upright prudence, which will lead me to union with You. Let it guide me in such a way that I shall never fail to perform Your works out of any motive of human respect or regard for any creature" (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

"Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Teach me Your ways, that I may follow Your truth. Give me temperance and prudence, justice and fortitude, for nothing is more profitable to men" (cf. *Ps 50 - Wis 8,7*).

"O Jesus, supreme Goodness, I ask You to give me a heart so enamored of You that nothing on earth can distract it...a free heart, never seduced or enslaved, an upright heart which never goes astray" (St. Thomas Aquinas).

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DILIGENCE

PRESENCE OF GOD - O God, make me diligent in Your service, diligent and prompt in every duty!

MEDITATION

1. A prudent man is also diligent; he carefully examines and selects the means best suited to his sanctification, and diligently makes use of them. "He hath done all things well," St. Mark said of Jesus (7,37). Speaking absolutely, such praise belongs only to Jesus, whose care and diligence in accomplishing the mission He had been given by His heavenly Father, were most perfect and totally free from the smallest defect. Nevertheless, in due proportion, we should be able to say the same of a diligent person; in fact, this should be the program of his life: to do all things well. It is not enough to do good works; we must do them well, that is, not in a half-hearted sort of way, but with care, solicitude, and promptness—in a word, diligently. What distinguishes saints is not so much their great works or the important position they may occupy in the Church, but their perfect diligence in the performance of every duty, even the humblest.

It often happens, for example, that in a group of people who lead the same kind of life, have the same duties, practice

the same exercises of piety, austerity, and mortification, and perform the same apostolic works, some will reach a high degree of charity and union with God, while others will lead a mediocre life, the difference depending on the degree of diligence, greater or less, with which each one applies himself to the fulfillment of his duties. Diligence makes the soul attentive and alert in what is good, so that all its acts are vivified by charity and accomplished with great exactness in every detail. "He that feareth God neglecteth nothing" (*Eccl* 7,19). When this fear is not servile, but the fruit of love which avoids everything that might be displeasing to God, it makes the soul so much the more diligent as it is the more loving.

2. "Diligence is the application of the soul in the prompt performance of good works. It makes man like the angels who fly with wonderful speed to fulfill God's commands" (Ven. John of Jesus Mary,). Promptness in doing good works is a special characteristic of diligence.

A negligent person goes to his work unwillingly, slowly, and with needless delay, whereas the diligent man hastens to it cheerfully, with promptness and concern. The prompt doing of a thing that should be done, even when it would be more convenient to do something else, is the fruit of diligence. Above all, one who is bound to a definite rule of life, either privately or in a community, must observe it punctually and exactly. In fact, any rule which has been approved by one who represents God, is, for the soul who is bound to it, a manifestation of the divine will, which must be carried out without delay or postponement. Punctuality exacts self-discipline and detachment; it often asks us to interrupt some interesting, pleasant work in order to give ourselves to another kind, perhaps less attractive or less important. However, it would be a great mistake to esteem our duties and to dedicate ourselves to them according to the attraction we have for them or according to their more or less apparent importance. All is important and beautiful when it is the expression of the will of God, and the soul who wishes to live in this holy will at every minute of the day, will never omit the slightest act prescribed by its rule of life. To prolong what we are doing beyond the prescribed time, or to dispense ourselves from a duty without a serious reason, is to abandon the will of God; it shows an

attachment to our own will, and often enough, to our own convenience.

“ In carefulness not slothful. In spirit fervent, serving the Lord ” wrote St. Paul to the Romans (12,11); and to the Ephesians he recommended, “ See therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly : not as unwise, but as wise : redeeming the time.... Wherefore, become not unwise, but understanding what is the will of God ” (5,15-17).

COLLOQUY

“ O Lord, meditating in Your presence, I understand that the best remedy for carelessness and laxity in performing my duties is charity. I must strive to do everything for love, with the special intention of pleasing You.

“ How gracious of You, my God, and how fortunate for me, a poor nothing, to be able to work in order to please You! This thought makes me want to sacrifice everything with joy. O Lord, Your words console me and renew my youth as an eagle’s! Yes, sometimes I succeed better and more surely by repeating to myself : ‘ Do this because it is pleasing to God,’ instead of simply saying, ‘ It is my duty.’ ”

“ O Lord, all I can do is already owed to You, and will always be less than what I should do. Yet Your divine goodness likes to give me the consolation of thinking that I am acting freely and generously when I work diligently in order to please You, not only in carrying out my duties, but also in works of supererogation and perfection, in great and important things as well as in small and unimportant ones, for nothing that can be offered to You is negligible.

“ O Lord, I wish to show You continually how great are my desires and my love, by performing all my actions with loving diligence. The more generous and liberal I am in serving You, the more will I receive the fruits of Your generosity ” (cf. Bl. M. Thérèse Soubiran).

JUSTICE

PRESENCE OF GOD - Teach me, O Lord, to love justice and to hate all that is opposed to it.

MEDITATION

I. When with clever astuteness, the Pharisees asked Jesus if it were lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, He replied : " Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God, the things that are God's " (*Mt 22,21*). By this simple reply, Jesus gave us clearly and precisely a description of the virtue of justice : to give to everyone what is his due. " Justice," says St. Thomas, " is the perpetual, constant will to give to everyone what is due to him " (*II^a II^{ae}, q.58, a.1, co.*). To God, we give the worship which is due Him as our Creator, Lord, and Father : adoration, honor, glory, gratitude, faithful observance of His laws, and humble, devout service. To our neighbor, we owe respect for his rights, taking into account our various obligations toward him, according to whether He is our superior, equal, or inferior.

Certainly, a soul striving for perfection, cannot be satisfied to remain within the limits of justice; charity will urge it to give and do more. However, justice is always the necessary foundation of charity, without which charity itself could not subsist. Charity toward God can and ought to incite us to do something more than what is strictly prescribed; but this *more* will not be pleasing to God if it causes us to neglect some duty of obligation. Thus a professional man cannot devote himself to apostolic works to the prejudice of his professional duties, nor can a religious undertake works of supererogation, if they prevent him from observing some point of his rule. In the same way, charity toward our neighbor can and should urge us to give alms, but this will not be pleasing to God if it is done with money which rightfully belongs to someone else, as for instance, money which should be used as wages for workmen, or for the paying of debts. A failure in justice—that is, in what is of obligation—cannot be considered an act of charity, either

toward God or toward our neighbor. Only by starting from the solid, indispensable foundation of justice, will charity be able to mount to sure and lofty heights.

2. "Thou hast loved justice and hated iniquity; therefore, God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness" (*Ps 44,8*), the Psalmist says in praise of the just man. God gives His joy and peace to the soul which respects justice and fulfills with great exactness all the duties required by it, even at the cost of sacrifice. Actually, it is not infrequent that respect for the rights of others calls for the sacrifice of our own ease and comfort, and sometimes even our personal interests; but the soul aiming for perfection must be generous at all times and never fail, through selfishness, to fulfill the duty of justice toward its neighbor. One of the things which scandalizes and most antagonizes those in the world is to see pious people who, in their relations with others, have no scruple about failing in justice, who close their eyes to the rights of others when they interfere with their own personal interests. The more we aspire to perfection, the more we should cultivate the virtue of justice, and sincerely detest all that is even slightly opposed to it. Such conduct is a source of peace for ourself and others. "Justice and peace have kissed" (*Ps 84,11*), says Holy Scripture, because peace can reign only where there is justice, whereas all attempts at peace and harmony will be useless where justice is not respected. Our God is the God of peace; who, more than a soul who wishes to live in intimacy with Him, should be the bearer of peace to all? But only if we observe justice will we radiate peace. In fact, it is futile to exhort others to peace if we refuse to give to everyone what is his due.

As the observance of justice is a fount of peace and joy for our own conscience, so it also brings peace and joy to our family, to our community, to each person with whom we come in contact in our daily life, and to society in general.

COLLOQUY

"O justice, thou art the precious pearl which makes the soul shine brightly; thou givest peace and light to creatures; thou keepest them in holy fear and dost unite their hearts. If thy light failest, we are immediately plunged into confusion

and surrounded by the darkness of injustice" (St. Catherine of Siena).

O God, Thou alone can infuse true justice in me, for Thou alone art infinite Justice, "Thou who art just in all Thy ways and holy in all Thy works" (*Ps* 144,17).

"Thou art just, O Lord : and all Thy judgments are right. Justice and fidelity are in Thy testimonies. Thy justice is justice forever; Thy law is an eternal law. Give me understanding of Thy commandments, and I will live by them. Teach me to keep Thy law and to observe it with all my heart. Lead me by the paths of Thy laws, for they are my delight. Incline my heart to Thy precepts, and not to the love of money. Teach me to love justice and to hate iniquity, that I may enjoy Thy blessings for all eternity" (cf. *Ps* 118 - 44).

HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER JUSTICE

PRESENCE OF GOD - Give me, O God, a strong efficacious desire for justice, that I may draw near You, O infinite Justice.

MEDITATION

1. "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after justice" (*Mt* 5,6), Jesus said, speaking of justice in general, which inclines man to live in perfect harmony with God's will, to the extent of desiring that sacred will as the one indispensable food of his spiritual life. However, these words may also be applied to the special virtue of justice, without which there will never be any harmony with God's will, and therefore, no sanctity. If we wish to live in union with God, who is infinite Justice, we must hunger and thirst for justice in all our actions and in all our relations with others. Hunger and thirst indicate imperious needs which cannot be suppressed; it is a question of life or death. As food and drink are absolutely essential to the life of the body, so

justice is absolutely necessary for a life of virtue, and its duties are so compelling that no motive can exempt us from fulfilling them. If an act of charity for the neighbor should impose on us great inconvenience or cause us serious harm, we would not be obliged to do it, but the same inconvenience or harm could not excuse us from fulfilling a duty of justice. Serious motives can sometimes authorize us to postpone the fulfillment of such a duty, but the obligation always remains; although we might be prevented from acquitting it ourselves in a material way, we must supply for it, at least morally. It is thus appropriate to speak of *hunger* and *thirst* for justice, not in the sense of vindicating rights, but in the sense of cultivating in ourselves such a lively desire and imperious need for justice in all our relations with others, that we do not feel satisfied until we have completely fulfilled all the duties stemming from this virtue.

2. Justice, like all the other virtues, has bitter enemies in our passions, particularly in egoism. When not thoroughly mortified and subdued, egoism always finds a way to make certain duties required by justice seem too burdensome; it can always invent excuses and subterfuges to exempt itself from them. In addition to being an attachment to our personal interests and rights, egoism sometimes appears under the special aspect of jealousy, and even here, it is the cause of injustice. The jealous person—or worse still, the envious person—is almost unconsciously inclined to belittle the merits of others, to criticize and find their way of acting defective. Thus they rob others of the esteem which, in all justice, they should have from their superiors, equals, and inferiors. All this is contrary to justice as well as to charity.

Another source of injustice is partiality or preference for one particular person to the great detriment of others who have identical rights. Very often this is done under the mask of charity, but there can be no question of charity when, to favor, defend, or sustain one person or to be more generous to him, one fails in justice toward others and sometimes perhaps toward an entire community. A soul that hungers and thirsts after justice will watch over itself very carefully to prevent even the slightest fault of this kind, from insinuating itself into its conduct. As long as we have passions—and we shall always have them—we have reason to be fearful of ourselves, and we should be diligent in examining the

motives of our acts. It is necessary to have a great love for justice, for truth, and for the common good together with a great sincerity if we are to succeed in unmasking all those little passions that might cause us to deviate, however slightly, from the path of justice. Let us look at our justice in the mirror of infinite justice, and we shall always find something to correct or improve. "Blessed are they who keep judgment and do justice at all times," sings the Psalmist, for "the righteous will behold His countenance" (*Ps 105,3 – 10,7*). The desire to be united to God, who is infinite Justice, will lead us to practice this virtue ever more perfectly.

COLLOQUY

"O Lord, increase my hunger and thirst for justice, so that I may lovingly fulfill all the duties of justice, every obligation to You and to others, neglecting none, but doing them all willingly, even if they are unpleasant to nature. This hunger presses me to always make more progress in the virtues, considering as very little what I have already obtained, and as very much, what I still lack. May this hunger and thirst give me a most ardent desire for Your grace and a fervent love for the holy Sacraments especially the Sacrament of the Altar, so that I may nourish myself with You, O Jesus, who are my Justice.

"O Jesus, Your hunger after justice was so great that You no longer felt bodily hunger, and one day when You were very tired and in need of refreshment, You said to Your disciples : ' My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me. ' You had such an ardent thirst for justice that You burned with desire to taste the bitter chalice of Your Passion, even to the point of saying : ' I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized, and how am I straightened until it be accomplished! '

"O my beloved Redeemer, inflame me with the fire of Your love, the source of this hunger and thirst; may I continually use this hunger and thirst to serve You, as You did to redeem me" (cf. Ven. L. Du Pont).

PERFECT JUSTICE

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, You who are just and love what is just, teach me how to practice justice perfectly.

MEDITATION

i. The justice of a soul aspiring to perfection is not cold and dry, not insistent about receiving all that is its due, but it is broad, liberal, generous, and vivified by the expansive breath of charity. Hence it reaches far beyond material justice, which does not come from the heart but limits itself to exterior acts. Primarily, the former is interior justice, that is, uprightness of heart and mind, justice in thoughts, desires, feelings, and intentions. The soul who possesses it has not listened in vain to the words of Jesus : " Unless your justice abound more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven " (*Mt* 5,20). The justice of the Pharisees was insufficient, because it was limited to a purely exterior observance of the law. They had no scruple about secretly trampling upon their most sacred religious duties. These men covered their public conduct with the cloak of justice, without troubling themselves to make it the motive of their private conduct, their affections and the desires of their hearts.

What good, then, is the outer display of justice if its interior spirit is lacking? For example, what use is it to pose in public as a defender of the rights of the people, if in private life a man does not pay workmen a just wage, or is dishonest in commerce, in business, in exercising his profession? What use is it to pour out fine words and promises —or even gifts—on anyone, when we are not willing to recognize and respect his rights?

The soul that thirsts for justice has a horror of all such proceedings, and, far from being satisfied to appear just in acts which can be judged by others, wants to be just in all actions, even those which are not seen by others, but are known only to God. He seeks above all justice of heart and of mind, for exterior justice proceeds solely from interior justice.

2. If we ourselves should fulfill justice rigorously in all our actions, interior as well as exterior, this does not give us the right to demand justice from our neighbor. More than anyone, Jesus brought justice into the world, yet no one was more gentle and kind than He. Even when it is our duty to safeguard or establish justice in specific circumstances, we should be careful not to be severe, but to act with kindness, trying to persuade rather than to impose. If we attempt to administer justice by force, we shall obtain nothing, or at most, a strained situation which will soon collapse. Following the example of Jesus, we must try to make justice penetrate into souls and into society by means of charity, love, and an understanding of the weaknesses of others. If we want to be realistic, we must remember that, no matter how much we do, we shall never, even under the best of circumstances, obtain absolute justice in this world. Perfect justice is found only in heaven; even Jesus bore with the unjust acts of Judas and the Pharisees. Although He could have acted otherwise, He did not wish the cockle to be uprooted from the field until the time of the harvest. We then, must be very patient and merciful, especially when the injustice is aimed against ourselves. For a soul aspiring to sanctity, it can well be said that the greatest justice consists in bearing patiently and humbly all the injustices of which it is the target, for it would be absurd to think of reaching perfection without following in the footsteps of Jesus. If He, Innocence itself, suffered so much injustice without complaining, is it not just that we who are sinners should, at least, suffer something without posing as victims, but remaining calm and serene? Justice itself, then, urges us to bear injustices. Thus, this virtue which begins by enjoining us to give to everyone his due, reaches its culmination in making us enter fully upon the path of sanctity and union with God.

COLLOQUY

"Justice comes from You, O God; its eye is always turned toward You, and it gives to each one his due. But what is this justice and what does it mean to say that it always looks at You? Oh! justice is one of Your perfections, and properly speaking, justice is Yourself, O God! And he

who reflects this virtue in himself, has his glance turned toward You, because he resembles You and wants to be like You in all his actions, always acting without deceit or fraud. A soul who looks upon You, O Incarnate Word, sees that You are so just that, rather than fail in justice, You preferred to take on Yourself the punishment for all our sins; therefore, this soul also wishes to do justice to itself for all its faults. But it sees, too, that justice and mercy are united in You, so much so that You give Yourself, O Christ, as Food to Your redeemed; You nourish them with Your words, Your deeds, Your example, but still more with Your Precious Blood" (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

"O God, the perfume of Your justice is everywhere; it is so pervasive that You are not called simply the Just One, but Justice itself, even justifying Justice, and the more You can justify the more You are inclined to pardon. Therefore, all who, hating their sins, hunger and thirst for justice, can hope in You, who justify the impious.

"No one is so presumptuous that he thinks his justice or holiness is enough to assure his salvation. For this reason I hasten to You, O Jesus: Your Passion is my supreme refuge and sole remedy! It comes to help us when our wisdom fails, when our justice is weak, and the merits of our holiness are useless. When my strength grows weak, I shall not be discouraged. I know what I must do: 'I shall take the chalice of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.' Open my eyes, O God, that I may always know what is pleasing to You and then I shall be wise. Pardon the faults of my youth and ignorance, and I shall be just. Lead me, O God, on Your path, and I shall be holy. But if Your Blood does not intercede for me, I shall not be saved" (St. Bernard).

THE TEN LEPERS

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, my Savior, I need You; heal me, have pity on me!

MEDITATION

1. In the cycle of the Sundays after Pentecost, the Church brings to our attention, sometimes under one aspect, sometimes under another, the merciful action of Jesus on our souls. Two weeks ago she told us about the deaf-mute; last Sunday, the kindness of the good Samaritan; today, the touching scene of the ten lepers whom Jesus cured. It is in this way that the Church tries to awaken in us humble consideration of our misery and to show us the immense need we continually have of the redemptive work of Jesus; at the same time, she wants to make us feel that this work is always in action and that we are living under its influence every day, every moment. The passage in the Gospel (*Lk 17,11-19*) chosen for today's Mass is especially effective in making clear the chief purpose of the Redemption : the healing of souls from the leprosy of sin. From ancient times leprosy has been considered the most fitting figure to represent the hideousness of sin, and indeed it would be difficult to picture anything more horrible and repulsive. Yet, while everybody has such a great dread of leprosy of the body, how indifferent and easy-going even Christians are in regard to leprosy of the soul. How far we are from the deep realization that the saints had of what an offense against God really is! "Oh!" St. Teresa of Avila exclaimed, "why can we not realize that sin is a pitched battle fought against God with all our senses and the faculties of the soul; the stronger the soul is, the more ways it invents to betray its King" (*Exc.*, 14). One of the fruits of today's Gospel is that of awakening in us a great horror of sin, of arousing again in our souls a lively and efficacious repentance for the sins we have committed and a

feeling of profound humility upon recognizing our misery. Let us go with the ten lepers to Our Lord and cry out : "Jesus, Master, have Mercy on us!"

2. Today's Gospel shows us the remedies for sin. The first of these is the sincere humility which recognizes one's own misery. However, humility is not enough; it needs to be accompanied by confident recourse to God. The poor lepers, knowing their miserable state, put their trust in Jesus, and full of faith made their plea to Him; this was the first step toward their cure. Some people bewail their misfortunes and are distressed because of them; still, they never succeed in being cured because they do not have recourse to Jesus, the only physician capable of healing them. The remembrance of their past sins holds them back; they hardly dare to approach Him or to trust in His mercy. Such persons do not understand that it is just because we are sinners that we should go to Jesus, and that "they that are whole, need not the physician, but they that are sick" (*Lk 5,31*).

The divine Master did not cure the poor lepers immediately, but sent them to the priests : "Go, show yourselves to the priests." They obeyed at once, without arguing or doubting, and "as they went, they were made clean." Jesus acts in the same way with us; it is always He who heals us, but He usually wills to do so through the mediation of the priest. Some persons do not have enough faith in the words and works of God's minister. Their faith in the efficacy of the sacraments and in the sacramental absolution is not sufficiently strong; and therefore, they live in a state of continual anguish. When one has sincerely revealed the state of his conscience to a priest, that is, with no intention of deceiving him, he should be at peace and submit wholly to the judgment of the priest. In such a case, to doubt the word of God's minister, to doubt the absolution he has given, is to doubt Jesus Himself, for it is He who is acting through His representative.

Only one of the ten lepers who were cured felt the need to return and thank Our Lord. "Blessed is the soul," St. Bernard comments, "who every time he receives a gift of grace from God, returns to Him, to Him who responds to our gratitude for the favors we have received by giving us new favors. The greatest hindrance to progress in the spiritual life is ingratitude, for God counts as lost the graces we

receive without gratitude, and He refrains from giving us new graces.”

COLLOQUY

“ O Lord, physician of my soul, heal me, that I may acknowledge Your gifts, O health of my soul, and thank You with all my heart for the favors You have showered upon me since my youth, and will continue to shower upon me unto old age. In Your goodness, do not abandon me, I beseech You. You made me when I did not exist; You willed to redeem me when I was perishing and was dead. You came down to him who was dead; You put on mortality; a King, You came to the servant to redeem him and gave Yourself that he might live; You endured death and conquered it, and humbling Yourself, You restored me.

“ I was perishing, far away, immersed in my sins; You came for me to redeem me and You loved me so much that You shed Your Blood for me. You loved me, Lord, more than Yourself, for You willed to die for me. For so high a price, You brought me back from exile; You freed me from slavery, You drew me out of torments, gave me Your Name and marked me with Your Blood, so that I would always remember You and keep You in my heart. Your love for me made You accept the Cross. You anointed me with the oil with which You were anointed, so that by You, O Christ, I might be called a Christian. Your grace and mercy have always gone before me. You have often rescued me from grave dangers, O my Deliverer. When I strayed from the right path, You brought me back to it; when I lay in ignorance, You instructed me; when I sinned, You corrected me; when I was sad, You consoled me; when I was in despair, You strengthened me; when I fell, You lifted me up; when I stood up, You supported me; when I journeyed, You guided me on my way; when I came to You, You received me; when I slept, You watched over me; when I invoked You, You answered me” (St. Augustine).

JUSTICE AND RELIGION

PRESENCE OF GOD - Help me, O God, by Your grace, to render You all the homage of which I am capable.

MEDITATION

1. Justice leads us to render to each one what is his due. But when it is a question of justice to God, we can never succeed in giving Him all that we owe Him, in making Him a suitable return for all His gifts, in paying Him the worship and homage which are due His infinite Majesty. We can fulfill our obligations to others according to justice, but we cannot do so with regard to God. However much man does, it will always be far less than what justice demands. Therefore, justice to God creates in us an urgent need to give ourselves to Him without reserve, without measure, without calculations, in other words, to make a complete gift of ourselves to God, in an attempt to render Him all the homage of which He, by His grace, has made us capable.

Because our justice is insufficient, we should have recourse to Jesus "who of God is made unto us...justice" (*1 Cor 1,30*), not only in the sense that He justified us from sin, but also in that He came upon earth to give the Father, in the name of all mankind, the worship worthy of Him. Therefore, we should seek in Jesus, in His wounds and His precious Blood, all that will make up for our insufficiency, and pay our debt to God; and we shall find it superabundantly. Even though we have consecrated ourselves to the service and worship of God, we are always useless servants, always His great debtors; this, however, should not discourage us, but should serve to stimulate us never to lessen, never to draw back in our dedication to God. At the same time, it ought to urge us to appeal with immense confidence to Jesus, our Savior and Mediator.

2. The virtue of religion makes us give to God the homage and worship which are His due; in this sense, it is related to the virtue of justice; however, it can never completely

fulfill the requirements of justice, but it approaches these as closely as possible. Our religion can honor God worthily only when it becomes part of Christ's religion, that is, insofar as it is united with the homage, adoration, praise, and offering which are continually rising up from the heart of Christ to His heavenly Father. Jesus was the perfect religious, in the sense that all His affections, His activity and His will were so directed to the glory of the Father and to His service that His whole life was one continual act of worship and religion. "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (*Lk* 2,49). This was the fundamental attitude of His spirit. Jesus, who in the secret of His heart incessantly adored the Trinity, who so often expressed His prayer even externally, raising His eyes to Heaven and calling upon His Father, who passed a good part of the night in solitary conversation with Him, who went punctually to the temple at Jerusalem for all the acts of external worship prescribed by the law, who died on the Cross to offer to the Triune God a sacrifice worthy of Him—yes, Jesus has shown us in what the true virtue of religion consists. It is interior worship, because "God is a spirit, and they that adore Him must adore Him in spirit and in truth" (*Jn* 4,24); but it is also exterior, because our whole being, including our bodies, must take part in the homage we render to God.

Religious who are wholly consecrated to the service of God by their vows practice the virtue of religion in the highest degree, provided they fulfill their obligations "in spirit and in truth." But even those who are not bound by vows should try in all their acts to have the intention of performing them for the glory, honor, and service of God; therefore, they should do them in such a way that they can be presented to Him as acts of homage, offering, and sacrifice. Thus the virtue of religion is not confined to the hours of prayer; it embraces our whole life, transforming it into one continual act of homage to God, in imitation of the life of Jesus and in union with it.

COLLOQUY

"What return shall I make to You, O God, for all You have given me? Reason and human justice require me to give myself entirely to You from whom I have received

all that I am, and they enjoin me to love You with all my strength. But faith teaches me that I should love You still more than this because Your gifts are greater than I am. You have given me not only my being, but also, by grace, Your being.

"If, because You created me, I ought to give myself entirely to You, what should I add in exchange for my redemption? When You created me, You gave me myself; when You redeemed me, You gave me Yourself, and by so doing, You gave me back to myself. Given and then returned, I owe myself to You in exchange for myself; I owe myself twice. But what can I give You, my God, in return for Yourself? Even if I could give myself to You a thousand times, what am I compared with You?

"I will love You, O Lord, my strength, my support, my refuge, my redeemer. I will love You for Your gifts, according to my measure, which certainly will be less than the just measure, but will not be less than my capacity for loving You. Doubtless I shall know how to love You more when You deign to give me more love, and yet I shall never be able to love You as much as You deserve. Your eyes have seen my imperfection, but the names of those who have done all that they could are written in Your book, even if they could not do all they should" (St. Bernard).

"I invoke You, omnipotent Father, by the charity of Your omnipotent Son; nor do I know of any other intercessor, if not this One who made Himself a propitiation for our sins. I beseech You through Him, the High Priest, true Pontiff and Good Shepherd, who offered Himself as a sacrifice and gave His life for His flock; I pray to You through Him who is seated at Your right hand interceding for us, to give me the grace to bless You and praise You and glorify You together with Him, with intense compunction of heart, with many tears, and with great reverence. He is my advocate with You, God the Father; He is the sacred Victim, pleasing to You, perfect, offered in the odor of sweetness and acceptable to You" (St. Augustine).

PIETY AND DEVOTION

PRESENCE OF GOD - O God, our Father, infuse into my soul the true spirit of piety and devotion.

MEDITATION

1. The Christian religion is not limited to the simple relations of the creature with the Creator, relations which, given the infinite distance between them, would remain only within the sphere of reverence and homage, without any character of intimacy, without any confidential impetus toward God. A Christian knows that he is bound to God for other reasons than those of creation, strong though these may be—he has been redeemed from sin and raised to a supernatural state. A Christian is conscious of the fact that he is not only a creature, but a child of God, redeemed by Christ; and this gives to all his relations with God that quality of filial piety, which is the very soul of his religion. Let us contemplate Jesus in His relations with God; He knows He is a *Son*, a *Son* who lives for the Father who has given Him existence. “The Father hath sent Me...and I live by the Father” (*Jn* 6,58); a *Son* who has no other ideal than to do His Father’s will, to which He adheres with all the strength of His Heart: “Yea, Father, for so hath it seemed good in Thy sight” (*Mt* 11,26); a *Son* who in all His actions, seeks only to please His Father: “I do always the things that please Him” (*Jn* 8,29). Jesus, the only-begotten of the Father, the only Son of God by nature, has by grace made us sharers in His divine filiation, so that “we should be called and should be the sons of God” (1 *Jn* 3,1). If we are sons of God, then it is right that we, too, strive to share Christ’s dispositions of filial piety toward His heavenly Father. For it is this which truly characterizes our religion as given to us by our divine Master: “Thus, shall you pray: Our Father, who art in heaven” (*Mt* 6,9). He wishes us to consider and invoke God as *our Father*: the *Father* who provides for all our needs; the *Father* who wishes us to pray to Him in secret, and who in secret will hear our prayers;

the *Father* who sees all our actions, even the most hidden ones, and who is preparing a reward for them; the *Father* who wishes us to honor Him by keeping His commandments, and who is pleased to make His abode in the souls of those who love Him. The divine paternity is the center of the Christian religion, and to this paternity should correspond, on our part, an attitude of deep filial piety. We should love God as a child loves its father, trying to please Him in all things. Piety is truly the heart of our religion.

2. If God has wished to raise us to the dignity of being His children, we should live as such and not like servants. The servant does only what is strictly necessary to obtain his salary and retain his position; the son, however, does not consider the reward, but loving his father dearly, puts himself at his disposal unreservedly, without restriction. The servant is lazy and selfish; he tries to spare himself as much as he can, and does not wish to give his employer anything more than what has been agreed upon. Not so the son; for him it is not a question of a time for work and a time for rest; nothing is too laborious when it is a question of giving pleasure to his father; he is always ready to carry out his orders, always attentive to his wishes, he is happy to be able to repeat at every moment, "Behold, I come... to do Thy will" (*Heb 10,7*). Similarly, in our relations with God, filial piety flows into *devotion*, which according to St. Thomas, is "the will to do promptly all that pertains to the service of God" (*II^a II^{ae}, q.82, a.1, co.*). Piety as well as devotion can be very much alive in the soul, although in the sensible part it feels cold and dry; and this to the extent that all its exercises of prayer and virtue are performed without the feeling of any sweetness or consolation, but rather with great repugnance.

This should not alarm us: St. Thomas teaches that devotion is an *act of the will*, that this act can very well exist in spite of aridity, coldness, repugnance, and even rebellion in the inferior part of the soul. St. Paul himself, although raised to the third heaven, was still not entirely free from these miseries, and confessed: "I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind" (*Rom 7,22.23*). Now as St. Paul—in spite of this resistance in the sensible part of his soul—was not deprived of true

piety and true devotion, so neither is the soul deprived of them if it remains firm in the decision of its will to give itself promptly to God's service, in spite of everything. *Devotion*, which is derived from the Latin word *devoveo*, means precisely consecration to the divinity; and the soul gives itself entirely to God, not by bursts of enthusiasm in its feelings, but by an act of the will. Furthermore, when devotion is deprived of relish for the things of God, "it has a double worth, because the soul both fulfills its duty and governs its sensitive appetite by a strong act of the will" (Ven. John of Jesus Mary).

COLLOQUY

O Most High God, You have willed to be my Father; grant that I may really be Your child, a loving, devoted child, attentive and docile to every manifestation of Your will, desiring to serve and please You in everything. O You, who have a Father's heart for me, create in me the heart of a child, a heart free from servile fear, but rich in filial fear, a disinterested, generous heart which has but one fear: the fear of offending You, and but one desire: that of pleasing You.

"May Your will be my will, my passion, my honor! Grant that I may seek it, find it, and accomplish it. Show me Your ways, point out to me Your paths. O Father, You have Your designs over me. Show them to me clearly and grant that I may follow them so as to obtain the salvation of my soul. Apart from You, may every joy be bitter to me. May I have no desire or rest but in You. May every work undertaken for You be sweet.

"Let my piety not be merely mechanical, but a continual impulse of my heart... and grant that my spirit, which is incapable of not knowing You, be ardent in seeking You, and know how to find You, O most loving Father.

"Ah! let not my words displease You! Grant that, trustful and calm, I may await Your answer, relying on Your word!" (St. Thomas).

Receive me, O Father, in Your embrace; admit me to intimacy with You! Grant, I beseech You, that my heart may never wander when You leave it in darkness and distress; but sustained with Your grace, may it persevere in seeking and serving You with good will.

GRATITUDE

PRESENCE OF GOD - O my God, give me a grateful heart, that I may sing Your praises forever.

MEDITATION

1. Incapable as we are of paying our debts to God according to justice, we should at least try to supply for them by our gratitude. Even the poorest beggar, having nothing to give in return for the alms he has received, can always acknowledge a kindness by showing gratitude to his benefactor. This is our position in regard to God : we have nothing of our own; all that we are and have comes from Him, and in return for His infinite generosity, we can do nothing but use His gifts to express our gratitude to Him. "In all things give thanks : for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you all" (*Thes* 5,18). God, who showers blessings upon us with infinite generosity, has a perfect right to expect gratitude from us. Yet this, a natural need of a humble, delicate soul, is a duty so often neglected even by good people, even by those who have received the most favors from God. Jesus complained of this neglect when only one of the ten lepers whom He had cured returned to thank Him : "And where are the nine? Is there no one found to return and give glory to God, but this stranger?" (*Lk* 17,17.18). It is significant that the nine ungrateful ones were the nine Jews, who, being fellow-citizens of Jesus, were in a more privileged position than the stranger. Sometimes those whom Jesus has called to be His close friends, those upon whom He has bestowed a privileged vocation, are the very ones who show Him the least gratitude.

It is almost as though the multiplicity of the graces which they have received dulls their sensitiveness to the divine gifts; it seems they no longer regard the greatness of these gifts, nor the fact that they are totally gratuitous; gratitude seems to have dried up in their hearts. "Oh!" exclaims St. Teresa, "how the very greatness of His favors condemns those who are ungrateful!" (*Exc*, 3). Ingratitude

always redounds to the disadvantage of the soul. Let us think, for example, of the irreparable loss of the nine lepers who, not returning to give thanks for the healing they had received, forfeited the joy the one grateful leper had of hearing Jesus say: "Thy faith hath made thee whole" (*Lk* 17,19). Their want of gratitude deprived them of health of soul, a grace immeasurably more precious than the health of the body.

2. St. Bernard says, "Ingratitude is the enemy of the soul, the destroyer of merit and virtue, causing the loss of favors. It is a burning wind which dries up the fountain of piety, the dew of mercy, the torrents of grace." Gratitude, on the contrary, attracts new graces, new gifts; it draws down upon souls the infinite liberality. But this gratitude should be sincere and cordial, and should extend to all of God's gifts. "Every gift of God, whether great or small, should be gratefully acknowledged; not even the least grace should be forgotten" (*ibid.*). This sincere gratitude flourishes only in a heart that is humble, convinced of its own poverty, and thoroughly aware that it is nothing and can do nothing without continual help from God. It is not impossible, in fact, to thank God with the lips, while in the heart, one attributes the graces received to one's own merits. Such was the false gratitude of the Pharisee when he said: "O God, I give Thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men" (*Lk* 18,11). The context clearly shows that this proud man was far from recognizing his own nothingness and attributing to God alone the little good that might have been in him. A humble man has an entirely different attitude: if he has done some good, or practiced virtue, he is convinced that all is the fruit of grace, and therefore, not only God's great gifts to him, but even the least of the good works he performs, are opportunities for giving continual thanks to God, whom he recognizes as the source of all good. Who, then, can express his gratitude for every Mass, for every Communion, for every confession? Each one of these graces even if renewed a thousand times finds this gratitude as lively and alert, as if it were a question of an entirely new gift. And in reality, it is: each sacrament, each divine succor, each actual grace, each spiritual or material help, brings with it newness of grace, of spiritual life, of love; blessed the soul who realizes this and praises God for it! If the

multitude of divine benefits do not produce in us proportionate fruits, the reason probably lies in our want of gratitude, and if we want to look more deeply for the root of this evil, almost always we shall find that it is a lack of humility.

COLLOQUY

“ I give You thanks, O eternal Father, because You have not despised Your creature, nor turned away Your face from me, nor ignored my desires. You, who are light, did not despise my darkness; You, who are life, did not go far away from me who am death; nor did You, the physician, fail to heal my wounds.... Your wisdom, mercy, and infinite goodness have not looked with scorn at all these and the infinite number of other evils and faults that are in me. What forced You to love me and to grant me so many graces? It was not my virtues but only Your charity. May I always keep Your favors in mind, and may my will burn with the fire of Your charity.

“ O inestimable Love, how admirable are the things You have done in Your creature! O my wretched, blind soul, where is your cry of gratitude, where are the tears you should shed in the sight of your God who is unceasingly calling to you? Where are all my yearning desires in the sight of divine mercy? They are not in me because I have not yet lost myself, for if I were lost and had sought only You, my God, only the glory and the praise of Your Name, my heart would have thrilled in a hymn of gratitude.

“ Thanks be to You, O eternal, most high Trinity! I am she who is not and You are He who is. Glorify Yourself by enabling me to praise You. Pardon me, O Father, pardon me who am miserable, and ungrateful to You for the immense benefits I have received. I confess that Your goodness has preserved me, Your spouse, although because of my many defects I have often been unfaithful to You ”
(St. Catherine of Siena).

SINCERITY

PRESENCE OF GOD - Give me, O Lord, an open, sincere heart, loving the truth, seeking and desiring it at any cost.

MEDITATION

I. "Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle, or who shall rest in Thy holy hill?" asks the Psalmist. And he gives the answer : "He that walketh without blemish, and worketh justice" (*Ps 14,1.2*).

God is truth, and no one can be admitted to His intimacy who does not strive as much as he can, to live in truth and to be sincere in all his actions. First of all, we must seek to possess truth in the depths of our heart, that we may know ourselves as we really are in the eyes of God, stripped of all disguise and artificiality. To do this we must accept, not only the truths which please us, but also those which are painful and wound our pride to the quick, revealing our faults and evil tendencies. A person who is sincere never closes his eyes to these truths, but values them, even if they are humiliating, knowing that humiliation which reveals the truth is worth more than illusion which flatters pride and keeps us in error. Sometimes God permits difficult circumstances which are especially hard and trying for the practice of virtue, that we may see the truth and know ourselves as we really are. Under the onset of contradiction, we experience movements, hitherto unknown, surging up within us : movements of anger, rebellion, selfishness, from which perhaps we had had the illusion that we were free. In such cases, instead of turning our gaze away, it is necessary to have the courage to recognize these faults and confess them, humbly and frankly. St. John of the Cross speaks of certain pious souls who, in confession, "palliate [their sins] and make them appear less evil, and thus... excuse themselves rather than accuse themselves" (cf. *DN I*, 2,4). A soul that loves the truth is very far from acting in this way; even if it has only venial sins and imperfections of which to accuse itself in confession, it exposes them all very sin-

cerely, without magnifying or minimizing them, never blaming circumstances, but only itself for all that is faulty. Sincerity in confessing our faults is the first step toward freeing ourselves from them.

2. A soul can be insincere in its interior life and its relations with God, but it can never deceive Him, and its lack of sincerity will only redound to its own disadvantage. But with respect to our neighbors it is not so; a want of sincerity can easily harm them, or at least deceive them. Hence, not only charity, but also justice demands that we conduct ourselves with the greatest sincerity in our relations with our neighbor. "Wherefore putting away lying," St. Paul exhorts, "speak ye the truth every man with his neighbor, for we are members one of another" (*Eph* 4,25). Because of the natural ties, and still more, the supernatural ones, which bind us to our neighbor, he has every right not to be deceived either by our words or by our actions.

To be sincere, our words must, first of all, correspond to our thoughts. To be convinced of one thing and to affirm another, with the intention of deceiving someone, is directly contrary to truth and, therefore, an offense against God, who is infinite Truth. Such an act is absolutely inadmissible in any soul, and especially in one who aspires to union with God : How can falsehood hope to be united to supreme Truth? And yet under a more subtle form certain deficiencies in sincerity are not wholly absent from the conduct of devout souls—little subterfuges, words spoken in such a way that they ward off a just rebuke, conceal a mistake which one does not wish to admit, or even attract a little praise or admiration... and all this through vanity or human respect, in order to avoid humiliation or suffering. These are mean ways of acting, unworthy of a sincere, noble spirit. Any want of sincerity, however small, in a soul who has consecrated itself to God, is very displeasing to Him, and is a serious obstacle to its spiritual progress. St. Margaret Mary writes : "If I should see a soul adorned with all the virtues except sincerity, and if I knew that she had been favored with great graces, it would all seem to me but deceit and illusion."

It is not sufficient to be sincere in our words; we must also be sincere in our actions and conduct. Sincere conduct is

that which makes us appear just as we are, with no affectation, and no desire to appear to be what we are not. Our words and actions should express the truth which has been sought and loved interiorly. Sincerity does not require us to reveal all that we think or know to everyone; this would be contrary to prudence and to other virtues. It does, however, demand that everything we do reveal, by word or act, or even by silence, corresponds to truth.

COLLOQUY

“ O Lord, if I wish to reach You, who are the Way, the Truth, and the Life, I must travel the road of truth, without any pretense or dissimulation, renouncing reason that has been darkened by self-love and human respect. I must act with simplicity, wholly dying to myself and to creatures. Teach me, O eternal Truth, how to act sincerely and frankly. Let my soul, simple as a dove, fly to You to build its nest in Your heart, and nourish itself with the knowledge of You and of itself; thus despising its own malice, it will find nothing in itself to satisfy it, and therefore, it will be unable to stay far away from You, not finding where to repose outside of You. Teach me to walk in the straight path of truth without stopping, but always advancing, hurrying and running swiftly, in order to follow You, eternal Truth, my guide and my way ” (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

“ O Lord, let Thy truth teach me, let Thy truth guard me, and keep me till I come to a happy end. Let the same deliver me from all evil affections. I confess my sins to Thee with great compunction and sorrow; never permit me to esteem myself for my good works. I am indeed a sinner, subject to, and entangled with many passions. I always tend to nothing, I fall quickly, I am quickly overcome, easily disturbed and discouraged. I have nothing in which I can glory, but many things for which I ought to humble myself, for I am much weaker than I am able to comprehend.

“ Teach me, O Lord, to admire Thy eternal truth, and to despise my own exceeding vileness ” (*Imit. III*, 4,2-4).

SIMPLICITY

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, give me a simple heart, free from duplicity and deceit, a heart which goes to You with childlike simplicity.

MEDITATION

1. Simplicity is a virtue very much like sincerity, its indispensable foundation, but one which surpasses it when perfect, embracing man's whole moral life and reducing it to unity. Simplicity excludes every form of duplicity and complication stemming from egoism, self-love, or attachment to self and to creatures; hence it impels the soul in one direction only : to God, to live for Him, to please Him, and to give glory to Him. The whole spiritual life consists in this progressive simplification which proceeds at an equal pace with interior purification. When a soul is perfectly purified from every passion and attachment, then is it reduced to perfect simplicity, that simplicity which makes it live only in God and for God. To reach this goal, we must, during our whole life, let ourselves be guided in everything by one light alone; we must rely on one power alone, and seek but one end : God.

A soul who wishes to acquire holy simplicity accepts no light but that which comes from God, which is God Himself; therefore, it puts aside its selfish and egoistic point of view; it rejects the deceptive voice of the passions and the blinding but false maxims of the world, knowing that all is darkness and illusion except the light of truth which can come from God alone, from His law, from the Gospel. It judges all things in the light of faith, seeing the hand of God in every circumstance and happening, even the most painful. It makes use of everything to go to Him, without wasting time in reasoning about the conduct of creatures, for to do so would complicate its life and create obstacles to the practice of virtue. Nothing holds it back in its rapid pace, because it finds in God, not only the light by which to see the right path, but also the strength to pursue it. A simple soul leans

on God at every moment, at every step of its life, seeking in Him its sole support and strength. In whatever difficulty it finds itself, it immediately looks to God for help, and with complete confidence, convinced that only in Him will it find the strength necessary to sustain its weakness, and that this strength will never be refused. It is not prevented, however, from seeking the help of wise, prudent persons, but it does so with detachment, and does not become troubled or disturbed when God permits it to be deprived of this help.

2. In everything, a simple soul considers but one end, God, and has but one intention, to serve God and to please Him. Therefore, it watches very carefully lest any secondary intention arising from self-love ever insinuate itself into its actions, as, for example, a desire of making a good appearance, of procuring the esteem of others, or of satisfying its own curiosity or love of ease. These secondary intentions are like the little foxes of which the Canticle of Canticles speaks; they stealthily penetrate into the blossoming vine of the soul and destroy the flowers and fruits of our good works. How many good actions begun out of love for God, lose at least half their value because, before they are completed, they are contaminated by some secondary intention not sufficiently suppressed or rectified! And how many others which also began well are transformed into evil by lack of rectitude in the intention. The simple soul has declared war on all such deviations and repeats with St. Francis de Sales : " My God, if I knew that even one fibre of my heart did not beat for You, I would tear it out at once and throw it far from me." Purity of intention makes all its words and actions simple, clearly reflecting its thoughts and intentions. Its language is simple : " Yes, yes; no, no" (*Mt 5,37*) ; its conduct is simple : it does what it should without pretense or dissimulation. It fears nothing because it is seeking only God and His approval, it acts with the holy liberty of the children of God, without human respect, without preoccupying itself with the judgment and approval of creatures : " He that judgeth me is the Lord," it says with St. Paul (*1 Cor 4,4*), and continues on its way, looking only at God. Thus, free from all cares and useless preoccupations, the simple soul goes straight to God, as rapidly and as directly as an

arrow. The one light, the one strength, the one end of its life is God, and because of this, its whole life attains a purity, a strength, and an enchanting unity—a pale reflection of the divine perfections.

COLLOQUY

“ O Lord, would that I could go to You by the straight path of truth and simplicity! Grant to my soul that right intention, that simple gaze which desires to please You alone and pays no heed to the interpretations put on its actions by others.

“ Teach me to see with the eyes of faith, to see You alone in my superiors, so that my relations with them will be marked by frankness, respect, esteem, confidence, obedience and docility. As for myself, grant that I may go right to the center of my nothingness and remain there without preoccupations about myself, eliminating all scruples and melancholy, all disturbance. Teach me to go straight to the inmost depths of my soul, where You abide.

“ Grant that, when dealing with my neighbor, I may always follow the straight path of the love of pure benevolence, loving You in him and not seeking any natural satisfaction.

“ In the midst of the vicissitudes and unexpected events of life, teach me to go directly where Your will calls me, without any curiosity or distraction. Teach me to follow the straight path of love, which knows no delay; of simplicity, which knows no deviation; of truth, which knows no deceit; of obedience, which knows no objections; of purity, which knows not the fascination of creatures; of recollection, which knows not distractions.

“ This is the path which pleases You, O Jesus, the one You wished to call the straight path : ‘ *Ego sum via rectissima*,’ I am the straightest way (*Imit. III*, 56,1). This is the way which leads to the Father, for You have said, ‘ No man goes to the Father but by Me.’ This is the way by which the Holy Spirit guides us, for Wisdom leads the just man by straight ways! ’

“ Therefore, I beseech You, O God, with a fervent, trustful desire, to create in me a pure heart and to renew in me Your Spirit. May Your good Spirit guide me by the straight path! ” (Sr. Carmela of the Holy Spirit, O.C.D.).

FORTITUDE

PRESENCE OF GOD - Teach me, O Lord, to act courageously, trusting in You.

MEDITATION

1. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away" (*Mt 11,12*). Neither good resolutions nor good desires suffice to make a saint. These must be translated into action; but precisely in the accomplishment of this work, great difficulties are encountered, causing many to stop in discouragement or actually to turn back from the way they have begun. These are weak souls who become frightened in the face of fatigue, effort, and struggle. They lack the virtue of fortitude, or at least, are deficient in it. This virtue enables us to face and bear whatever difficulty, whatever hardship or sacrifice we may encounter in the fulfillment of duty. Difficulties and sacrifices will never be wanting for, although "wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction...narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life" (*ibid. 7,13.14*). Hence, it would be an illusion to pretend that the way to sanctity is easy and agreeable, as it would equally be an illusion to think that one could persevere in it without constantly practicing the virtue of fortitude. On the contrary, the greater the perfection to which a soul aspires, the stronger and more courageous it must be, because the difficulties it has to face will be greater.

When Jesus wished to praise the Precursor, He said, "What went you out into the desert to see? A reed shaken with the wind?" (*ibid. 11,7*). No, John the Baptist was not a weak man who could be shaken by the wind of difficulties; his was the strength of one who, to uphold the law of God, did not fear to incur his king's displeasure and to courageously face martyrdom. Elsewhere, speaking of the victory over sin and the devil, Jesus praised the strong man: "When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things are in peace which he possesseth" (*Lk 11,21*). This is a picture of the soul that possesses the virtue of fortitude: it is well

armed and cannot be frightened by any struggle, temptation, or other obstacle; rather, in the midst of all this, it remains in peaceful security because its strength comes from God Himself.

2. "His Majesty," writes St. Teresa of Avila, "desires and loves courageous souls if they have no confidence in themselves but walk in humility" (*T.J. Life*, 13). Christian fortitude is neither rashness nor presumption because of one's own strength; it is based on God and the great gifts He has lavished on man. If man is nothing in himself, he is, however, great because of what God has done for him and given to him, and by reason of the exalted dignity God has conferred upon him. In fact, in the natural order, man has been appointed to rule the world; all other creatures have been subjected to him, and he should use them to know and love God better. In the supernatural order, he has been given the high vocation of being a child of God, called by Him to participate in His life and in His eternal beatitude. To attain this end, he has received grace, which is not only supernatural life and light, but also divine strength, strength infused into him precisely to cure the weakness of his nature, to strengthen his will, thereby making him capable of fulfilling all the duties inherent in his vocation. At Baptism, together with the other infused virtues, he has received the virtue of fortitude, a participation in the divine strength which has been placed in his soul like a seed, capable of developing into full perfection. Christian fortitude has its foundation, therefore, in the natural and supernatural gifts received from God, and in the exalted dignity to which man has been raised by God.

If we are weak, it is not due to the insufficiency of the divine gifts, but to our own insufficiency—because we have not properly developed the gifts of nature and grace which God has given us. And if we are strong, it is due, not to our own merits, but to the work God has done in us. The Christian is humble in his strength because he knows that it does not spring from him as its source, but from the gifts God has given him. He always lives in dependence upon God, both in the consideration of his nothingness and in that of his greatness, both in his humility and in his strength. Behold why the Lord, loving courageous souls, wants them, nevertheless, to be humble and always distrustful of self;

behold why the Holy Spirit says, "Let thy heart take courage, and wait thou for the Lord" (*Ps 26,14*).

COLLOQUY

"O God, You have seen the weakness of our human nature; You know how weak, frail and miserable it is; therefore, You, the sovereign Provider, who in all things have provided for all the needs of Your creatures, You, the perfect Repairer, who have given a remedy for all our ills, You gave us the rock and fortitude of will to strengthen the weakness of our flesh. This will is so strong that no demon or creature can conquer it if we do not will it, that is, if our free will, which is in our own hands, does not consent.

"O infinite Goodness, where does such great strength in Your creature's will come from? From You, sovereign, eternal Strength because it shares the strength of Your will. Hence, we can see that our will is strong to the degree in which it follows Yours, and weak to the degree in which it deviates from Yours because You created our will to the likeness of Your will, and therefore, being in Yours, it is strong.

"In our will, O eternal Father, You show the fortitude of Your will; for if You have given so much fortitude to a little member, what should we think Yours to be, O Creator and Ruler of all things?

"It seems to me that this free will which You have given us is fortified by the light of faith, for in this light it knows Your will, which wishes nothing but our sanctification. Then our will, fortified and nourished by our holy faith, gives life to our actions, which explains why neither good will nor lively faith can exist without works. Faith nourishes and maintains the fire of charity, because it reveals to our soul Your love and charity to us, and thus makes it strong in loving You" (St. Catherine of Siena).

THE TWO KINGDOMS

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PRESENCE OF GOD - Give strength to my weakness, O Lord, so that I may come to possess Your kingdom.

MEDITATION

i. We find the central thought of today's Mass synthesized in the Collect : "O Lord...because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation." Behold the position of man in respect to the spiritual life : he is like a child who finds himself at a crossroad : he cannot go on alone, and he does not know which road leads to his home. Two roads open up before the Christian : one leads to the kingdom of the spirit, the kingdom of God; the other to the kingdom of the flesh, the kingdom of Mammon; which of the two will he choose? Evidently, he wishes to give the preference to the one leading to the kingdom of God, the calm, peaceful kingdom described by Jesus in today's Gospel (*Mt* 6,24-33). Unfortunately, however, the kingdom of Mammon also has attractions and tries to seduce his heart. The Epistle (*Gal* 5,16-24) tells us that we must struggle against these allurements. "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary one to another, so that you do not the things that you would."

The struggle is hard sometimes, even in souls that are decidedly advanced in the things of God. Why? Because the path that leads to the kingdom of God is rough and tiring; it is often shrouded in dense darkness, rendering it impossible for the soul to discern the progress already made. Then the soul must proceed in the night, believing and hoping. Meanwhile, its gaze falls on the other road, which is broader and more comfortable, strewn with sensible goods which can be seen and touched, gathered and enjoyed immediately, by merely stretching out one's hand. The soul feels

the temptation and realizes that alone it could not resist, but if it takes refuge in God, if it yields to the guidance of the Spirit, it will be saved, although not without sacrifice. "I say then, walk in the spirit," continues St. Paul, "and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.... Now the works of the flesh are manifest..." and the Apostle gives a very unattractive list of them. It is always true : material goods present themselves like flowers, attractive, yes, but doomed to quickly vanish and decay; it is not worthwhile to stop to enjoy them. That is why "they that are Christ's have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences."

2. The Gospel again puts us on our guard against the attractiveness of earthly goods. First it affirms that no man can simultaneously serve two masters, God and Mammon, any more than one can follow the two roads at the same time : the one leading to the kingdom of God and the other to worldly pleasure. Anyone giving himself to God must have the courage to give himself entirely, with no regrets, no backward glance—however fleeting—at the things of the world. The soul who, after choosing the path of perfection, does not go forth generously, with its whole heart, will never be contented. It will neither experience the joy of knowing that it belongs entirely to God, nor will it have the satisfaction of being able to follow all the attractions of the world; the first will be impeded by the soul's unfaithfulness, the second by the fear of God which it still possesses. Such a soul is unhappy, torn between the two and in continual struggle with itself. But what keeps it from seeking the kingdom of God with its whole heart? Jesus gives us the answer in today's Gospel : too much solicitude about material things, about ease and security in this present life. Even though we have the will to live according to the spirit, as long as we are pilgrims here below and in a mortal body, we shall always have to face the possibility of becoming engrossed in worldly cares : "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewith shall we be clothed?" Precisely to relieve us of such anxieties, Jesus presents to us the marvelous picture of divine Providence. "Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not you of more value than they?" These are words that give us wings and fill us with a desire to cast aside all vain preoccupations

about earthly things and concentrate on seeking the kingdom of God. "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you." Oh, if we only had greater faith in divine Providence, how much freer we would be to attend to the things of our soul! Although obliged to occupy ourselves with earthly affairs, we would not remain entrapped by them, but would know how to attend to them with complete liberty of spirit.

COLLOQUY

"O Lord, as the desires of the flesh are opposed to those of the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are opposed to those of the flesh, the struggle is a mortal one; I do not do the things I would like to do, for I would like to free myself from concupiscence, but this is impossible. Whether I will it or not, I cling to it; it flatters, tempts, importunes, always trying to raise up its head. It can be restrained but not suppressed.

"O Lord, my God, Your commandments are weapons. By the Holy Spirit, You have given me the possibility of keeping my members under control; therefore, all my hope is in You. Grant that I may do what You command, and then command what You will.

"I do not want to be a friend of this world, O Lord, for if I were, I should be Your enemy. I want to make a ladder of all created things, by which I may mount to You, for if I love creatures more than You, I shall not possess You. Of what benefit would an abundance of created things be to me, if I did not have You, the Creator of all things?

"Why do I work so much for the love of riches? The desire for gain imposes fatigue, dangers, and tribulations; and I, unhappy that I am, submit to them. I accept them in order to fill my coffers, and so I lose my tranquillity.

"But You, what do You command me to do, O my God? To love You. If I love gold, I try to seek it but am not able to find it; but You are always with those who seek for You. I desire honor, and I may not receive it; but can anyone love You and not reach You? All I have to do is love You, and love itself will bring You near me. Is there anything sweeter than such love? You, O Lord, are my love! I love

You with all the ardor of my heart, and I trample underfoot
all earthly attractions, resolving to pass them by ”
(St. Augustine).

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COURAGE

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, make me strong and courageous in Your service.

MEDITATION

1. The more a soul loves God, the more courageous it will be in undertaking any work, no matter how laborious, for love of Him. Fear of fatigue, of suffering, and of danger, is the greatest enemy of fortitude; it paralyzes the soul and makes it recoil before duty. Courage, on the contrary, is invigorating; it enables us to confront anything in order to be faithful to God. Courage, therefore, incites us to embrace death itself, if necessary, rather than be unfaithful to duty. Martyrdom is the supreme act of Christian fortitude, an act which is not asked of all, yet one which it is well not to ignore as a possibility. Every Christian is, so to speak, a potential martyr, in the sense that the virtue of fortitude, infused into him at Baptism and Confirmation, makes him capable, if necessity requires it, of sacrificing even his life for the love of God. And if all Christians are not actually called upon to render to the Lord this supreme testimony of love, all should, nevertheless, live like courageous soldiers, accustoming themselves never to desert any duty, little or great, through fear of sacrifice.

It is true that the virtue of fortitude does not exempt us from the fear and alarm which invade our nature when faced with sacrifice, danger, or above all, the imminent danger of death. But fortitude, like all the other virtues, is exercised by the will; hence, it is possible to perform courageous acts in spite of our fear. In these cases, courage has a twofold function : it conquers fear and faces the difficult task. Such

was the supreme act of fortitude Jesus made in the Garden of Olives when He accepted to drink the bitter chalice of His Passion, in spite of the repugnance of His human nature. It is by uniting ourselves to this act of our Savior that we shall find strength to embrace all that is painful in our lives.

2. Grace can give courage even to those who are naturally timid; but we must not expect grace to do this without our cooperation. The virtue of fortitude has been given to all Christians, and in this sense is an infused virtue; however, it remains for us to activate it by practice, and in this sense it becomes an acquired virtue. Furthermore, the same is true of all the theological and moral virtues which are infused into the soul with grace. They are like capital which will increase only if we invest it with good will to make it productive.

We become humble by making acts of humility; likewise, we become strong and courageous by performing courageous acts. It is not within our power to suppress the sensible fear which we inherit with our fallen nature and which we feel in spite of ourselves, but we can prevent it from taking possession of our will and paralyzing our acts. We must act energetically, forcing ourselves in the name of God to do what we should, and not stopping to argue with fear. "Many souls say, 'I have not the strength to accomplish such an act.' But let them begin and put forth some effort! The good God never refuses the initial grace which imparts courage to act. After that, the heart is strengthened, and the soul goes on from victory to victory" (*T.C.J. NV*). This is true. To become courageous, we must make up our minds to act in spite of our natural cowardice and fear. This is particularly necessary at times when, because of physical weakness or because of the privation of the support of actual grace, even the smallest difficulties seem like mountains and everything frightens us. If we were to wait until we felt courageous, we should never undertake anything. "What does it matter if we have no courage," said the Saint of Lisieux to a novice, "provided we act as though we were really brave?" (*C*). Courageous acts performed when we have no courage are purer and more supernatural: they are purer, because they afford no place for feelings of pride; they are more supernatural because they are based, not on the resources of nature, but on those of grace. On the contrary, acts of

courage which we perform according to our natural dispositions are often simply human acts; they can easily become food for self-love. Therefore, one who is brave by nature must learn not to rely on his own strength but to depend on God's grace, without which all human strength is mere weakness.

COLLOQUY

" O Lord God of hosts, You said in Your Gospel, ' I am not come to bring peace but the sword'; provide me then with strength and weapons for the battle. I burn with desire to fight for Your glory, but I beseech You, strengthen my courage. Then with holy King David I can exclaim : ' You alone are my shield, O God; it is You who prepare my hands for war.'

" O my Jesus, I will fight for You as long as I live, and love will be my sword. My weakness should never discourage me; when in the morning I feel no courage or strength for the practice of virtue, I must look upon this state as a grace, for You teach me that it is the very moment to put the axe to the root of the tree, counting only on Your help.

" What merit would there be in fighting only when I feel courage? What does it matter even if I have none, provided that I act as if I had? O Jesus, make me understand that if I feel too weak to pick up a bit of thread, and yet do it for love of You, I shall gain much more merit than if I had performed some nobler act in a moment of fervor. So instead of grieving, I ought to rejoice seeing that You, by allowing me to feel my own weakness, give me an occasion of saving a greater number of souls" (cf. T.C.J. *Prayer - L*, 40 - C).

MAGNANIMITY

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, give me a generous heart, capable of undertaking great things for You.

MEDITATION

I. Whoever aspires to sanctity should have a generous, magnanimous heart, which is not satisfied with doing little things for God, and tiny acts of virtue, but is eager to do great things and give great proofs of love. Just as there is no sanctity without heroic virtue, so it is impossible to attain to heroism without performing great acts of virtue.

Some think there is pride and delusion of the devil in fostering great desires, or in wanting to do great things for God. There would be, certainly, if in this we sought honor for ourselves, or praise from others, or if, in trying to do great things, we were to neglect the small details of our daily duties. The virtue of magnanimity, on the contrary, inclines the soul to do great things for God, but never to the detriment of obedience, humility, or the fulfillment of duty. Generous souls, precisely in this domain, will often meet with arduous, difficult things which call for much virtue, but which usually remain hidden from the eyes of others. In circumstances such as these we are often tempted to give up, under the pretext that it is not necessary to push virtue to such extremes; we excuse ourselves, saying that we are neither angels nor saints. St. Teresa of Jesus says, "We may not be; but what a good thing it is for us to reflect that we can be if we will only try, and if God gives us His hand!" (*Way*, 16). The Saint strongly insists that those who have dedicated themselves to the spiritual life should not nourish petty desires, but generous ones, nor should they fear to emulate the saints; she affirms with authority, "I have never seen any courageous person hanging back on this road, nor any soul that, under the guise of humility, acted like a coward, go as far in many years as the courageous soul can in a few" (*Life*, 13).

2. The contrary of magnanimity is pusillanimity, or faintheartedness, a defect which prevents souls from accomplishing great things through excessive fear of failure. Certainly, of our own volition, we should not rashly attempt to do what is beyond our strength. This too, is a defect, evincing imprudence and presumption which displease God. But when, in particular circumstances, and after sufficient examination, we see clearly that Our Lord wishes of us certain acts of virtue or some special work, we should not refuse, however difficult it may seem to be. Can God not give us the strength to do what He asks? Why do we doubt Him? A pusillanimous person who withdraws on such occasions, under the pretext that he does not feel capable of doing so much, may believe that he is humble; but in reality he is a coward, proud, and lacking trust in God. He is a coward because, overly preoccupied with himself, he fears failure, he is afraid to expose himself to the criticism of others, he dreads fatigue and sacrifice. He is proud because he relies more on his own erroneous judgment than on God and His grace. The humble soul, on the contrary, although conscious of his nothingness, trusts in God; convinced of his weakness, he is still more convinced that God can make use of him to accomplish great things. The truly humble person is never pusillanimous, but always magnanimous: he is not afraid to encourage himself to attempt great things for God, and this very attitude helps him greatly to make progress. "The soul may not have the strength to achieve these things at once," says St. Teresa of Jesus, "but if it takes its flight it can make good progress, though like a little unfledged bird, it is apt to grow tired and stop" (*Life*, 13). It is natural to our weakness to stop, but if we have great confidence and great love, we shall soon know well how to spread our wings. The more confidence we have in God, the stronger we shall become with His divine strength. The more intense our love, the greater will become our capability of doing arduous things for God. "Perfect love," says St. Thomas, "undertakes even the most difficult things" (III Sent. D. 29, q.1, a.8). Sustained by confidence and love, we shall be able to soar very high without fear of dangers or falls.

COLLOQUY

" O strong love of God! I really think that nothing seems impossible to one who loves! O happy soul that has obtained Your peace, O my God! It has become mistress over all the trials and perils of the world, and it fears none of them when there is question of serving You.

" It is a characteristic of the true servant of God, to whom His Majesty has given light to follow the true path, that when beset by these fears, his desire not to stop only increases. Teach me, then, O my God, always to go straight ahead, to fight with courage, and to parry the blows of the devil who is trying to frighten me.

" For what can a man accomplish, my Lord, who does not wholly abase himself for Your sake? How far, O, how far, how very far—I could repeat it a thousand times—am I from doing this! How many imperfections do I find in myself! How feebly do I serve You! Sometimes I could really wish I were devoid of sense, for then I should not understand how much evil is in me. May He who is able to do so, grant me succor! We must have great confidence for it is most important that we should not cramp our good desires but should believe that, with God's help, if we make continual efforts to do so, we shall attain, though perhaps not at once, to that which many saints have reached through His favor.

" How true it is, O Lord, that everything is possible in You; I realize too, that of myself I can do nothing. Therefore, I beseech You with St. Augustine : ' Give me, Lord, what You command me and then command what You will '" (T.J. *Con*, 3 – *Way*, 21 – *Life*, 39 – 13).

GENEROSITY

PRESENCE OF GOD - Fill my heart with Your spirit of generosity, O Lord, so that I may know how to give myself wholly to Your service.

MEDITATION

1. Generosity is very similar to magnanimity but has a wider scope, including not only great things, but anything which concerns the service of God. It urges the soul to do all with the greatest devotion. Generosity is the virtue which teaches us to spend ourselves, without counting the cost, without ever saying, "It is enough"; it teaches us to give ourselves completely, and to work with the maximum of love, not only in great things but also in little ones, even the least. Only when we are not hampered by the bonds of selfishness can we be really generous, that is, capable of giving ourself wholly to the service of our ideal, to the accomplishment of our mission, without thinking of self, without letting ourself be detained by personal preoccupations. If we really understood that our vocation comes from God, and that He has prepared for us all the graces we need to correspond with it most perfectly, we should not allow ourselves to be disheartened by the sacrifices it requires. Selfishness, preoccupation with self, and discouragement are all enemies of generosity; they are "earth and lead" which weigh down our spiritual life, making it more fatiguing and keeping us from soaring to the heights. Why should we reduce ourselves to walking at "a hen's pace" (*T.J. Life*, 13) when God has made us capable of flying like the eagle? St. Teresa laughs somewhat mischievously at those who are afraid of doing too much for God, and under pretext of prudence, measure their acts of virtue with a yardstick: "You need never fear that they will kill themselves; they are eminently reasonable folk! Their love is not yet ardent enough to overwhelm their reason. How I wish ours would make us dissatisfied with this habit of always serving God at a snail's pace! As long as we do that we shall never get to the

end of the road. Do you think that if we could get from one country to another in a week, it would be advisable to take a year over it?" (*Int C III*, 2). The quickest way to reach our goal is generosity, which is the fruit of love and at the same time the generator of love.

2. To become generous, we must first learn to forget ourselves, our own interests, our convenience, our own rights, making no account of weariness or pain. We must have but one thought : to give ourselves entirely to God and to souls. "God's good pleasure, the welfare of others, not my own; for me the most unpleasant things, in order to please God" (Bl. Marie Thérèse Soubiran). Such is the program of the generous soul. It desires nothing but to spend life, strength, and talents in serving God, knowing that it is in the total gift of self that the greatest love consists. "To love is to give all and to give oneself" (T.C.J. *Poems*).

To become generous, we must learn to do with our whole heart, not only what is a duty, but also what, though not obligatory, will give more glory to God. St. Teresa gives us a golden rule for this : the "first stone" of our spiritual edifice must be the decision to "strive after the greatest possible perfection" (*Way*, 5). The proposal may seem too arduous, but the Saint is not talking at random. Even if at first the soul does not succeed in discerning or in doing always what is most perfect, yet this resolution, if it is sincere and accompanied by humility and trust in the help of grace, will be a great stimulus to desire always to do better, always to do a little more; it will prevent us from settling down in a tranquil mediocrity. It is very important for those who would be intimate with God to cultivate these dispositions; in this way, little by little, we will be able to make the complete gift of ourself, the gift God awaits before giving Himself completely. "God does not give Himself wholly until He sees that we are giving ourselves wholly to Him" (*ibid.*, 28). God wants to give Himself to us in this life, but He proportions His gift to ours; it will depend upon our generosity in giving ourselves to Him.

COLLOQUY

“ O Lord, how little we do for You! Indeed we cannot consider as signs of great virtue and mortification, these little acts which are of no weight or bulk, like grains of salt which a bird might carry in its beak. Sometimes we attribute importance to trifling things we do for You which, however numerous they may be, cannot be considered of much value. I am like that myself and I forget Your favors at every moment. I do not say that in Your great mercy, You do not value these little acts of virtue; but I have no wish to set store by them myself, or even to notice when I do them, since they are nothing.

“ Forgive me, then, O Lord, and blame me not if I try to take comfort from anything I do, since I am of no real service to You : if I served You in great matters, I would set no store by these nothings. Blessed are they who serve You by great deeds! If merely envying them and desiring to imitate them counted in my favor, I should not be wanting in pleasing You! But I am of no worth, my Lord; do You put value into what I do, since You have such love for me.

“ O my God, grant that I may no longer be content with serving You in a small way, but let me do so to the greatest extent of my powers. Help me to make You a complete gift of my soul, emptying it of everything, so that You may take out and put in just what You like, as You would with something of Your own. You refuse to force our will, You take what we give You, but You do not give Yourself wholly until we give ourselves wholly to You. You like everything to be done in order, and You do not work within a soul unless it is wholly Yours, and keeps nothing back.” (T.J. *Life*, 39 – 20 – *Way*, 28).

“ O most loving Word of God, teach me to be generous, to serve You as You deserve : to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labor and not to ask for any other reward save that of knowing that I do Your holy will” (St. Ignatius).

FORTITUDE AND PATIENCE

PRESENCE OF GOD - Teach me, O Lord, to bear my sufferings with fortitude and patience.

MEDITATION

1. Although courage is needed to face or to undertake hard tasks, it is even more necessary in order to persevere in them, above all when they are unpleasant or of long duration, and it is impossible to avoid or change them. In this sense, St. Thomas teaches that the principal act of fortitude is not to attack but to stand firm in the midst of dangers, and to endure struggles, opposition, privations, and persecutions with a virile spirit.

In the spiritual life we meet not only difficulties which can be surmounted and overcome once and for all by a strong act of courage, but we encounter—and this much more frequently—difficult, painful situations from which it is impossible to escape, and which willingly or unwillingly we must face. There are physical ailments which exhaust us, and prevent us from extending our activity as we would wish; there are moral sufferings caused by our own temperamental deficiencies or by contact with persons who are opposed to us or do not understand us; or again, there is the pain of seeing our loved ones suffer without our being able to relieve them; there is the experience of separation from our friends, and loneliness of heart. There are also spiritual troubles due to aridity, interior darkness, weariness of mind, temptations, and scruples. In addition to these, there are all the problems, fatigue, and difficulties inherent in our everyday duties. We know that all these things are planned by God for our sanctification and our good; nevertheless, that does not prevent us from feeling the weight of them; suffering is never pleasant, and though we will to accept all for the love of God, we are sometimes tempted to react, to give up, to shake off the yoke, or we are weighed down by sadness and discouragement. What remedy is there? There is the one which Jesus suggested to the Apostles after telling

them of the persecutions they would have to endure : " *In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras*," in your patience you shall possess your souls (*Lk 21,19*). Patience is the virtue which permits us to live in a state of suffering, hardship and privation without losing our serenity. It enables us to remain firm amid storms, contradictions, and dangers, without becoming irritated or despondent, without being deterred by them.

2. Christian patience is not the forced resignation of the fatalist or the philosopher who submits to suffering because he cannot escape it, nor is it the attitude of one who submits because he is not able to react through lack of strength and resources ; it is the voluntary acceptance of suffering in view of God and eternal happiness, an acceptance sustained by the knowledge that suffering is absolutely necessary to purify us from sin, to atone for our faults, and to prepare us to meet God. Christian patience incites us to accept suffering serenely, and gradually to esteem and love it, not because we see it as an end in life, but rather as a necessary means for attaining the end, which is love of God and union with Him. If Jesus willed to live a life of martyrdom and to die on the Cross in order to kindle the fire of charity in us and restore us to friendship with God, how can we expect to attain the plenitude of love and intimacy with God if we do not follow in His footsteps? " Christ, therefore, having suffered in the flesh, be you also armed with the same thought," cries St. Peter (*1 Pt 4,1*). Let us embrace suffering, then, with the same sentiments which Jesus had : to do the heavenly Father's will, to atone for sin, and to give Him proof of our love.

Christian patience is not merely a passive attitude in the face of suffering; it is also active and voluntary. The latter is the more important because it is this which makes suffering meritorious. A patient man is passive because he wills to be passive, because he uses his free will to submit to all the sufferings which he meets on his way, because he voluntarily bows his shoulders under the yoke of suffering, just as Jesus bowed His under the weight of the Cross, because He willed to do so, " *quia ipse voluit*" (*Is 53,7*). A Christian is not a forced Cyrenean, but a willing one, not in the sense that he goes spontaneously in search of suffering — this would not be feasible for all, and sometimes would be imprudent —

but in the more modest sense whereby he accepts willingly all the suffering which he encounters on his way, recognizing in this the Cross offered him by God for his sanctification.

COLLOQUY

" O Jesus, the duty of souls admitted to Your intimacy is to suffer with You, to raise the Cross on high, not to allow it to leave their hands, whatever the perils in which they find themselves, and not to let themselves be found wanting in suffering.

" Now that You have shown me what a signal blessing it is to suffer trials and persecutions for Your sake, I find I cannot cease from desiring trials; for those who follow You must take the way which You took, unless they want to be lost. Blessed are their labors which, even here in this life, have such abundant recompense!

" O Jesus, what greater proof of Your love could You give me than to choose for me all that You willed for Yourself? To die or to suffer : this is what I should desire " (*T.J. Way*, 18 – *Life*, 33 – 11).

" O Christ crucified, You are sufficient for me; with You I wish to suffer and to take my rest! Grant that I may be crucified with You inwardly and outwardly, and may live in this life in the fullness and satisfaction of my soul, possessing it in patience.

" Teach me to love trials and repute them of small account to attain Your favor, O Lord, who hesitated not to die for me. O my Beloved, all that is rough and toilsome I desire for myself, and all that is sweet and delectable I desire for You " (*J.C. SM II*, 13,8,15,52).

THE PRACTICE OF PATIENCE

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, give me greater patience that I may be able to endure more for Your love.

MEDITATION

1. Patience is a virtue of primary importance and daily necessity. As we need bread to live, so every day, even every moment, we need patience, because every day and every moment brings with it its own trial. We become patient by making acts of patience, that is, by accustoming ourselves to accept peacefully all that contradicts us and makes us suffer. If, however, instead of accepting annoyances, we use every means possible to avoid them, we shall never acquire patience. For example, we may at our work come in contact with someone who clashes with us, or we may be given a difficult or disagreeable task; if under these or similar circumstances we do our utmost to free ourselves as soon as possible, asking for a change, we are depriving ourselves of a precious opportunity prepared for us by God Himself to make us practice the virtue of patience. In certain cases it is lawful and even a duty to represent our problems to our superiors and to ask humbly for a solution, but we should never insist on obtaining one at all costs. On the contrary, we should think that divine Providence has arranged these circumstances to help us acquire the patience we do not yet possess. St. Philip Neri once complained to Our Lord because he had to deal with an extremely insulting, disagreeable person. Our Lord replied to him interiorly, "Philip, you have asked for patience. Here is the means of acquiring it."

God will surely give us the virtue we ask of Him, but only on condition that we make use of the means He gives us, and apply ourselves to practice that virtue with the help of His grace. Whoever wishes to become a saint will not be anxious to avoid opportunities for practicing patience, but will welcome them, recognizing in them the means offered by God for his sanctification. And how can a mere creature dare wish to make any change in what has been

ordered "in measure, and number, and weight" (*Wis* 11,21) by God's infinite wisdom?

2. God can draw good out of evil; therefore, He can, and in fact does, use our faults and even our sins and the sins of others, to make us practice patience: patience with ourselves, seeing ourselves so frail, so imperfect, so prone to fall, yet humbly recognizing our faults and bearing their consequences peacefully; patience with others, being indulgent toward their frailties, compassionating the weaknesses of each one, and accepting without irritation the discomfort and sufferings caused by their faults. For example, when anyone disturbs or provokes us, we must not stop to consider his manner of behaving, for that would rouse our indignation, making it more difficult to practice patience. Instead, we should turn our gaze away from the creature to fix it upon God who permits this contradiction to make us advance in virtue. We should also avoid complaining about our sufferings to others, or even to ourselves. Complaints always make the heart bitter, rendering it ill-disposed to accept trials calmly. "To suffer and be silent for You, my God" (T.M.) is the motto of the patient soul who wishes to conform its conduct to that of Jesus in His Passion: "He was offered...and He opened not His mouth" (*Is* 53,7). If we feel the need of a little help in bearing a trial, let us speak of it only to those who will encourage us to suffer for the love of God, and not to those who will give us merely human consolation and sympathy, thereby nourishing our resentment toward those who make us suffer.

All the saints were eager for the occasions of suffering which we so eagerly avoid. Let us consider St. Jane Frances de Chantal who chose to live for many years in her father-in-law's house, amidst the disrespect and calumnies of a servant who also attempted to endanger her children's welfare. Let us think of St. John of the Cross who being free to choose the monastery in which he would spend his last days, gave the preference to one whose superior was hostile to him. These are examples of the heroism of the saints, to be sure — but heroism from which no soul of good will is excluded and to which everyone is called by God, heroism for which we too, if we really wish to be generous, must prepare ourselves by lovingly accepting everything which causes us suffering.

COLLOQUY

" O Lord, we want to serve and please You, yes, but we do not want to suffer anything. Yet we must be much more pleasing to You when after Your example and out of love for You, we endure suffering in Your service. Suffering is so noble and precious, O eternal Word, that when You were in the bosom of the Father, superabounding in all the riches and delights of Paradise but unadorned with the robe of suffering, You came to earth in order to clothe Yourself with it. You are God and cannot be deceived; since You have chosen stark suffering, I too desire it for love of You. I beseech You, therefore, Lord, to permit me to experience this suffering which is unmixed with any consolation, and by the confidence I have in Your goodness, I trust that You will grant me this grace before I dic.

" But in order to obtain profit from tribulations, teach me to accept them in total conformity to Your will; otherwise, they will be a great and unbearable burden. When, however, a soul abandons itself entirely in the arms of Your will, then it finds strength in the midst of its sorrows, and even if You leave it in darkness for a time, very quickly will its sadness be changed into joy, so that, for no delight in the world would it exchange this suffering.

" O blessed, happy, and glorious is he who suffers for love of You, O eternal Word, for—shall I dare to say it?—as long as we are here below, it is a greater thing to suffer for You than to possess You, because possessing You, we can still lose You, but if we suffer for love of You, it will admit us to eternal life where we can never lose You " (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

PERSEVERANCE

PRESENCE OF GOD - Grant, O Lord, that by Your grace I may persevere unto the end.

MEDITATION

1. To become a saint, it is not enough to be courageous and patient and to practice the other virtues for a few days or a few months, or even for a few years. We must *persevere* in these dispositions to the end of our life, never yielding to fatigue, discouragement, or laxity. This is the crucial point for, as St. Thomas says, "to apply oneself for a long time to a difficult task—and virtue is almost always difficult—constitutes a special difficulty" (II^a II^{ae}, q.137, a.1, co.); and it is only by overcoming this difficulty that we shall be able to reach perfection. We are not angels, we are human beings. The angel, a pure spirit, is stable by nature; if he makes a resolution, he holds to it; but this is not the case with us. We, being composed of spirit and matter, must suffer the consequences of the instability and fluctuations of the latter. As stability is characteristic of spirit, so instability is characteristic of matter; hence it becomes so difficult for us to be perfectly constant in the good. Although we have formed good resolutions in our mind, we always feel handicapped by the weakness of the sensible part of our nature which rebels against the weariness of sustained effort, and seeks to free itself from it, or at least to reduce it to a minimum. Our bodies are subject to fatigue; our minds are disturbed by emotions which are always fluctuating. That which at one moment fills us with enthusiasm may, at the next, become distasteful and annoying to such a point that we think we can no longer endure it. This is our state while on earth and no one can escape it. However, God calls us all to sanctity, and since sanctity requires a continual practice of virtue, He, who never asks the impossible, has provided a remedy for the instability of our nature by giving us the virtue of perseverance, the special object of which is the sustaining of our efforts. Though fickle by nature, we can by the help of grace become steadfast.

2. There are two types of perseverance. The first is so perfect that it never wavers, it is always inflexible, maintained even in the most difficult and unexpected circumstances. This is the perseverance of heroic virtue, of souls who have reached the state of transforming union, who habitually live under the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is the beautiful goal to which we can and should aspire, though we cannot attain to it by the practice of virtue alone; only the continual intervention of the gifts of the Holy Spirit can completely overcome the instability of our nature.

The second type is the perseverance practiced by fervent or even perfect souls who do not as yet enjoy the habitual motions of the Holy Spirit, and whose perseverance, therefore, shows some fluctuations, more or less slight, according to the degree of perfection of the soul. In this case perseverance does not consist in remaining perfectly stable in good, but rather in constantly beginning again as soon as any failure is recognized. Sometimes just a momentary inattention, an unexpected happening, a little weariness or emotion, is enough to make us commit some fault that we had sincerely resolved to avoid at any cost, and here we have failed again! This, however, is no reason for being discouraged or sad; rather it is a motive for humbling ourselves, for recognizing our weakness and begging more insistently for God's help to rise at once and begin again. Because our human nature is so unstable, our perseverance will usually consist in continually beginning again. This is the perseverance to which we should all attain, because it depends on our good will, in the sense that God has infused this virtue in our soul, giving us at every moment sufficient grace to practice it. It is not in our power to free ourselves from this instability of our nature, and therefore we cannot avoid every slackening in virtue, every negligence, weakness, or fault; but it is within our power to correct ourselves as soon as we perceive that we have failed. This is the kind of perseverance that God demands of us, and when we practice it faithfully, and are always prompt in rising after each fall, He will crown our efforts by granting us the supreme grace of final perseverance.

COLLOQUY

" O Lord, I shall certainly be saved if I persevere to the end, but my perseverance must be virtuous if it is to merit salvation; from You comes the virtue which will save me; it is You who make me persevere until I attain salvation.

" At present I am still engaged in battle : the struggle from without against false virtue, the struggle from within against my concupiscence. When I think of the number of little faults which I commit every day, even if only in thought and word, I realize that their number is very great, and that this great number of little failings makes an immense heap. O unhappy that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? You will deliver me, O God, by Your grace, through the merits of Jesus Christ, Your Son and Our Lord. In the toil of this battle, then, I shall look to Your grace and, in the heat and burning thirst which I feel, I will beg for Your life-giving shade.

" Help me, O Lord Jesus, by saying to me : ' Do not tire of the narrow way : I walked it before you, I am the way itself; I am the guide, and I carry those whom I lead and bring them to Myself at the last ' " (St. Augustine).

" O eternal God, grant me the virtue of perseverance; without it, no one can please You nor be acceptable to You. This virtue brings to the soul an abundance of charity and the fruit of every effort. Oh! how happy I should be, Lord, if You would give me this virtue, because even here on earth it will make me enjoy a pledge of eternal life. But Your light reveals to me that I cannot attain it unless I suffer much, because this life cannot be lived without suffering. He who would escape suffering would deprive himself of holy perseverance " (St. Catherine of Siena).

JESUS OUR LIFE

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, life of my soul, make me rise each day to a new life of charity and fervor.

MEDITATION

1. In the Mass of today there is a dominant thought, so often repeated in the liturgy and so dear to our hearts : Jesus is our life. Whatever good there is in us is the fruit of His grace, by which we remain steadfast in good (*Collect*) and live in the Spirit (*Ep*); by His grace we rise from sin (*Gosp*), and eating His flesh, we nourish His life within us (*Communion*). Without Jesus we would abide in death; without Him we could never live the glorious life of the Spirit described by St. Paul in today's Epistle (*Gal 5,25.26 – 6,1-10*).

It would be well to glean a few thoughts from this. " Let us not be made desirous of vainglory, provoking one another. For if any man think himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. " True humility is presented here as the basis of fraternal charity; anyone who is proud carries about with him a hotbed of discord for, preferring himself to others, he will often be provocative, envious, haughty, and disdainful of those whom he considers his inferiors.

" If a man be overtaken in any fault, you, who are spiritual, instruct such a one in the spirit of meekness. " One who wishes to scale the heights must never be critical of him whose way is not so high, nor be scandalized at the faults of another. If duty requires us to admonish anyone, we should do so with sweetness and kindness. This sweetness is another fruit of humility, because when we correct others, we should always take heed to ourselves : " lest thou also be tempted. "

" And in doing good, let us not fail; for in due time we shall reap, not failing. " We must not allow ourselves to be discouraged by difficulties in the spiritual life, even when we

do not succeed in overcoming them. God does not ask us to succeed but to continually renew our efforts, although the results may not be apparent. "In due time," that is, when God wills and in the way that pleases Him, we shall reap the fruit, provided we "fail not."

2. The thought that Jesus is *our Life* shines forth even more in the Gospel (*Lk 7,11-16*). The Master meets the sad funeral procession of a young man. His mother is walking beside the bier, weeping. "And the Lord, seeing her, had compassion on her, and said to her: Weep not. And He came near and touched the bier.... And He said: Young man, I say to thee, arise.... And He gave him to his mother." Jesus is our Savior who sympathizes with us in our trials and uses His divine omnipotence to alleviate them. Today we see Him work a miracle in order to console a widowed mother; He restores her dead son to life. This was an expression of the delicacy of His love for us; but how many others, less visible perhaps but no less full of love and life, have surged from His heart! "The Gospel speaks of three who were dead and who were visibly restored to life by Our Lord," St. Augustine tells us, "but He has restored thousands invisibly." When writing these words, the Saint must have recalled with ineffable gratitude the much greater miracle Jesus had wrought for him, making him rise from the death of sin.

St. Augustine and many other saints have been restored to life. If the saints who led lives of innocence attract us so much, those who were brought back from sin have still greater power to encourage us in our struggles. It may be a laborious task for us to overcome pride, sensuality, and all the other passions, but it was no easier for them. They too knew our temptations, struggles and falls; if they overcame them, why cannot we do the same?

Thanks be to God, it is not always a question of having to rise from a life of serious sin, but there is always occasion for a resurrection from our little daily infidelities; if they are not corrected, our fervor in the spiritual life will gradually weaken. In this regard, we need to rise every day, indeed every hour; yet so many times we lack the strength for it. But if we beseech Jesus, *our Life*, He will touch us with His grace as He once touched the bier of the young man of Naim; He will give us fresh vigor and will put us back again,

full of courage, on the way to perfection. The resurrection of the young man was implored by his mother's tears; let ours be implored every day by the tears of our hearts, by our compunction, humility, and trust.

COLLOQUY

"O Lord, my God, I had reached the gates of death, but You placed Yourself between them and me, so that I could not pass through them. O my Savior, You have often rescued me from bodily death when I was seriously ill or exposed to danger. You knew, Lord, that if death had surprised me then, my soul would have been cast into hell and I should have been damned forever. Your mercy and Your grace prevented me, and saved both my body and soul from death. You have done all this and much more for me, O Lord, my God!

"Now, O light of my soul, my God, life by which I live, I give You thanks : to You do I offer my thanks, though I am poor and worthless and unworthy to receive Your benefits.

"I was once among the sinners whom You saved. To give others an example of Your most benign mercy, I shall declare Your great favors. You saved me from the deepest pit of hell once, twice, thrice, a hundred times, a thousand times. I was ever tending toward hell, and always You drew me back when, if You had so willed, You could have justly damned me a thousand times; You did not will to do so, because You love souls and dissimulate the sins of men so that they may do penance, O Lord, most merciful in all Your ways.

"Now I see and by Your light I know all this, O Lord my God, and my soul faints away when it considers the greatness of Your mercy. My whole life, which was perishing in my misery, has been revived by Your mercy. I was wholly dead and You restored me wholly to life. May all that is in me be Yours then, henceforth, for I give myself wholly to You!" (St. Augustine).

PERSEVERANCE AND CONFIDENCE

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, increase my confidence in Your help and grant that in this confidence, I may always find courage to begin again.

MEDITATION

I. What most distresses souls of good will who are seriously trying to live a spiritual life, is to find themselves falling so many times, despite their continual and sincere resolutions. When they begin a program of asceticism, they are usually very brave and have no doubts concerning their success; but being still inexperienced, and not having yet faced the demands of more advanced virtue, they know nothing of the struggles that await them on this way. And herein lies the danger : meeting with new difficulties, they fall; they rise and fall again; again they rise, and shortly after, find themselves prostrate once more until they are, at a certain point, attacked by that most dangerous temptation : to give up the undertaking which henceforth seems impossible. How many souls have fervently begun the ascent of the mount of perfection, but discouraged by their continual falls, have stopped halfway up or even turned back, because they lacked the courage to begin anew every day and every moment.

Humility is needed for the exercise of courage; we must be convinced that in spite of our lofty aspirations, we are fallible men like all the rest. Sacred Scripture affirms that the "just man shall fall seven times and shall rise again" (*Prv 24,16*); how, then, can we, who are not just, pretend never to fall?

The real evil is not so much in falling as in failing to rise. The distinguishing mark of fervent souls, and even of saints, is less their lack of faults, than their promptness in rising after each fall. The annoyance felt by so many souls when they see themselves continually falling, is not the fruit of humility but of pride. They are not yet convinced of their own misery and are astonished to experience

it so constantly. They rely too much on themselves, and God, who wishes to lead them to the full realization of their nothingness, permits them to fall again and again. In the plan of divine Providence these falls are for the definite purpose of convincing us that we are miserable creatures. If we wish to adhere to the divine plan, we have but one thing to do : to humble ourselves. But if, on the contrary, we become discouraged, and give up what we have begun, we shall be going farther away from our goal, to our very great loss.

2. Some souls justify their discouragement saying that they cannot bear to offend God. That is well, for the first condition required for sanctity is a hatred for sin and a firm determination to avoid even the slightest sin, at the cost of any sacrifice. However, we must make a distinction : if we cultivate the sincere disposition not to tolerate in ourselves the slightest offense against God, it signifies our intention to make no truce with the faults and failings which, in spite of our good will, escape us. However, if we do fall, notwithstanding all our efforts, this disposition does not authorize us to become so discouraged that we are unable to rise. It is just because we do not wish to tolerate in ourselves anything displeasing to God that we should never surrender in the struggle, but begin again vigorously, in order to avoid future falls. On this field, he who surrenders is already conquered. In fact, if even when we are fighting without respite, we are liable to fall, what will happen if we surrender our arms? It will always be better to fight maimed and wounded, than not to fight at all.

But to have the courage to persevere in the struggle, especially when we fall repeatedly—either as a result of our imperfection and frailty, or because God permits it in order to humble us more—we must join to humility an immense confidence in the divine help. Having experienced our own misery we know that we cannot rise relying on our own strength, but there still remains to us a much more powerful resource : trust in the help of God. We shall find the strength to keep beginning again, precisely in trust. God alone can give us this strength, and He will give it in the measure of our confidence : the more trust we have in Him, the stronger we shall be. The more convinced we are that God is calling us to sanctity, and that our personal resources

are insufficient for attaining it, so much the more should we be convinced that God will furnish us with the help needed to answer His call. There is nothing illogical in God : if He asks something from us, He cannot refuse us the help needed to give it to Him. Not finding this strength in ourselves, we shall surely find it in Him, in His omnipotent help.

“He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved” (*Mt* 10,22), said Jesus. He who will persevere unto the end is not he who will never fall, but he who after every fall will humble himself and rise again, relying on the infinite strength of God.

COLLOQUY

“O Jesus, You see I am a very little soul and can offer You only very little things : I frequently miss the opportunity of welcoming these small sacrifices which bring so much peace; but I am not discouraged—I bear the loss of a little peace and I try to be more watchful in the future. You are so good to me that it is impossible for me to fear You.

“If it is Your will that throughout my whole life I should feel a repugnance to suffering and humiliation; if You permit all the flowers of my desires and good will to fall to the ground without producing any fruit, I shall not be disturbed. I am sure that if I persevere in my good efforts, in the twinkling of an eye, at the moment of death, You will cause rich fruits to ripen on the tree of my soul” (cf. T.C.J. *St*, 11 – C).

“O God, I am very weak in ability, poor in strength, and full of poverty, but if Your eye will look upon me, I shall be lifted up from my low estate, my head shall be exalted, and many will glorify You.

“Grant that I may be steadfast in Your covenant, and be conversant therein, and grow old in the work of Your commandments. I will trust in You and persevere in what I am doing, for it is easy for You to suddenly make the poor man rich. Your blessing will be my reward, and in a swift hour my efforts will bear fruit” (cf. *Sir* 11,12-24).

TEMPERANCE

PRESENCE OF GOD - Teach me, O Lord, to mortify my flesh, in order that I may live fully the life of the spirit.

MEDITATION

1. We may fail in our duty either because of the hardships and sacrifices we encounter, or because of the allurements of pleasure. Our help in the first case is the virtue of fortitude; in the second, the virtue of temperance. Temperance is the virtue which moderates in us the inordinate desire for sensible pleasure, keeping it within the limits assigned by reason and faith. Sin has produced in us the great discord by which the inferior part tends to rebel against the superior, and craves that which is contrary to the spirit. We shall never be able to defend ourselves against the attractions of pleasure without the help of this virtue, which has been infused by God into our souls for the express purpose of enabling us to regulate our disordered tendency to pleasure. As fortitude, with its accompanying virtues of magnanimity, patience and perseverance, is a sustaining power for our weakness, in like manner, temperance, with the virtues which spring from it—sobriety, chastity, continence, modesty—controls our concupiscence. Nevertheless, although this virtue is a check, it has not only a negative task, to temper, restrain, and moderate the disordered love of pleasure, but it has also a positive one : that of regulating our passions and permitting us to use our senses in perfect harmony with the requirements of the spirit, in such a way that they do not disturb our spiritual life. In this way temperance, together with grace and the other virtues, heals and elevates our nature by reestablishing in us the harmony which was destroyed by sin. However, this cannot be realized without our cooperation which, in regard to temperance, consists above all in the mortification of our passions and senses. St. Paul says : " If you live according to the flesh you shall die; but if by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live " (*Rom 8,13*). The virtue of temperance

has been infused into us to "mortify the deeds of the flesh"; this mortification is not an end in itself, but it is an indispensable condition for the life of the spirit.

2. The beauty of the virtue of temperance lies in the fact that it helps us to turn back on the down-hill path taken by our first parents in consequence of their sin. In order to reestablish perfect harmony between spirit and matter, we have to ascend an arduous path. Just as a horseman, before setting out on a race, bridles his spirited horse, so we, to take this road, must impose on our flesh the strong bridle of mortification, so as to bring under control all its appetites and movements.

One easily understands how important mortification is in the realm of chastity: it is an illusion to think we can live chastely without bodily mortification, for neither the virtue nor the vow of chastity changes our nature, or makes us insensible to the allurements of the senses, the world, and the devil. The need of mortification of the sense of taste, however, is less understood. In this matter, even souls striving for perfection are quite free in admitting sensible pleasure, considering it a wholly innocent pleasure and of no consequence for the spiritual life. This is not so, since everything inordinate—even to the slightest degree—in the life of the senses eventually impairs, more or less, the life of the spirit and weakens it. In fact, there is disorder in the use of food and drink every time we allow the amount we use to be determined in any way by the pleasure we find in it, taking more than is necessary if we like it, or if we do not like it, showing displeasure or refusing to take it. This too is being a slave to our senses, and allowing ourselves to be dominated by sensible pleasure; it is to open a door to the rebellion of the senses against the spirit. St. Paul warns us: "Be not deceived...for what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption. But he that soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting" (*Gal 6, 7.8*). He who in this life sows sensible pleasures of any kind whatsoever, sows corruption, because all that is of the senses is destined to perish and leads us astray. Then how can a soul that aspires to a deeply spiritual life, subject itself, even though it be in a slight matter, to sense satisfactions? "Weary not yourself," says St. John of the Cross, "for you shall not enter into

spiritual delight and sweetness if you give not yourself to mortification of all this that you desire" (*SM I*, 38)

COLLOQUY

"I am not astonished, O Lord, at human defection, for You have wounded my heart with Your perfect charity, and have protected it with the guard of purity. Oh! if only blind mortals would taste the delights and sweetness of Your holy love! I think they would immediately hate the pleasures of the senses and would be filled with loathing and disgust for them. Thirsty and anxious, they would hasten to drink from the fountain of Your sweetness. Why do they not run in the odor of Your perfumes?

"I understand, eternal Truth. If they meditated and considered attentively, they would engrave in their memory the immense favors You bestow upon them daily, they would easily allow themselves to be drawn by the ineffable sweetness of Your love, and they would hasten with eagerness and longing to take delight in the fragrance of Your sweetness!" (St. Catherine of Siena).

"I have but one desire, Lord : to seek You! And while I seek You, I will never stop to pluck the flowers that I may find on my way; that is, I will not pause to enjoy the pleasures which may be offered to me in this life, because they would delay me on my journey. I will not apply my heart to riches and worldly goods, neither will I accept the pleasures and delights of my flesh, nor rest in the sweetness and consolations of my spirit, in order not to be kept from seeking You, my God and my love, over the mountains of virtues and labors. Grant, O Lord, that my soul may really be enamored of You, that it esteem You above all else; and then, trusting in Your love and in Your help, I shall have the strength to cast far from me the desires of sense and all natural affections" (cf. J.C. *SC*, 3,5-10).

MEEKNESS

PRESENCE OF GOD - Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto Thine.

MEDITATION

1. Temperance makes man master of himself by controlling the passions of concupiscence; meekness makes him master of himself by controlling the impulses of anger. The great value of this virtue lies in the fact that it assures the soul of that inner peace which is so necessary in order to fulfill serenely all its duties toward God and toward the neighbor. The soul, when upset by resentments and anger, is unable to see things in their true light, to form unbiased judgments, to make wise decisions, or to keep words and actions within the limits of courtesy and kindness. A person's manner becomes brusque, unrestrained, and often unjust, provoking displeasure in others; charity is cooled and harmonious relationships are disturbed. Unrestrained anger clouds the mind, preventing it from recognizing God's will, and thus making the soul swerve from the line of duty to follow the impulses of the passions. It is the task of meekness to moderate and calm all such movements of passion by giving the soul mastery of itself, enabling it to remain tranquil, even in difficult or irritating circumstances. "Let us be very meek toward everyone," exhorts St. Francis de Sales, "and take care that our heart does not escape from our hands; therefore, let us place it every morning in an attitude of humility, meekness and tranquillity. Perfect equanimity, meekness and unalterable graciousness are virtues more rare than perfect chastity and are most desirable." In order to keep our heart free from the movements of anger, we should be prompt in restraining them as soon as they appear, because if we favor them, even a little, they will at once gain strength, and it will be much more difficult for us to overcome them. Constant fidelity in repressing every feeling of anger will gradually bring us to the enjoyment of the sweet fruit of meekness : "The meek shall inherit the land, and shall delight in abundance of peace" (*Ps 36,11*).

2. Meekness has a very special importance in the development of a life of prayer and union with God. How can a soul, agitated by the storms of anger, apply itself to recollection and intimate conversation with God? In vain will it try to apply itself to prayer : its mind and heart will escape it, following after the imaginations aroused by passion. "*Non in commotione Dominus,*" The Lord is not in the earthquake (*3 Kgs 19,11*) ; God does not let Himself be found nor does He show Himself in the midst of disturbance and excitement, but only in interior peace and calm. When we are disturbed, even slightly, by impulses of anger, we are unable to perceive the delicate impulses of grace or to hear the gentle whisper of divine inspirations : the noise of our unbridled passions prevents us from listening to our interior Master, and losing our guide, we no longer act according to God's good pleasure, but allow ourselves to be carried away by the whims of our own impulsiveness, which will always cause us to commit faults.

Our interior soul knows very well that everything that happens to us, however painful, is permitted by God for our sanctification ; yet in moments of rising anger, this thought vanishes and we no longer see anything but the creature, which has injured us and against which we wish to react. If we wish our life to remain always under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, our actions to be always directed by grace and conformed to God's will, we should never permit ourselves to yield to the impulses of anger, not even under the pretext of good. Rather, in these moments we should use our energy to suspend every judgment and every act, striving to reestablish in our heart the peace necessary to judge things in the light of God.

Our Lord teaches His ways to the meek, because only one who has silenced all resentments and feelings of anger is ready to be instructed by God, to listen to His voice and to follow it.

COLLOQUY

" O Jesus, meekest Lamb, who being cursed did not curse, who suffering injuries did not threaten, who receiving the greatest contempt, answered with divine meekness or preserved an admirable silence, help me to follow Your

example, to repress my anger, to embrace meekness, and armed with patience, to suffer willingly any labor so that I may come to enjoy eternal repose with You" (Ven. L. Du Pont).

"O Lord, with Your help, I desire especially to practice meekness and resignation to Your will, not so much in extraordinary matters as in the events and vexations of everyday life.

"As soon as I notice anger rising within me, I will gather my strength, not impetuously but gently, not violently but sweetly, and I will endeavor to restore peace to my heart. But knowing well that I can do nothing by myself, I will take care to call upon Your aid as the Apostles did when they were harassed by the tempest and buffeted by the angry waters. O Lord, would You allow me to invoke You in vain? Deign to hasten to help me at such times; command my passions to subside, raise Your hand in blessing, and a great calm will follow. Teach me to be meek toward all, with those who offend or oppose me, and even with myself, not becoming angry with myself because of my frequent relapses and defects. When I find that I have fallen, in spite of my efforts, I will meekly rise again and say, 'Come, my poor heart. Behold, we have fallen again into the ditch which we have so often resolved to avoid. Let us rise now, and leave it forever. Let us have recourse to God's mercy; let us place our hopes in it, and it will help us.' Trusting in You, O Lord, I will begin again, and keep to the path of humility and meekness" (St. Francis de Sales).

SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

PRESENCE OF GOD - Help me, O Lord, to advance rapidly in the path of virtue.

MEDITATION

1. "Be ye holy, because I the Lord your God am holy" (*Lv* 19,2) : this is the will of God, this is our vocation, the object of all our desires and efforts. Created to the likeness of God, we do not wish His image in us to be dimmed by our sins and passions, but to shine forth clear and pure, reflecting His sanctity as far as possible. In order to make us like Himself, God has infused into our soul, together with grace, the moral and theological virtues, the purpose of which is to reproduce in us to some degree His infinite perfections; and as a father delights to find in his children some traces of resemblance to himself, so God greatly desires to see us grow in virtue. St. John of the Cross says, "The virtues cannot be wrought by the soul alone, nor can it attain to them alone without the help of God, neither does God work them alone in the soul without its cooperation" (*SC*, 30,6). In fact, although God has infused the virtues into us at Baptism without any merit on our part, He does not make them grow without our collaboration; it remains for us, always with the help of grace, to put into practice the virtuous principles he has given us. Only in this way shall we acquire good habits of virtue and facility in practicing them.

Therefore, if we desire to cooperate with the action of God who wishes to make us like to Himself, we should apply ourselves with great zeal to the practice of the virtues. We should concentrate particularly on the virtue that we see is most necessary in order to correct our faults, or to overcome our dominant passion. This should be the special subject of our resolutions, of our examinations of conscience, and of the account given to our spiritual director. We should not think that this exercise is only for beginners, for "the obligation to advance in the love of God—and

therefore, in all the other virtues as well—lasts even unto death" (St. Francis de Sales). No one, however advanced in the spiritual life, can consider himself dispensed from the practice of the virtues.

2. St. Teresa of Jesus in describing the high states of the life of union with God, often digresses to urge the practice of virtue. "You must not build," she wrote to her daughters, "upon the foundation of prayer and contemplation alone, for unless you strive after the virtues and practice them, you will never grow to be more than dwarfs" (*Int C VII*, 4); and elsewhere she expressly says that, by means of the virtues, "even though not greatly given to contemplation, people who have them can advance a long way in the Lord's service, while, unless they have them, they cannot possibly be great contemplatives" (*Way*, 4.). It is not essential that God should lead us by the path of high contemplation in order to make us saints; besides, this does not depend upon our will. What does depend upon us, and is essential, is that we maintain the practice of virtue. Whether God wills for us a family life or one dedicated to the duties of a professional life, whether He calls us to the apostolate or to the contemplative life, in each case we shall become saints only in the measure in which we practice virtue.

The more we apply ourselves to the practice of virtue, the easier and more natural it will become; but to attain this facility which is the mark of mature virtue, we must have sufficient courage to persevere a long time in the struggle against our faults, and in the effort to acquire the opposite virtues. However, we shall never reach perfect, much less heroic, virtue unaided by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the end of which is precisely to perfect the virtues. Although the task of practicing the virtues is ours, it is only God who can actuate the gifts, and ordinarily He does this in proportion to our zeal in practicing virtue. The assiduous practice of the virtues opens our soul wide to God's action, rendering it apt to receive and follow the motions of the Holy Spirit. Let us devote ourselves to this exercise with great generosity, and the Holy Spirit will not delay to come to us with His gifts; then we shall make rapid progress toward perfect, heroic virtue, toward sanctity.

COLLOQUY

"O Lord, You said, 'Be ye holy because I am holy.' I think this was the wish You expressed on the day of creation when You said, 'Let us make man to our image and likeness.' It is Your continual desire to associate and identify Yourself with Your creatures.... How can I better satisfy Your desire than by keeping myself simply and lovingly turned toward You, so that You can reflect Your own image in me, as the sun is reflected through pure crystal?... But if I am to reflect Your perfections, I must first put off the old man before I can put on the new man created by You in justice and holiness of truth. The path is traced for me. To walk therein as You intend, I have but to deny myself, to die to self, to lose sight of self" (*E.T. II*, 9 - *I*, 7).

Help me, O God, to combat my faults and to put off the old man; help me to practice virtue in order to put on the new man. You have far greater esteem for the practice of virtue than for magnificent deeds or the fame of a great name.

"You would rather see in me the least degree of purity of conscience than all the works that I could do.

"You desire of me the least degree of obedience to all the services I might think to render You.

"You esteem my acceptance of aridity and of suffering for love of You more than all the spiritual consolations I could have" (*J.C. SM I*, 12-14).

THE GIFT OF FEAR

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, grant that I may fear but one thing : that of displeasing You and being separated from You.

MEDITATION

i. The Holy Spirit invites us to His school : " Come, children, hearken to me : I will teach you the fear of the Lord " (*Ps 33,12*). This is the first lesson the divine Paraclete teaches the soul desiring to become a saint. It is fundamental and most important because, infusing into the soul hatred of sin, which is the greatest obstacle to union with God, it insures the development of the spiritual life. In this sense Holy Scripture says, " The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom " (*Sir 1,16*).

To educate us in the fear of the Lord, the Holy Spirit, instead of placing before our eyes pictures of the punishment and pains due to sin, instead of representing God as a stern judge, shows Him to us as a most loving Father, infinitely desirous of our good, and He presents us the touching picture of God's favors and mercies. " I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, have I drawn thee, " whispers the Holy Spirit in the depths of our soul; " You are not servants, but my friends, my children " (cf. *Jer 31,3* — cf. *Jn 15,15*). Captured by love for such a good Father, the soul has but one desire, to return Him love for love, to give Him pleasure and to be united with Him forever. Consequently, it fears nothing but sin, which offends God and alone can separate it from Him. What a difference there is between this filial fear, which is the fruit of love, and servile fear, which arises from the dread of punishment! It is true that the fear of judgment and the divine punishment is salutary and in certain cases can serve greatly to hold a soul back from sin; but if it does not change gradually into filial fear, it will never be sufficient to impel the soul on to sanctity. Fear that is merely servile contracts the soul and makes it petty, whereas filial fear dilates it and spurs it on in the way of generosity and perfection.

2. The gift of fear perfects at the same time the virtues of hope and of temperance. The object of hope is the possession of God and eternal beatitude. The gift of fear, by making us carefully avoid even the slightest offense against God, establishes us in the disposition best suited to maintain our hope for the beatific union of heaven and to receive the graces necessary to obtain it.

Temperance restrains our passions and the attractions of sense pleasure. The gift of fear perfects this virtue by making us more generous in mortifying our senses and passions. Impelled by this holy fear, we become more vigilant than ever, lest we be seduced by the desire for pleasure; we are eager to renounce anything rather than displease our heavenly Father in even the slightest degree. "It is much better to displease myself than to be displeasing to God," says the soul under the influence of this gift.

The Holy Spirit, rather than have us fear God, incites us to fear ourselves, with our evil dispositions and passions. These, being the source of sin, may put us in danger of offending God and of being separated from Him, or at least, of not living in complete union with Him. However, this fear should not give rise to anxiety or scruples; if it is accompanied by confidence and love, it will urge us to place ourselves unreservedly in God's hands, that He may keep us from every shadow of sin. While the gift of fear causes us to throw ourselves into the arms of the heavenly Father with great confidence, it infuses into the soul at the same time, a sense of respectful reverence toward His infinite Majesty. The soul feels that God, because of His immense dignity, is most distant from it; but it feels too, that through His merciful love He has made Himself so near that He invites it to live in intimacy with Him. Between these alternations of filial reverence and trustful confidence, the gift of fear matures and blossoms into perfect love. "When the soul attains to perfect possession of the spirit of fear, it has likewise in perfection the spirit of love, since that fear which is the last of the seven gifts, is filial, and the perfect fear of a son proceeds from the perfect love of a father" (J.C. SC, 26,3).

COLLOQUY

" My God, although I desire to love You, and although I know the vanities of the world and prefer to serve You rather than them, I can never be sure while I am here below, that I shall never again offend You. Since this is true, what can I do but flee to You and beg You not to allow my enemies to lead me into temptation? How can I recognize their treacherous assaults? Oh! my God! how I need Your help! Speak, O Lord, the word that will enlighten and strengthen me. Deign to teach me what remedy to use in the assaults of this perilous struggle! You Yourself tell me the remedy is love and fear. Love will make me quicken my steps; fear will make me look where I set my feet so that I shall not fall. Give me both, O Lord, for love and fear are two strong castles from the height of which I shall be able to conquer every temptation. Sustain me, O God, so that for all the gold in the world, I may never commit any deliberate venial sin, however small " (cf. T.J. Way, 39 - 40 - 41).

" My Lord and my God, all my good consists in being united to you and placing all my hope in You. If my soul were left to itself, it would be like a puff of wind, which goes away and does not return. Without You I can do no good, nor can I remain steadfast. Without You I cannot love You, please You, or avoid what is displeasing to You. Therefore, I take refuge in You, I abandon myself to You, that You may sustain me by Your power, hold me by Your strength, and never permit me to become separated from You " (cf. St. Bernard).

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Holy Spirit, show me the way which leads to true poverty of spirit and give me strength to walk therein to the end.

MEDITATION

1. When we cooperate with the action of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, they produce in us fruits of virtue so exquisite that they give us a foretaste of the eternal beatitude of which they are a sweet pledge. For this reason, we call them *beatitudes*. For each gift there is a corresponding beatitude : the beatitude which corresponds to the gift of fear is poverty of spirit : "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (*Mt* 5,3).

The gift of fear, the purpose of which is to liberate the soul completely from sin, tends to extinguish in us the desire for earthly things, which is the principal cause of sin. Therefore, it urges us to a life of total self-detachment so that, stripping us of all selfish proud desires, of all cupidity and concern as to worldly things, it gradually establishes us in perfect poverty of spirit. In the face of all that life can offer us in the way of honors, satisfactions, affections of creatures, comforts, and riches, the Holy Spirit repeats in the depths of our heart the words of Jesus : "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast...and come, follow Me" (*ibid.* 19,21). This means, not only to desire nothing more than what one has, but to give up even this; not to be eager for riches, pleasures, consolations, fame, nor earthly affections, but to sacrifice all these things which fill the heart with the world, and prevent it from being filled with God.

The Holy Spirit spurs the soul on to material poverty, teaching it to be content with little, curbing its desires for the necessities of life, but He urges it even more to poverty of spirit, for without this, the former is of no worth. "The lack of things," says St. John of the Cross, "implies no detachment on the part of the soul if it retains a desire for them, that is, if it is still attached to them.... The

things of this world neither occupy the soul nor cause it harm, since they enter it not, but rather the will and the desire for them, for it is these that dwell within it" (*AS I*, 3,4).

2. Poverty of spirit includes detachment not only from material goods, but also from moral and even spiritual goods. Whoever tries to assert his own personality, seeking the esteem and regard of creatures, who remains attached to his own will and ideas, or is too fond of his independence, is not poor in spirit, but is rich in himself, in his self-love and his pride. "If thou wilt be perfect," says St. John of the Cross, "sell thy will...come to Christ through meekness and humility; and follow Him to Calvary and the grave" (*SM III*, 7).

In like manner, one who still seeks the affection of creatures, and the joy and satisfactions which they can give him, is not poor in spirit; neither is he who goes in search of consolations and spiritual delights in his devotions and relations with God. Poverty of spirit consists in being entirely stripped and empty of all these pretensions, so that the soul seeks and desires only one thing: to possess God, and to be thus content, even when God lets Himself be found only in darkness, aridity, anguish, and suffering. Here is that perfect poverty of spirit which frees the soul from all that is not God; this very freedom constitutes the reason for our happiness, because "the soul that strips itself of its desires, either to will or not to will, will be clothed by God with His purity, joy, and will" (J.C. *SM II*, 19). The beatitude promised to the poor in spirit is the possession of God, a possession which will clothe them with His infinite riches. This is the goal to which the Holy Spirit desires to lead us; let us second His action by responding with docility to His invitation to detachment and total despoliation. The more generously we renounce all that is not God, the more we shall enjoy the beatitude promised to the poor in spirit.

COLLOQUY

"O Jesus, our book of life and our salvation, Your first companion on earth was extreme, continual, perfect poverty. You, the Almighty, the Lord of all things, willed absolute

poverty in order that we might unite love and poverty as one. You became poor in everything : poor in material things, poor in Your own will, poor in spirit, beyond anything that we can possibly imagine, infinitely poor, because Your love for us was infinite. You were poor like those who possess nothing, who do not even ask for what they need. You were poor in possessions, in friends, in power and human wisdom, poor in reputation for sanctity, in worldly honors, poor in everything that exists.

" You also wished to glorify poverty by Your words and You said ' blessed are the poor,' and that the poor would judge the world.

" But, oh! shame and sorrow! Today, O Lord, this poverty of spirit which You taught and exalted so highly, is rejected and fled from by almost all men, and even those who preach it and glorify it by their words, in reality, deny it in will, desire, and actions.

" Oh! truly blessed is he who, following Your example, O Christ, has chosen poverty for his companion! Truly blessed, as You said, is he who, not only by his words, but by his will and by his life, embraces poverty of earthly goods, poverty of friends and relatives, of consolations and vain knowledge; blessed is he who shuns honors, dignities, and the reputation for sanctity.

" O Lord, if I cannot strip myself materially of all earthly things, at least permit me, I beseech You, to become detached at least in spirit, and not once only, but every day and every moment. Oh! truly blessed is such a poor one, for the kingdom of heaven is his!" (St. Angela of Foligno).

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A CHRISTIAN

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PRESENCE OF GOD - Grant, O Lord, that my soul may be deeply rooted in charity and in humility.

MEDITATION

1. The Epistle (*Eph* 3,13-21) which we read in today's Mass is one of the most beautiful passages in the letters of St. Paul. In it we find the famous counsel of the Apostle addressed to the Ephesians, which summarizes in three parts, the whole of the spiritual life.

"That the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ...would grant you...to be strengthened by His Spirit with might unto the inward man." The inward man is the human spirit regenerated by grace; it is the spiritual man who has renounced all material things and the pleasures of the senses. This man is in each one of us and should be strong in order to keep up the struggle against our lower nature, which will always be a part of us while we are on earth, and is always trying to drag us down. The Apostle rightly asks this fortitude of the Holy Spirit, because the strength of our virtue is not sufficient unless it is supported by what the Holy Spirit infuses into us through His gifts.

"That Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts." Christ with the Father and the Holy Spirit already dwells in the soul in the state of grace, but His presence can always become more profound. And the more profound His presence, the more deeply will the soul be penetrated with divine charity, until it becomes truly "rooted and founded" in love. If we wish to grow in love we should keep ourselves in contact with the fount of love, with God living in our soul.

"That you may be able to comprehend...the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge." To comprehend the mystery of God's love, insofar as it is possible to our limitations, is the summit of the spiritual life. Christianity is all love : we are Christians in the measure that we live in

love, in the measure that we understand God's love. Yet this mystery always leaves us a little incredulous, a little skeptical. Oh! if we could see as the blessed do, that God is love and wishes nothing but love; that the way to go to Him is the way of love; that suffering, mortification and humility are only means to reach perfect love, and to correspond with the love of the God who is Charity! Then indeed we would be "filled unto all the fullness of God."

2. St. Paul in the Epistle has exhorted us to be rooted in love, and in the Gospel (*Lk 14, 1-11*) Jesus exhorts us to be rooted in love and in humility.

Despite the tacit disapproval of the Pharisees, caused by their narrowness of mind and heart, Jesus cured a man of dropsy on the Sabbath, thus teaching us again the great importance of love of neighbor. In vain would we believe that we were rooted in the love of God if we failed in our love of neighbor. How could one think that an act of fraternal charity might be in opposition to the law for sanctifying the Sabbath? Such are the aberrations of one who pretends to love God while paying attention solely to his own interests, without any thought for the needs of others. This is not Christianity, but Pharisaism and the destruction of charity.

To be rooted in love, we must also be rooted in humility, for only he who is humble is capable of really loving God and his neighbor. The Gospel continues with a practical lesson in humility, condemning those who seek the first places. We should not think that this refers only to material places; it refers also to those places which our pride seeks to occupy in the esteem and regard of others. It is really humiliating to note how our self-love always tries to make us take a higher place than that which is due us, and this to our own confusion, for "he that exalteth himself shall be humbled." "Let us always take the lowest place," says St. Bernard, "there is no harm in humbling ourselves and believing that we are less than we really are. But there is exceeding harm and great evil in wishing to elevate ourselves, even if only a finger's breadth, above what we are and in preferring ourselves to even one. There is no danger in stooping too much to pass through a low doorway, whereas there would be great danger in lifting our head even an inch above the lintel, as we would strike against it and injure our head;

similarly, we should not be afraid that we shall humble ourselves too much, but should fear and abominate the slightest movement of presumption." Let us, like the saints, ask God to send us a humiliation every time our pride tries to raise us above others; this will be the surest way to become rooted in humility. At the same time, we shall be rooted in charity and shall thus possess the two fundamental characteristics of a Christian soul.

COLLOQUY

"O Lord, increase my faith in Your love, so that I may be able to say to You in all truth : 'I have known and have believed the charity which God hath to me.' It seems to me that this is the greatest act of our faith, the most beautiful way to render You love for love; in it is the hidden secret of which St. Paul speaks, a secret which my soul longs to understand, because in understanding it, I shall thrill with joy. Make me capable of believing in Your exceeding love for me. Then I shall not stop at preferences or feelings. It will matter little if I feel Your presence or not, whether You send me joy or suffering. I shall believe in Your love and that will suffice. Grant, O God, that my soul may penetrate into Your depths and remain there, rooted and founded in love.

"O Lord, when I ponder within myself Your immensity, Your faithfulness, the proofs of love You have shown me, and Your benefits, and then look at myself and see how I have outraged You, I can only turn upon my soul with a profound feeling of contempt; yet this self-contempt is not strong enough to cast me down as low as I would wish. O Lord, plunge me into humility! It seems to me that to be plunged into humility is to be plunged into You; for, living in You who are the Truth, I cannot fail to realize my nothingness. The humble soul is the chosen recipient, the vessel capable of receiving Your grace, and only into it do You wish to pour Your grace. Grant then, O Lord, that I may be humble, and make me understand that the humble soul will never put You high enough or itself low enough" (cf. E.T. I, 6 - II, 8 - I, 9).

THE GIFT OF FORTITUDE

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Holy Spirit, You know how weak I am; make me strong with Your divine fortitude.

MEDITATION

1. Under the influence of the gift of fear, the soul puts itself completely into the hands of God and has but one desire, that of never being separated from Him. The gift of fortitude comes to strengthen it so that it may be always more and more courageous in serving God.

In the measure that the soul advances in the spiritual life, it should follow God's initiative, and let itself be guided by the Holy Spirit, rather than proceed according to its own ideas; however, its activity is necessary here too, consisting as it does in a prompt, docile adherence to the promptings of the divine Paraclete, accepting and willing all that He does for it and in it. Thus this gift comes to help and to perfect the virtue of fortitude, which, in spite of our good will, is always weak and too often fails us, especially when we are faced with the rigorous demands of a more perfect spiritual life. We need courage to remain faithful to God's law and the duties of our state—even at the cost of great sacrifice—and to endure patiently the difficulties of life. We need it even more to second the action of God in our soul, to follow faithfully the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, and not be frightened by the trials God makes us undergo. He is a kind, gentle Master, but at the same time, a very exacting one, because He cannot lead us to sanctity without asking us for *all*. And this is just where we most experience our frailty : we feel intuitively what God wants from us, perhaps we see it very clearly, and yet we are not capable, we lack the strength to do it. This is a great grief for a soul of good will, not yet fully matured. It is the condition of human weakness which actual grace and the infused virtue of fortitude can do much to relieve, but which they cannot completely cure, acting as they do by means of our limited faculties. The direct intervention of God Himself

is necessary and God does intervene by putting the gift of fortitude into action.

2. The virtue of fortitude and the gift of fortitude have the same end, to strengthen us in the spiritual life, but they differ as to the manner in which they act. The virtue acts in us by means of our own efforts, sustained, certainly, by grace, but yet these efforts are always human efforts; hence, even though they are supernatural, they must necessarily adapt themselves to our human way of acting; consequently, they will always be affected by our limitations. On the other hand, the gift—like all the gifts of the Holy Spirit—is supernatural not only in itself, but also in its activation. In fact, instead of being put into action by us—as is the case with the virtue—it is activated by God Himself. By means of the virtue and using our good will, the little sister of grace, it is we who try to acquire fortitude to make ourselves strong; by means of the gift, however, it is the Holy Spirit who fortifies us interiorly, communicating to us something of His omnipotence, something of His infinite fortitude. Between the fortitude acquired by our own efforts and that infused by the Holy Spirit, there is a difference similar to that which exists between the work of an inexperienced student and that of a skillful artist, or rather, between man's capacity and power, and God's. "You shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you," Jesus said to the Apostles, "and you shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem" (*Acts 1,8*). Indeed, those poor fishermen full of fear, who did not have the courage to accompany Jesus to Calvary, became as brave as lions after the coming of the Holy Spirit, ready to face every danger, even death itself. This shows us how necessary is the gift of fortitude; without it, we would always be vacillating, always uncertain, always inconstant. But the Holy Spirit wills that we should be disposed to receive this gift by practicing the virtue. Our efforts, repeated with humility and constancy, are in themselves a tacit plea for the gift of fortitude. Through these efforts we unfurl the sails of our souls to the breeze of the Holy Spirit. It remains for Him to choose the moment to move us, but He will not do this unless He finds us disposed to welcome His divine impulse, that is, applying ourselves to the practice of virtue.

COLLOQUY

"O eternal God, You are Fortitude and You give fortitude to the soul, making it so strong that neither the devil nor any other creature can take this strength away unless it consents. It will never do so if it clothes itself with Your will, because it is only its own will that weakens it. O eternal God! inestimable love! I, Your creature am wholly incorporated into You, and You into me by creation, by the force of Your will, by the love with which You have created me!" (St. Catherine of Siena).

"*Veni, Spiritus fortitudinis, robora me!*" Come, O Spirit of fortitude, strengthen me! Grant me the gift of fortitude, to confront with courage, to support with patience, difficult and painful things, overcoming all obstacles. I am in great need of this Your gift, because I am little and weak, and I tire as easily as a child. 'But You do not tire, grow weary, and Your wisdom is unsearchable. Give strength to the weary; and to those who have little, increase their strength and vigor. Youths shall faint, and young men shall fall by infirmity. But they that hope in You shall renew their strength, they shall take wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint!' (cf. *Is* 40,28-31).

"O Holy Spirit, sustain me and then I shall become strong with Your strength. If You are my strength and my salvation, what shall I fear? My own power cannot sustain me, but I can do all things in You who strengthen me! Come to my aid, and in spite of my weakness, I shall overcome temptations and obstacles; I shall accomplish great things, and strong with Your strength, I shall bear suffering with patience and joy.

"O Holy Spirit, with all my heart I beg this gift; let it make me generous, fearless, loving in sacrifice, virile, desirous of tending to perfection resolutely and wholeheartedly" (Sister Carmela of the Holy Spirit, O.C.D.).

*BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HUNGER
AND THIRST AFTER JUSTICE*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Holy Spirit, may I no longer hunger for the things of earth, but for heavenly things alone.

MEDITATION

1. When the Holy Spirit becomes master of a soul and takes entire control of it, He communicates to it an invincible strength which sweeps away and overcomes all obstacles, enabling it to bear all kinds of suffering. As the strong are not easily satisfied, but are always aspiring to greater things, so in the measure in which the Holy Spirit strengthens a soul, He makes ever increasing desires to spring up in it, longings for justice and virtue and sanctity, so ardent and impelling that they may well be called hunger and thirst. Under the influence of the gift of fortitude, the soul hungers and thirsts after justice. This explains how the fourth beatitude corresponds to the gift of fortitude. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill" (*Mt 5,6*). The word *justice* must be taken in the very broad sense, signifying perfection, sanctity, and a total gift of self to God and to souls; it is in this sense that the Holy Spirit impels the soul, revealing to it ever wider horizons, calling it to ever more perfect works and to an increasingly generous and complete gift of self. Such a soul can no longer reserve anything for itself: the Holy Spirit will not permit it; it must give itself wholly. "The charity of Christ presseth us" (*2 Cor 5,14*), the soul repeats with St. Paul. It is consumed by a burning thirst for God's will, which it seeks even as the miser searches for gold. It is an ardent thirst for sanctity which will not tolerate the slightest infidelity to grace; the soul always thinks itself to be doing too little for God, and "if it were lawful for it to be destroyed a thousand times for Him it would be comforted" (*J.C. DN II, 19,3*); it has a burning thirst for souls, and continually spends itself for them, without ever sparing itself; it thirsts for God's glory and has no thought of rest, but is

always ready for new sacrifices and labors. Whence comes such courage and zeal? Not from its own strength and energy, as it well knows, but it springs from the power of the Holy Spirit, from trust in Him and docility to His inspirations. The soul can truthfully say : " I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me " (*Phil 4,13*).

2. Just as a starving person rejoices when he can satisfy his hunger with bread, so the soul living under the influence of the gift of fortitude rejoices when it is able to satisfy its hunger for justice and sanctity. It is happy when able to immerse itself in God's will, the only food which can satiate it; it rejoices when it can quench its thirst for immolation by sacrificing itself for God and for souls. The soul is delighted when it can appease its hunger for God by receiving Him in the Eucharist, or by immersing itself in Him in the intimacy of prayer. This is a pure joy, because it is not sought after, but is the fruit of the fulfillment of duty, the joy of the soul gravitating toward its center, God, and conscious of giving itself more and more to Him, of belonging entirely to Him. But to taste this joy, the soul must be firmly resolved not to want, seek, or admit any other. St. Teresa of Jesus says : " Anyone whose sole pleasure lies in seeking God and who cares nothing for her own pleasure, will find our life a very good one " (*Way*, 13).

If we do not taste this joy, it is because we do not hunger after justice sufficiently : together with this holy hunger we still nourish, perhaps, eagerness for the things of the world; and our hunger for earthly things and earthly joys weakens our hunger for justice, making us turn aside in search of human satisfactions. But what can creatures give us? They will never be able to satiate our hunger, but will always leave us unsatisfied. Let us, therefore, ask the Holy Spirit to extinguish in us all hunger for earthly things and to make our hunger for sanctity increase. This hunger is still very weak in us and, above all, it is inconstant. How many times, after making great resolutions, we have relapsed, and remained discouraged, perhaps even resigned to doing no better. The Holy Spirit, through the gift of fortitude, wishes to make our hunger for sanctity stronger and more persevering, that it may never be extinguished, leaving us to die of starvation, but may satiate us with imperishable goods : with God's will, with justice, with sanctity. He who

has the power to awaken this hunger in us, has also the power to satisfy it even to satiety, and with this satiety we shall be blessed forever.

COLLOQUY

“ O God, ocean of sacred love and sweetness, come and give Yourself to my soul. Grant that I may continually long for You with my whole heart, with absolute desire and burning love, and that I may live in You. O my true supreme joy, may I prefer You to all creatures, and for Your sake, renounce all transitory pleasures!

“ O Lord, nourish this starving beggar with the influx of Your divinity, and delight me with the desired presence of Your grace. This I long and beg for, so that Your vehement love may penetrate, fill, and transform me into You.

“ O loving Redeemer, make me burn with love for You, making no account of myself, and finding my delight in You alone; may I know and enjoy no one but You. O overflowing abyss of the divinity! draw me, and immerse me in You! Take all the love from my heart and apply it to Yourself, so that I may be dead to all other things.

“ My soul calls You, and seeks You with indescribable love, O delight of loving embraces! Come, my Beloved, come, You whom I desire above all, that I may possess You within me, and that my soul may embrace You and hold You close! Come into my soul, O sovereign sweetness, and let me taste Your sweetness, and delight and rest in You alone.

“ O my Beloved, Beloved of all my desires, let me find You and then hold You and press You close in a spiritual embrace. I desire You, I sigh for You, O eternal Beatitude! Oh! give Yourself to me, unite me closely to You, and inebriate me with the wine of Your love!” (Bl. Louis de Blois).

THE GIFT OF PIETY

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Holy Spirit, Spirit of piety, give to my heart the spirit of filial love.

MEDITATION

1. By means of the gift of piety, the Holy Spirit gives a new touch to our spiritual life, a touch of delicacy and sweetness which perfects and simplifies our relations with God and our neighbor. Basically these relations are regulated by justice, the virtue which inclines us to fulfill every duty and to give to each one his due. But if we were guided in our lives by justice alone, our path would be very arid, and fidelity, difficult. When, however, a sense of *filial piety* toward our heavenly Father is developed in us by the action of the Holy Spirit—a sense which, in practice, is expressed in ardent desires to please Him in all things—then we pass beyond the limits of justice—always a little rigid—and devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the service of God. Incited by that profound cry of “Father!” (*Gal 4,6*) which the Holy Spirit repeats within us, we rise toward heaven, longing to win God’s heart and to behave in all things as His true children; then the most difficult, laborious tasks become easy and sweet. This is how the gift of piety helps the virtue of justice as well as the virtue of religion. By this gift, “the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God” (*Rom 8,16*); and this truth becomes a living, personal experience, capable of elevating us to God with entirely new filial ardor, ardor which will make our prayer easier, transforming it into an intimate heart-to-heart talk with our heavenly Father.

Therefore, if we aspire to live in close union with God, it is right for us to desire and pray for this gift. Under its influence our prayer will become more affectionate, more filial, and we shall attend with greater facility to all that concerns divine worship. Let us ask for this gift, especially when we seem to be very dry and cold, so that in times of trial and interior suffering by its help we shall go to God

as a child to its Father. Furthermore, our diligent, constant application to prayer, notwithstanding the lack of sensible devotion, is one of the best dispositions for bringing upon us the life-giving breath of the gift of piety.

2. The gift of piety perfects justice in our relations with others by helping us to smooth over differences and overcome the feelings of reserve and coldness which, in spite of ourselves, may remain in our conduct, particularly toward those who are disagreeable and unfriendly. The gift of piety inspires a sense of the divine paternity, not only in respect to ourselves, but also in respect to others; it makes us realize that this same paternity extends, not only to ourselves, but to all men, near or far away, friends or enemies, since there is only "one God and Father of all, who is above all" (*Eph* 4,6). The knowledge that God is the Father of us all must not be confined to our thoughts, but should penetrate our life in a practical way and sweetly influence our relations with others, giving them warmth and ease. This is just what the Holy Spirit wishes to accomplish in us by means of the gift of piety, by which He inclines us to meekness, indulgence, and kindness to all because we are all children of the same Father. The Holy Spirit teaches us that our supernatural kinship is a stronger bond between ourselves and others than the bond of flesh and blood, because the former springs not from the will of man, but from the will of our heavenly Father, who "before the foundation of the world...hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ unto Himself" (*ibid.* 1,4,5). By means of this bond, the Holy Spirit urges us to overcome all the difficulties we may meet with in dealing with others, treating them all, not as strangers, but as brothers.

If we wish to respond to the inspirations of the gift of piety, we must make every effort to be kind and gentle, and to form the habit of seeing in everyone, even in those who may be opposed to us, a child of God and our brother. When we find it very difficult to do this, instead of becoming discouraged, let us appeal more insistently to the Holy Spirit, begging Him to accomplish in us what we cannot do by ourselves.

COLLOQUY

" O Holy Spirit, guide my soul, because all who are led by the Spirit of God, are truly the sons of God. You teach me that I have not received the spirit of bondage to live in fear, but the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby I can cry to God : ' Abba, Father ! ' You Yourself give testimony to my spirit that I am a child of God and a joint-heir with Christ : because, if we suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified with Him " (cf. *Rom 8,14-17*).

" My God, send forth Your light and Your truth, that they may shine upon the earth : for I am like land that is dry and barren, awaiting Your light. Pour forth Your grace from above; water my heart with the dew of heaven; send down the waters of devotion to wash the face of the earth, to bring forth good and perfect fruit. Lift up my mind oppressed with the weight of my sins, and raise all my desires toward heavenly things, that having tasted the sweetness of supernal happiness, I may have no pleasure in dwelling on the things of this earth.

" Draw my heart to You, and deliver me from all vain human consolations, none of which can fully satisfy my desires or make me happy. Unite me to Yourself by the inseparable bond of Your love; for You alone are sufficient for the soul that loves You, and without You, all is vain and of no value " (*Imit. III, 23,9.10*).

O Holy Spirit, create in me the heart of a child toward its heavenly Father, a heart that seeks Him always, loving and serving Him with good will. Create in me the heart of a brother toward all my neighbors, so that I may overlook all differences and be kind, gentle, and meek with all.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Holy Spirit, diffuse in my heart an increase of the spirit of piety and meekness.

MEDITATION

1. By the gift of fortitude the Holy Spirit strengthens our heart; by the gift of piety He makes it meek and gentle. When we practice the virtue of meekness, we are doing our part—as we should do at all costs—to acquire that meekness of heart which Jesus has so strongly recommended and which He Himself tells us brings interior peace as its fruit. “Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls” (*Mt 11,29*). However, we have not yet acquired a sustained habitual meekness and the continual peace that accompanies it, if when we meet with unexpected trials, contradictions, injuries, or offenses, our meekness fails and our peace of heart vanishes, at least momentarily. These daily experiences, although painful and humiliating, are salutary, because, far more than any reasoning, they make us realize the insufficiency of our efforts and the extreme need we have of God’s help. This help He has already willed to give us by infusing into our soul the gift of piety. When the Holy Spirit moves us through this gift, He quenches in us every trace of ill-feeling toward our neighbor; He softens our hardness and, so to speak, takes our heart in His hands to establish it in meekness and habitual peace.

As long as this poor heart remains in our own hands, we shall never succeed in being wholly master of it; but even if, in spite of all our frequently renewed resolutions, we fail in meekness every day, we should not on this account desist from our undertaking, but cheerfully renew our efforts and, at the same time, beg God’s help with humble persistence. “*Veni, Sancte Spiritus, flecte quod est rigidum, fove quod est frigidum, rege quod est devium*” (*Sequence*). Come, Holy Spirit, bend the stubborn heart and will, melt the frozen, warm the chill, guide the steps that go astray.

2. The beatitude which corresponds to the gift of piety is the reward promised to those who have attained perfect meekness by making use of their own efforts and the help of the Holy Spirit. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land" (*Mt* 5,4). What land? First of all, that of their own heart since, St. Thomas says, "Meekness makes a man master of himself" (II^a II^{ae}, q.157, a.4, co.). Without this interior control of all our impulses—feelings of animosity, of antipathy, indignation, anger—we might be able to present an appearance of meekness as worldlings do when it is opportune, but we will never have that profound meekness which calmly faces all the trials of daily living. Furthermore, this complete self-control is what Jesus said would enable us to possess the land in a broader, more beautiful sense, that is, to possess the hearts of others. If we wish to be of service to our brethren, winning their hearts and orientating them to goodness and truth, that is, to God, we must not use force or an authority which exasperates others and arouses opposition, but rather, meekness, patience, and forbearance. This is the method used by Jesus who Himself announced His mission as one of meekness : "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, wherefore He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the contrite of heart...to set at liberty them that are bruised" (*Lk* 4,18.19).

The "Spirit of the Lord," the Holy Spirit, has also been given to us, and our hearts have been anointed with the oil of piety and meekness, to enable us to continue the mission of Jesus in the world. To this He invites us saying : "Go : Behold I send you as lambs among wolves" (*ibid.* 10,3); and He commands us, as He commanded the Apostles, to go without staff or arms of defense, though we know that we shall meet opposition, struggles, and enemies.

Jesus, the Lamb of God, conquered the world by His meekness; so we too shall win the hearts of others to the degree in which, overcoming ourselves, we become lambs of meekness, ready, like Him, to suffer rather than to assert ourselves and defend ourselves by force.

COLLOQUY

"O Jesus, Savior of the world, in the midst of Your sufferings, persecutions, and revilings, You did not utter any threat or malediction; You did not defend, excuse, or avenge Yourself! You were spat upon, but You did not turn Your face away; Your hands and arms were stretched upon the Cross, but You did not draw them back; in all things You surrendered Yourself to the will of Your executioners, in order to accomplish the work of the Redemption. This is a mystery of infinite mercy, but it is also an example. Thus, O Lord, You give us an example of meekness and patience in tribulations and adversities; You teach us not to render evil for evil, but, on the contrary, to render good for evil.

"Read then, O my soul, read again in this book of life which is Christ crucified! Read the infinite meekness of God! How can you still protest and murmur against tribulations, against those who make you suffer, when your God has immolated Himself for you as the meekest of lambs?" (St. Angela of Foligno).

"O Holy Spirit, give me a simple heart which will not retire within itself to savor its own sorrows, a heart magnanimous in giving itself, easily moved to compassion, a faithful, generous heart, which does not forget any favor received, nor hold resentment for any injuries done to it. Make my heart meek and humble, quick to forgive and capable of bearing tranquilly all opposition, a heart which will love without expecting love in return, content to vanish in the hearts of others, sacrificing itself before the heavenly Father, a great and indomitable heart, that no ingratitude can close and no indifference can weary, a heart tormented by the glory of Jesus Christ, wounded by His love, with a wound which cannot be healed except in heaven" (Leonce de Grandmaison, S.J.).

THE GIFT OF COUNSEL

PRESENCE OF GOD - Come, O Spirit of Counsel, make my heart attentive to all Your inspirations!

MEDITATION

1. "The Holy Ghost whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you" (*Jn* 14,26). This promise made by Jesus is valid for all Christians, including ourselves. The Holy Spirit dwells within our souls to counsel us, to recall to us the instructions of Jesus and to apply them to the actual circumstances of our life. But how can we poor creatures who are so dull, and accustomed to the clamor of human language, perceive the light murmur of the divine inspirations? God has provided for this with a special gift, the gift of counsel, which enables our soul to understand the quiet interior voice of the Holy Spirit, and to distinguish it from all other voices.

The gift of counsel is a powerful aid to the virtue of prudence. Guided by this virtue, we try to understand how we ought to behave in the various circumstances of life so as to be pleasing to God. However, not always seeing clearly, we often remain doubtful in concrete cases, asking ourselves if this or that action will be more conformable to God's will. Am I really moved by supernatural motives in this deliberation, or does nature enter in, or self? The question remains; often even the counsels of wise persons are not sufficient to dissipate our perplexity, to give us that light whereby we may act with security. We need God Himself to enlighten us within, we need the Holy Spirit who, by activating the gift of counsel, brings His divine light to our soul. The gift is like an antenna which permits us to detect the counsels of the Holy Spirit, most precious and most simple counsels which, overstepping the labyrinth of our reasonings, show us with luminous clarity which road to follow, and make us understand God's will in an instant. The more this gift develops in us, the more our soul will open to the voice of the Holy Spirit, and will become more

responsive to His inspirations. Because of this gift, although we are but weak creatures, we can address to the Almighty this humble, but daring prayer : " Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth " (*1 Sm 3,9*).

2. There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit, by means of the gift of counsel, wishes to be our counsellor in the way of sanctity. Why, then, are we so seldom aware of His divine reminders? First of all, because we are distracted; our soul is deafened by the voices of creatures, and filled with the noises of the world. Holy Scripture compares the voice of the Holy Spirit to the " whistling of a gentle air " (*1 Kgs 19,12*). Therefore, we must be silent, silent exteriorly, but, even more so, interiorly, if we wish to be able to perceive this voice so tenuous and sweet. Only in silence can He be heard who manifests Himself " in divine silence " (cf. J.C. *SM I*, 26).

Another cause of our failure to receive the counsels of the Holy Spirit is attachment to our own judgment, to the limited counsels of our own mind. A little of this attachment, a little obstinacy in holding to our own ideas, is sufficient to immure the soul within itself and make it incapable of detecting the divine inspirations. Let us not deceive ourselves : this happens even when it is a question of obstinacy in good things, because attachment to our own opinions is never good; it never indicates the action of grace, but rather that of a self-love which has not been overcome. When a soul is not attentive nor submissive to the external voice of obedience which tries to dissuade it from its tenacity, so much the less will it be able to heed the interior silent voice of the Holy Spirit. As a boat which, although furnished with sails, cannot be moved by the wind as long as it is moored, so the soul attached to its own opinions is unable to enjoy the precious influence of the gift of counsel; it possesses this gift, but it remains powerless, as if paralyzed, like the sails of a ship anchored in the harbor. St. John of the Cross advises us : " Renounce thy desires and thou shalt find that which thy heart desires. How knowest thou if thy desire is according to God? " (*SM I*, 15).

By cultivating interior recollection, and detaching ourselves from our own judgment, we shall be truly, as Jesus said, "*docibiles Dei*," that is, we shall have the necessary dispositions for being instructed by God and receiving the counsels of the Holy Spirit.

COLLOQUY

“ ‘ Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.’ I am Thy servant, give me understanding that I may know Thy testimonies. Incline my heart to the words of Thy mouth, let Thy speech distil as the dew. Heretofore, the children of Israel said to Moses : ‘ Speak thou to us, and we will hear; let not the Lord speak to us, lest we die.’ It is not thus, O Lord, it is not thus I pray; but rather with the prophet Samuel, I humbly and earnestly entreat Thee : ‘ Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.’ Let not Moses, nor any of the prophets, speak to me; but speak Thou rather, O Lord God, who art the inspirer and enlightener of all the prophets; for Thou alone without them canst perfectly instruct me; but they without Thee will avail me nothing.

“ They may indeed utter fine words, but they give not the spirit. They speak well; but if Thou be silent, they inflame not the heart. They give the letter, but Thou disclorest the sense. They publish the mysteries, but Thou unlockest the meaning of the things signified.

“ They declare the commandments, but Thou enablest us to fulfill them. They show the way, but Thou givest strength to walk in it. What they can do is only from without, but Thou instructest and enlightenest the heart. They water outwardly, but Thou givest the increase. They cry aloud in words, but Thou givest understanding to the hearing.

“ Speak then, O Lord, for Thy servant heareth; for Thou hast the words of eternal life. Speak to me, that it may be for me some comfort to my soul, and for the amendment of my whole life, and also to Thy praise and glory, and everlasting honor” (*Imit III, 2,1-3*).

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Holy Spirit, make my heart merciful in imitation of the heart of Jesus.

MEDITATION

1. By the gift of counsel, the Holy Spirit wishes to take over the practical direction of our life that He may lead us to sanctity, because all Christian perfection, which was the object of the teaching of Jesus, is likewise the object of the gift of counsel, of the inspirations of the Holy Spirit : "He will teach you all things... whatsoever I shall have said to you" (*In 14,26*), the Master declared. Just as in the teaching of Jesus there is a *dominant* note, love, which He calls *His* commandment, so among the inspirations of the gift of counsel there is one which is generally recognized as the *proper effect* of this gift, and it is *mercy*.

When Jesus gave His commandment, He said : "Love one another, as I have loved you" (*ibid. 15,12*); now the fundamental characteristic of His love, of the love of God for men, is precisely mercy. All creatures are misery in the eyes of God, misery incapable of subsisting without the continual intervention of His action. And we men, what are we? Not only misery incapable of subsisting, but misery capable of sinning : of ourselves "we are nothing, we can do nothing, we are worth nothing, we possess nothing except sin" (St. John Eudes). We are misery in the fullest sense of the word. Therefore, when God loves us, His love is essentially and necessarily an act of mercy; that is, it is love which stoops to our misery to elevate, sustain, and enrich it with His infinite riches. This is what the Holy Spirit proposes especially to accomplish in us by means of the gift of counsel : to teach us to imitate that mercy which is the chief characteristic of God's love for us. The Holy Spirit wishes to bring us to the perfect observance of the commandment of Jesus, to the imitation of the merciful love of His divine heart : "Love one another as I have

loved you"; and to bring us to reproduce the infinite mercy of the heavenly Father: "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (*Lk* 6,36).

2. God is infinitely merciful, because He knows the depths of our misery; we are far from being merciful because we know too little about it. By the gift of counsel, the Holy Spirit enlightens us on this point, particularly in regard to our own personal wretchedness. In our failures and in our falls, He repeats in the depths of our heart the warnings of Jesus: "Without Me you can do nothing.... You are unprofitable servants" (*Jn* 15,5 — *Lk* 17,10). This lesson gradually becomes more and more vivid and effective through experience, and it penetrates our souls more deeply; we do not need long reasonings to persuade us of our insufficiency, our nothingness: we see it and touch it. The gift of counsel has opened our eyes to it.

This comprehension of our own personal misery makes us equally understanding of the misery of others. How can one who is really convinced of his own frailty, weakness, and inconstancy, dare to condemn others? "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone" (*Jn* 8,7), the Holy Spirit whispers to us interiorly when, annoyed by the faults of others, we may perhaps be tempted to imitate the cruel conduct of the Pharisees toward the woman taken in adultery. The Holy Spirit wishes to chisel the features of Jesus in us, transforming us into living images of the Savior; therefore, He gently and unceasingly urges us to be merciful. He puts into our hearts a love for the miserable: for those who are wretched both in the material and in the moral sense, so that, like Jesus, we may go in search of them, ready to sacrifice ourselves for the salvation of their souls. Above all, He spurs us on to seek those who, because they have made us suffer, have a special claim to our mercy. We can no longer be satisfied with forgiving them and treating them with kindness, but we must experience the need of doing good to them if we are to fully carry out the teaching of Jesus: "Do good to them that hate you" (*Mt* 5,44).

This is the goal toward which the Holy Spirit wants to lead us by the gift of counsel, and in this way He will establish us in that perfect mercy of which our divine Master has said: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (*ibid.*, 6, 7). Consider this most prudent advice of the

Holy Spirit : be merciful, because "With what judgment you judge you shall be judged" (*ibid.* 7,2).

COLLOQUY

"O Lord, I run to You because You are so good and merciful and because I know that You did not despise the poor nor hate the sinner. You did not reject the thief who confessed his sins, nor the weeping Magdalen, nor the suppliant Canaanite woman, nor the woman taken in adultery, nor the tax collector sitting at his counter, nor the publican who implored Your mercy, nor the Apostle who denied You, nor even those who crucified You. I am drawn by the perfume of Your graces.

"I have inhaled the fragrance of Your mercy and I come to You to be strengthened by it. Blessed is the man who, following Your example, has a heart filled with compassion for the unfortunate. Blessed is he who is merciful and quick to help those who are in need, he who remembers that it is more blessed to give than to receive, who is quick to forgive and slow to anger, who never takes revenge, but in all circumstances considers the needs of others as though they were his own. O Lord, pour into my soul the dew of Your mercy, fill my heart with charity, that I may know how to be all things to all men and be so dead to myself that I live only for the good of others. Teach me to distil the sweet perfume of mercy, which is composed of the needs of the poor, the anguish of the oppressed, the anxieties of the afflicted, the failures of sinners, and finally, all the pains of those who suffer, even if they be my enemies. All these things are repugnant to my nature, but the fragrance one draws from them surpasses all other odors, because, as You have said, it has the power to give eternal life : 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall find mercy.' O Lord, grant that I may pour out this perfume, not only on Your head and on Your feet, but on Your whole body, which is the Church, so that it will lessen the sorrows of all Your suffering members" (cf. St. Bernard).

FRATERNAL UNION

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PRESENCE OF GOD - O my God, give me the grace to preserve union with my neighbor by the bonds of charity and peace.

MEDITATION

1. As Jesus during His earthly life never ceased to recommend fraternal charity and union, so the Church in the Sunday Masses continually preaches this virtue. She does it today by making use of a passage in St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians (4,1-3). "I, therefore... beseech you, that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called, with all humility and mildness, with patience, supporting one another in charity, careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The call which we have received is the vocation to Christianity, which is to say, the vocation to love. God, infinite Charity, adopts us as His children, that we may so emulate His charity that love becomes the bond which unites us all in one heart, as the Father and Son are united in one Godhead by the bond of the Holy Spirit. "As Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us" (*Jn* 17,21), was the prayer of Jesus for us.

To "keep unity in the bond of peace" is easy and difficult at the same time. It is easy because when the heart is truly humble, meek, and patient, it bears everything with love, carefully trying to adapt itself to the feelings and desires of others, rather than asserting its own. It is difficult because, as long as we are here below, self-love, even when mortified, always tends to rise and assert its rights, thus creating continual occasions of clashes, the avoidance of which calls for much self-renunciation and much delicacy toward others. We should be persuaded that all that disturbs, weakens, or worse still, destroys fraternal union, does not please God; it does not please Him even if done under pretext of zeal. We should always prefer to renounce our own ideas—although they be good—rather than dispute with our neighbor,

except when it is a question of fulfillment of duty or respect for the law of God. An act of humble renunciation for the sake of union and peace among our brethren gives much more glory to God than a glorious deed which might cause discord or disagreement.

2. Very often the cause of division among good people is excessive self-assertion : the desire to do things one's own way. Given our limitations, there can be nothing so absolute in our ideas that it cannot give way to the ideas of others. If our ideas are good, upright, and brilliant, those of others may be equally good, or even better. Therefore, it is much wiser, more humble and charitable to accept the views of others and to try to reconcile our views with theirs, rather than to reject them, lest we be obliged to give up our personal ways and views. This individualism is the enemy of union; it is a hindrance to good works as well as to spiritual progress.

In today's Epistle, St. Paul puts before us all the reasons why we should preserve union with our neighbor. Be "one body and one spirit; as you are called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." If God has willed to save and sanctify us all in Christ, uniting us in Him in one body, giving us one same vocation, one faith, and one hope, and being Himself the Father of all, how shall we pretend to save and sanctify ourselves if we are not united with one another? If we do not wish to frustrate God's plan and endanger our salvation and sanctification, we should be ready to make any personal sacrifice whatsoever in order to maintain and strengthen union. Let us bear in mind that Jesus has asked for us not only union, but perfect union : "That they may be made perfect in one" (*Jn 17,23*).

Today's Gospel (*Mt 22,34-46*) also strengthens this exhortation to union, since in it Jesus repeats that the commandment to love our neighbor is, together with the commandment to love God, the basis of "the whole law," that is, of all Christianity. Let us not turn a deaf ear to these repeated appeals for charity and union; the Church insists on these points because Jesus has insisted on them, and because charity is "the precept of the Lord; if this only is done, it is enough" (St. John the Evangelist).

COLLOQUY

" O Word, Son of God, You look with more complacency on one work done in fraternal union and charity than on a thousand done in discord; one tiny little act, like the closing of an eye, performed in union and charity, pleases You more than if I were to suffer martyrdom in disunion and without charity. Where there is union, You are present, for You call Yourself charity : '*Deus caritas est*,' God is charity. You call Yourself the God of peace and union : '*Deus pacis*,' God of peace. You are the source of all peace, and without You there can be neither true peace nor union. False is the peace and union among sinners; it cannot last long, because as their hearts are dominated by the tyranny of sin and of passions, the bond which unites them quickly breaks; it is a weak bond no stronger than a thread of tow. Therefore, from You alone, O God, comes perfect union, and where there is disunion, confusion reigns because of sin and the devil. With what great desire should we seek this union and love it with all our heart! Where there is union, there is all good, there is an abundance of all things, of all celestial and terrestrial riches.

" O Most Holy Trinity, give us, then, the grace to live always united with one another, preserving union of spirit, having one will and opinion, imitating the indivisible unity which exists among the three divine Persons " (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

" Where charity and love are, You are there also, O Lord! Your love, O Christ, has united us in one body and one heart; grant, then, that we may love one another with a sincere heart. Keep far from us all quarrels and contentions; grant that our hearts may be always united in You, and do You dwell always in our midst" (The Liturgy).

THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Holy Spirit, teach me the nothingness of earthly things.

MEDITATION

1. By the gifts of fear, fortitude, piety, and counsel, the Holy Spirit regulates our moral life; whereas, by the other gifts—knowledge, understanding, and wisdom—He governs our theological life more directly, that is, our relations with God. The first four gifts perfect the moral virtues especially; the last three perfect the theological virtues. They are the so-called gifts of the contemplative life, that is, of the life of prayer and union with God.

In our ascent toward God we find one great obstacle : creatures which impress and allure us by their attractions, tempting us to stop at them and thus drawing us away from God, the infinite good, who transcends human experience. It is not easy for us who live in the realm of sense to believe that God is all, that He is the only good, the only happiness, and to place our hope in Him alone, while He is veiled from sight. We find it difficult to believe that creatures are nothing, to be convinced of their vanity, while they present themselves to us so alluringly. It is true that faith comes to our aid, and in its light we have often reflected on these truths, yet in practice, our reasonings have often failed. Confronted with the attractions of creatures, we forget and perhaps even betray our Creator. Therefore we need more powerful help, a divine light, which illuminates from within, without the need of passing through our reasonings, so limited and rude : it is this light that the Holy Spirit infuses into our soul by means of the gift of knowledge. This gift does not make us reason on the vanity of things; but it gives us a living, concrete experience of them, an intuition so clear that it admits no doubt. Under the influence of this gift, Francis of Assisi suddenly left his merry companions to espouse Lady Poverty, and when his indignant father drove him out of his house, he exclaimed

in the fervor of his spirit, "Henceforth I will not call Peter Bernardone my father, but our Father who is in heaven!"

Under the impulse of this gift, Teresa of Avila wrote these words : "All things pass, God never changes. He who has God, finds he lacks nothing : God alone suffices"; and the dying words of Blessed Maria Bertilla were : "One must work only for Jesus. All else is nothing."

2. Inspired by the gift of knowledge, St. John of the Cross traced the famous way of the "nothing," the way which, leaving aside all created goods, goes quickly and directly up the mount of perfection, on whose summit the soul finds God. "Nothing, nothing," the saint repeats, "neither this, nor that, neither the goods of earth, nor the goods of heaven," that is, not even spiritual joys and consolations, but God alone. So much renunciation, so much sacrifice, so much stripping of self terrifies poor human nature. But the soul illumined by the Holy Spirit understands: nothing at all, because "all is vanity, except to love God and serve Him alone" (*Imit. I*, 1,3). In the measure that the gift of knowledge develops in the soul, it understands and tastes the "nothingness" of creatures, which makes it relish the "all" of God and feel the need of escaping from creatures to plunge into Him. This is the first step toward contemplation.

"All the being of creation, then, compared with the infinite Being of God, is nothing" (J.C. *AS I*, 4,4). The wonders of creation are nothing, the most marvelous works of human genius are nothing, the knowledge possessed by the most learned men is nothing: God is the only reality, and it is He who gives value to all things, either because they are the works of His hand, or because they are works done by man for His glory.

In the midst of our most beautiful undertakings and our solicitude for earthly things, the Holy Spirit reminds us of the words of Jesus : "For what shall profit it a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?" (*Mk* 8,36). And again, "Thou art careful and art troubled about many things : but one thing is necessary" (*Lk* 10,41.42). Thus He teaches that our adherence to God is what is essential; all the rest is accessory and very often fruitless.

In evaluating the beauty of created things, the gift of knowledge, while revealing the essential nothingness of these things, does not deny the relative perfections to be

found in them, but shows them only as vestiges, reflections of the infinite perfection of God. It is this light that changes creatures from an obstacle into a ladder leading us to God, because "the soul is strongly moved to love her Beloved, her God, by the consideration of the creatures, seeing that these are things that have been made by His own hand" (J.C. SC, 4,3).

When a soul is profoundly enlightened by the gift of knowledge, creatures no longer hinder its ascent to God, for whether considering their nothingness or the beauty with which God has endowed them, whether in giving them up or in using them through necessity, they always urge the soul on to God, inspiring it to seek Him and love Him, the one infinitely beautiful Being.

COLLOQUY

" My God, here on earth all is vanity. What can I seek and desire to find here below where nothing is pure? All is vain, uncertain, and deceptive, except to love You, O Lord, and do good works. But I cannot love You perfectly unless I despise myself and the world.

" O my soul, do not think it hard to leave your friends and acquaintances; they often stand in the way of divine consolations. Where are the companions with whom you played and laughed? I do not know; they went away and abandoned me. And where are the things you were interested in yesterday? They have vanished. Everything has gone. Then only he who serves You, O Lord, is wise, because he despises the earthly life with all its charms.

" Keep me, O my God, from seeking the joys of the world. I conjure you, remove from my heart every attachment to earthly vanities. Lift me up to the height of the Cross; grant that I may follow You wherever You precede me. Poor and stripped of all, an exile on earth, and unknown, I willingly remain with You" (Thomas à Kempis).

" Remove from me, O my God, everything that leads me away from You; give me everything that will bring me nearer to You. Enrapture me, so that I will live wholly and always for You" (St. Nicholas of Flüe).

" O Lord, grant that the sweet, burning power of Your love may draw my heart away from all earthly delights,

so that I may die for love of You as You deigned to die for love of me " (St. Francis of Assisi).

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BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN

PRESENCE OF GOD - Grant, O Lord, that I may shed only such tears as are pleasing to You and that will help me to grow in Your love.

MEDITATION

1. The Beatitude : " Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted " (5,5), corresponds to the gift of knowledge. Blessed are they who, thoroughly enlightened by the Holy Spirit as to the nothingness of creatures, weep for the time they have spent seeking them, and mourn over the energy and affection they have wasted on the vanities of the world. These are the burning tears of St. Augustine who, in his *Confessions*, continually laments : " Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved Thee.... Thou wert with me, but I was not with Thee; creatures kept me far from Thee. " These are the tears of the penitent Magdalen, and of St. Peter weeping over his fall; blessed tears, cleansing souls from sin and disposing them for friendship with God. These are the tears of souls determined to seek God in preference to all creatures, but who still, because of their frailty, have to reproach themselves daily for some weakness, some slight return to futile earthly satisfactions. The gift of knowledge does not permit us to close our eyes to our infidelities, however slight, but it makes us hate them and weep for them with tears of compunction. One who lives under the influence of this gift will never be careless or superficial in his examinations of conscience; his confessions, though peaceful, will always be sorrowful and accompanied by true contrition. Such were the confessions of the saints, who with the most lively sorrow accused themselves of their slightest imperfections.

The Holy Spirit does not want us to be scrupulous, but He does want us to be very delicate in our fidelity to God. He is not satisfied that we despise the vanities of the world in general, but He wants us to despise them in their most subtle manifestations, such as slight retaliations of self-love, little self-complacencies, or concern for the affection and esteem of others. Blessed the soul who knows how to recognize all its miseries and weep for them, not with tears of discouragement or anxiety, but with tears of profound sorrow, which instead of contracting its heart in fear, will dilate it in repentant love, and cast it into God's arms, with a heart renewed by love and sorrow.

2. The gift of knowledge, making us clearly realize the vanity of creatures, convinces us that they are perishable and full of defects; hence, it incites us to place all our hope in God. In this sense, the gift of knowledge perfects and strengthens the virtue of hope so that, without further hesitation, our heart anchors itself in God, recognizing in Him our only strength and support, our only happiness.

The more we hope in God and the beatific possession of Him which awaits us in eternal life, so much the more are we disposed, not only to renounce the happiness and satisfaction which creatures can offer us, but also to embrace all the sacrifices necessary to reach eternal life. Many sacrifices are necessary because we cannot go to God except by following the path traced by the Son of God to lead us to Him : the way of the Cross. But even though it suffers, the soul who lives by hope can repeat the words of St. Paul : "We faint not...for that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (*2 Cor 4, 16.17*). The gift of knowledge helps us judge our present sorrows as light when compared with eternal beatitude, in view of which it incites us to bless them, even should they cost us our blood. This is why the Apostle rejoiced and gloried in his tribulations (*cf. Rom 5,3*), and St. Francis of Assisi sang, "The joys I hope for are so great that all pain is dear to me."

Under the influence of the gift of knowledge, the soul understands the blessedness of tears, that is, the blessedness of suffering embraced for the love of God. This gift does not make us insensible to physical and moral pain; so true is

this that the beatitude speaks expressly of "tears," but although it does not keep us from weeping, it does sanctify our weeping and makes us more resigned to God's will, preferring these tears to the vain joys of the world and regarding them as a means of becoming more like unto Christ crucified. What a difference between such tears and those shed through pride, because we will not submit to God's will, or because of the capricious resentments of self-love.

When a soul has reached the point where it prefers blessed tears shed at the foot of the Cross to the joys of earth, it can hope in the beatitude promised by Jesus : "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

COLLOQUY

"O Lord, the peace You give us in this world is full of anxieties, tribulations, and persecutions; but then You bring us to a quiet, tranquil peace. I can even say that in the midst of these difficulties You give us Your peace, because the Spirit attests in this way that we are Your children. This means, 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.' Not only will You comfort us in the future, but You turn our very tears into consolation, and war itself into peace. He who loves You, O Lord, finds in the most burning fire of tribulation the cool breeze and the dew of heavenly consolation" (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

"Blessed are You, O my God, because You have not demanded from us as the price of Your kingdom, a long period of suffering, but a very brief one, as brief as life, a moment compared with an eternity of happiness! Truly, if for love of You, we had to endure for hundreds of thousands of years, sufferings a thousand times harder, more painful and severe, we should have accepted Your decree with immense joy and longing, and thanked You on our knees with our hands joined. How much more then, should we thank You now that, in Your mercy, You have deigned to give us the shortest time possible of suffering, a time as short as life! Short as an instant, as nothing, because life is nothing compared with eternity.

"Come then, come, O children of God; let us hasten to the Cross of Christ, to sorrow, contempt, and poverty!"

Grant, O Lord, that I may love You as You have loved me, with that absolute fidelity, purity, and love which reserves nothing for self, which gives itself wholly and therefore runs to pain and suffering, seeing and feeling in all things nothing but love" (St. Angela of Foligno).

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THE GIFT OF UNDERSTANDING

PRESENCE OF GOD - Come, O Spirit of understanding, and enlighten me!

MEDITATION

1. As we advance toward God, we encounter many difficulties, not only because of creatures obstructing our path, but also because of the impenetrability of the divine mysteries. To enable us to surmount the former, the Holy Spirit comes to our aid with the gift of knowledge; to overcome the latter, He comes to our aid with the gift of understanding.

Our intellect is incapable of seizing the infinite. Although gifted with faith, its manner of understanding is always human, proceeding by means of ideas and limited concepts, which are totally inadequate to express the divine realities. Revelation itself comes to us in human language; therefore, it cannot tell us what God is in Himself, nor manifest to us the intimate essence of revealed truths. Proceeding with the virtue of faith alone, we are constrained to stop, so to speak, at the surface of the divine mysteries. We know with certitude that they have been revealed by God; we adhere to them with all our strength and yet we do not succeed in penetrating them. However, what faith alone cannot do, it is able to do with the help of the gift of understanding. This gift surpasses our human way of comprehension and enlightens us in a divine way; it makes us "*intus legere*," that is, "read within" the divine mysteries, with the light, with the understanding of the Holy Spirit Himself.

It is a swift, deep penetration which, while adding nothing new to what we already know from revelation, does make us understand the inner meaning of the revealed truth. The gift of understanding tears off, so to say, the outer coverings of the propositions and human concepts, allowing us to see the substance of the divine mysteries. Faith tells us that God is Trinity; the gift of understanding tells us nothing more, it does not make us see, nor does it explain this mystery to us, but it does make us penetrate it. Under the influence of this gift, the soul not only believes that God is One and Three, but it has the intuition that the mystery of the Trinity is essential to the divine nature and that it reveals better than anything else the perfection, the power, and the infinite love of God.

2. Only the Holy Spirit, who is God, can make us penetrate the divine mysteries. St. Paul expressly says so : That which " eye hath not seen nor ear heard...to us God hath revealed...by His Spirit. For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.... So the things also that are of God, no man knoweth, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit that is of God; that we may know the things that are given us from God" (*i Cor 2,9-12*). And this is the wonderful work that the Holy Spirit performs in us by the gift of understanding. He communicates a share of His knowledge of the divine mysteries to souls united to Him by love. Therefore, it is clear that the more closely united we are to the Holy Spirit by perfect charity, the more capable we shall be of receiving this precious communication. Then the gift of understanding will not be inactive in us, but will intervene with its light to illumine our studies and our meditations on divine things, making us penetrate into their depths, making us " see " the intimate sense of the sacred texts and giving us a correct understanding of God's commandments and counsels. In this way, the Holy Spirit introduces the soul to a form of prayer more simple and profound : the mind no longer needs to reason or to look for convincing motives; under the illuminating touch of the Holy Spirit, the soul's gaze is arrested and fixed on truth. This simple contemplative gaze reveals God to the soul better than any theological study; it feels itself engulfed in God; it senses a bottomless abyss into which it is glad to

plunge. It does not see, does not distinguish, cannot describe anything with precision, but it feels God, feels that it is in contact with Him. What a difference in our comprehension of the same mystery when we meditate on it by the light of faith only and when, on the contrary, we have the grace to penetrate it by the light derived from the gift of understanding! Then we no longer look at the exterior, but at the interior; we no longer stop at the words which express it, but we penetrate the secret meaning hidden within the words.

COLLOQUY

Come, Holy Spirit, come light divine!

"O light that sees no other light, light that obscures all other light, light which is the source of all other light, brightness compared with which all other brightness is darkness, and all other light obscurity; supreme light, not darkened by blindness, not clouded by darkness, not obscured by shadows; light that no obstacle impedes, no shade divides; light illuminating all things together and forever, absorb me in the ocean of your brilliance, that I may see You in Yourself, and myself in You, and all things beneath You" (St. Augustine).

"How can I approach You, O Holy Spirit? You dwell in inaccessible light, and are Yourself all light, knowledge and splendor, while I dwell in a place of darkness and am nothing but ignorance and rudeness.

"Meanwhile, O divine Spirit, I beg You with confidence to illumine me. Reveal to me the divine greatness and the divine mysteries, so that I may adore and acknowledge them. Disclose the wiles of the devil and of the world, that I may avoid them and never fall again; reveal to me my miseries and my weaknesses, my errors, my prejudices, my obstinacies, the artifices of my self-love, so that I may hate and correct them. But, O beneficent light, above all illumine my soul, that it may know what You wish of me: make me understand well the charm of Your attractions and of Your grace, and all that I must do to merit the beneficent influence of Your goodness, so that I may correspond with complete fidelity; O loving Spirit, sustain me in this fidelity unto death" (Fr. Aurillon).

BLESSED ARE THE CLEAN OF HEART

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, purify my heart and my mind, that I may learn to know You better.

MEDITATION

1. The beatitude : "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God" (*Mt 5,8*), corresponds to the gift of understanding. There is a purity of heart which is the indispensable condition for receiving an abundant inflowing of the gift of understanding; it is the purity that results, not only from the absence of sin, but also from the absence of the slightest earthly affection. In fact, God does not communicate Himself fully to a creature whose heart is not absolutely pure; that is, one whose entire capacity for affection is not reserved for Him. As long as we have any attachment to creatures, any seeking for the affection of others, any complacency in feeling that we are loved by them, our heart is not pure enough to enjoy the divine communications. Therefore, before allowing a soul to penetrate His divine mysteries, God subjects it to a purification of the affections by means of detachments and sacrifices, sometimes at the cost of blood, but which, if generously accepted, will eventually detach the heart from creatures and leave it entirely free for its Creator. If God makes us pass through this trial, let us not draw back or try to evade His action, but let us cooperate with it, being fully persuaded that He reserves the fullness of His gifts and of His light for those souls alone who are free from any shadow of creatures, those hearts which belong entirely to Him. In this sense it may well be said that the sight of God is the reward promised to the pure of heart. In fact, if the heart retains any attachment, even slight, to creatures, the intellect remains clouded, and "has no more capacity for receiving enlightenment from the wisdom of God than has the air, when it is dark, for receiving enlightenment from the sun.... Oh!" exclaims St. John of the Cross, "if men but knew how great is the blessing of divine light whereof they are deprived by this blindness

which proceeds from their affections and desires!" (*AS I*, 8,2.6). Indeed, when the heart is pure, then the intellect, like a clear glass, can be completely penetrated by the light of the Holy Spirit.

2. There is another purity of heart which is not just a disposition to receive the gift of understanding, but is the fruit of this gift. Here the word "heart" is used in its broader meaning of spirit and mind, which is its usual meaning in Holy Scripture.

Our minds are so dull that we can always err in understanding divine things, either by imagining them in a material way, measuring them by worldly standards, or by interpreting them according to our personal views, considering only one aspect, and ignoring others which are essential, and so on. This dullness of mind, unfortunately, has been the source of many heresies in the Church. The gift of understanding, giving us the light of the Holy Spirit Himself, purifies our minds from these errors and frees them from the illusions of the imagination, as well as from other false interpretations. By means of this purity of mind, the gift of understanding insures the integrity of our faith, enabling us to penetrate the objective reality of the divine mysteries, and giving us the real meaning of God's law, of the commandments, and the counsels. On the other hand, this gift, which allows us to penetrate the divine mysteries by the infused light of the Holy Spirit, makes us clearly understand that God cannot be enclosed in our dull imaginations nor in our limited ideas, but that He is infinitely superior to anything we can think or imagine about Him. St. John of the Cross says, "Since God is inaccessible, see that thou concern not thyself with how much thy faculties can comprehend and thy senses can perceive, that thou be not satisfied with less and that thy soul lose not the agility that is needful for one that would attain to Him" (*SM I*, 52).

If we wish to respond to the motions of the gift of understanding, we must be detached from our own ideas and ready to renounce them even though very dear to us; we must not be too sure about our way of understanding the things of God, but must seek the guidance of the Church. Above all, we must humbly pray for the gift of understanding because it will free us from errors and give us a right understanding of divine things.

If the Holy Spirit finds us pure in heart, He will enlighten us more and more; greater purity will lead to greater light, and vice versa; thus, from clarity to clarity, we shall arrive at a more profound penetration of the divine mysteries, which will give us a kind of foretaste of the beatific vision. “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God!”

COLLOQUY

“O Lord, give me right sentiments about You and grant that I may seek You with simplicity of heart. My heart says to You, ‘I will seek Your face.’ When my heart seeks You, O Lord, it is Your presence it is seeking. Your home is where You dwell, and where do You dwell, if not in Your temple? My heart is Your temple: teach me how to welcome You there. You are spirit, and I must adore You in spirit and in truth. Come into my heart, and all the idols shall fall.

“Now I shall listen to Your voice and learn to long for You and to prepare myself to see You. Blessed are all who see You! And if they do see You, it is not because, while they were on earth, they were poor in spirit, or because they were meek or merciful, or because they mourned or hungered and thirsted after justice, but because they were clean of heart. Humility is good for attaining the kingdom of heaven; meekness is good for possessing the land; tears are good for receiving consolation; hunger and thirst after justice, for being filled; mercy is good for obtaining mercy, but only purity of heart permits us to see You.

“My desire is to see You; what I desire is great, but it is You who tell me to wish for it. Help me to purify my heart, because what I desire to see is pure but my means of seeing it, impure. Come to me, O God, and purify me by Your grace; purify my heart with Your aid and strength. If I receive You into my heart during this present life, after my death You will admit me into Your presence” (St. Augustine).

“Come, Holy Spirit, speak to my heart; or at least, if You wish to remain silent, may Your very silence speak to me, because without You I am always in danger of following my own errors and confusing them with Your teachings” (cf. St. Bernard).

THE GIFT OF WISDOM

PRESENCE OF GOD - Come, O Spirit of Wisdom, draw me!

MEDITATION

1. The gift of understanding enables us to penetrate God's mysteries; the gift of wisdom takes us further : it lets us taste them and gives us a delightful knowledge of them. This is the *savory knowledge* of which St. Bernard speaks, the untranslatable "*dulce sapere*" invoked by St. Thomas in the *Adoro Te Devote*; it is the precious gift which the Holy Spirit offers us in the words : "*Gustate et videte quam bonus sit Dominus*" (*Ps 33,9*). "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet." It is not by chance that it is first said *taste*, and then *see*, for by the gift of wisdom we know God by the experience of the heart which "tastes" the object loved.

There are two ways of knowing : a speculative, intellectual way, and an experimental way, resulting from a kind of "connaturality" with the object of our knowledge. The latter is not so clear, but it is much deeper than the former, and grasps the inner substance of things. Thus, for example, because of the affinity of thought and affection that binds a mother to her child, she knows its heart much better than any other person. Similar to this is the knowledge of divine subjects which we acquire by means of the gift of wisdom. Between God and us there is a certain "connaturality," a certain similarity, produced by the love which unites us to Him and in some way assimilates us to Him; even more, St. Paul does not hesitate to say that "He who is joined to the Lord, is one spirit" (*1 Cor 6,17*).

The gift of wisdom enables us to know God and divine things precisely through this "connaturality," and therefore gives us a delightful experience of them through the love which is its source. This experience seizes the soul in its very center, that is, in the will, forcibly drawing it to God and at the same time, inundating the intellect with floods of light. The gift of wisdom acts somewhat like the rays of the sun which give heat and light at the same time. Its

warmth quickens charity in the soul, and through this enkindling of love, the soul is enlightened concerning the divine realities and is enabled to judge of them, because it knows intuitively their infinite goodness and their absolute superiority over all created things. "Oh, the depth of the riches of...God!" (*Rom* 11,33). This is the cry of the soul inflamed and illumined by the gift of wisdom.

2. All the gifts of the Holy Spirit are closely connected with charity, for they abound only in souls who possess charity, and they develop in the measure that charity increases. However, the gift of wisdom has a very special relationship to the love of charity, primarily because it is set in action by means of charity. St. Thomas says, "The cause of the gift of wisdom is found in the will, and it is charity" (II^a II^ae, q.45, a.2, co.); therefore, the more a soul loves God, the more capable it becomes of receiving the motions of this gift. In addition, the delightful knowledge of God derived from the gift of wisdom is a most powerful means of increasing charity. How can we fail to love the Lord more after having tasted His sweetness? In the measure that the gift of wisdom invades a soul, charity increases and so does its unitive force, by which the soul adheres ever more closely to God.

This gift leads to a more profound prayer than that experienced when the gift of understanding alone intervenes: the soul feels "seized" and drawn by God in an irresistible way; it feels truly united to the Lord and tastes Him in this union—not in a sensible manner but spiritually—and by intuition, it knows Him in the most intimate way possible here below. The soul emerges from this prayer inflamed with love, a love which it expresses above all by the perfect conformity of its will with God's in all the happenings of life; it comes from this prayer so full of God that, upon returning to its ordinary duties, it sees and considers everything in relation to God. In this way the gift of wisdom extends its influence even into our practical life and teaches us to judge all things in the light of God.

In order to receive the actions of the gift of wisdom—the most sublime of all the gifts—we should gently prepare our heart for the plenitude of love, and at the same time apply ourselves to the acquiring of a profound humility, because as Jesus has said: "Thou hast hid these things

from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones" (*Mt 11,25*).

"And those alone acquire the wisdom of God who are like ignorant children, and, laying aside their knowledge, walk in His service with love" (*J.C. AS I*, 4,5).

COLLOQUY

"Come, O divine Spirit, and take possession of my heart; dissipate all the darkness that the folly of the world calls wisdom, and grant me in its place the gift of heavenly wisdom. You alone can teach me to despise what the world loves, that is, what delights and flatters. You alone can teach me to enjoy the things of God, the virtue, piety, and love which You came to kindle on earth in order that the world might be inflamed" (Anonymous).

"O God, who by Your essence are uncreated Love, infinite Love, boundless Love, not only loving, but Love itself; O God, from whom proceeds the love of all the seraphim and of all creatures, why do I not love You? Why am I not consumed in this burning furnace of love, which embraces the whole universe?

"O God, essential goodness, You by whom all goodness is good, who are the source of the goodness of all creatures, just as the sea is the source of all waters, You whose goodness is so excellent that nothing in heaven or on earth can be called good in respect to it, why do I not love You, since goodness is the object of love?

"O most holy Father! O most merciful Son! O most loving Holy Spirit! When will You, O Father, be most deeply hidden in the innermost depths of my soul and fully possess me? When shall I be all Yours and You all mine? When will You be my King? When will that day come? Oh! When? Oh, it will surely come! Do You believe that I shall see it? Why such delay! How painful this waiting! Hasten, O Jesus, hasten, delay no longer!" (Ven. Louis of Granada).

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Holy Spirit, help me to establish my heart in peace.

MEDITATION

1. A soul who has tasted God, under the influence of the gift of wisdom, looks at the world with the eyes of God, and therefore is able to judge all things "*secundum rationes divinae*" (St. Thomas II^a II^{ae}, q.45, a.3, ad 3) by divine principles, according to supernatural motives, and not according to limited human reasoning. These are the truly "wise" judgments that we can never formulate without the help of the Holy Spirit. In fact, "the sensual man [the man of the senses and of natural reason] perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand, because it is spiritually examined. But the spiritual man [the man of faith guided by the Holy Spirit] judgeth all things" (*1 Cor 2,14.15*). He judges all things in relation to their supreme Cause, God; therefore, he directs all his acts and orders everything in his life according to God. From this order—the only true order—comes peace, the fruit of the wise direction of the gift of wisdom; hence, the man who habitually lives under the influence of this gift is a *peaceful* man par excellence. His heart is established in peace, there is no longer anything disordered in it; all his affections and desires, all his thoughts and acts, are completely ordered according to God, being wholly submitted and conformed to His laws, to His will, to His good pleasure. One who possesses peace, disseminates peace. A *peacemaker*, in the etymological sense, is one who makes peace, cultivates peace, and spreads it about him. This is why the gift of wisdom corresponds to the beatitude of peace, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Only one who lives under the influence of this gift can truly judge and regulate everything according to God, so that nothing, not even suffering, can disturb his interior peace, for he knows that even the most painful

happenings are permitted and ordered by God for the good of His elect. "To them that love God, all things work together unto good" (*Rom* 8,28).

In this way the gift of wisdom gives a note of sweetness, not only to our prayer, but also to our practical life : "Under the influence of this gift," says St. Thomas, "what is bitter becomes sweet, and weariness becomes repose" (II^a II^{ae}, q.45, a.3, ad 3).

2. The gift of wisdom leads us to peace : the interior peace of the soul who, having tasted God, gives itself to Him without reserve, in complete surrender to His divine will; the serene peace of one who, seeing God in all things, accepts the hardships of life without being disturbed, adoring God's providence in all; finally, it is the social peace of him who, considering all men in relation to God, as His creatures and His children, loves them all and wishes to live in peace with all. The more perfect it becomes, the more will this peace bring us to taste the reward promised by Jesus : "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God" (*Mt* 5,9).

All Christians are children of God by grace, but here we are considering the special reward which we might call a superabundance of the grace of adoption, an experience by which the soul not only knows, but even *feels and tastes* that it is a child of God. It is the savory sense of divine filiation which is born in the soul under the influence of the gift of wisdom. "The Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God" (*Rom* 8,16); these words of St. Paul become a living reality, a delightful experience; the soul feels itself called a child of God, not by men, but by God Himself; no audible voice speaks to it, but the more it feels drawn by God and enjoys Him in intimate union, so much the more does it feel that He is its Father and that, in very truth, it is His child.

Our God is the God of peace; therefore, it is perfectly right that the peaceful man, he who possesses and diffuses peace, should feel in a very special way that he is God's child. If men generally do not feel themselves to be children of God, it is because they are so little disposed to peace, so ready for disputes, quarrels and war. They talk about peace but do not make peace, for they do not accept the guidance of the Spirit of wisdom. In their

ignorance they prefer to be guided by themselves, and as a result they are dominated by pride, self-interest, and cupidity; they live in disorder and they sow disorder around them.

The more our soul becomes firmly established in peace, and the more we become messengers of peace, to that degree will the Holy Spirit infuse into us this delightful sense of our divine sonship, and this will become for us a source of immense happiness, a true prelude of eternal beatitude.

COLLOQUY

“ O Holy Spirit, give us Your wisdom to teach and guide us and to bring all things back to You, from whom they came. Oh! if we could really return to You as we came out from You, like waves returning to the ocean whence they came! Oh! If we could only make this complete return to You, we should be in perpetual happiness and perpetual peace!

“ Your wisdom is the perfection which orders all things in relation to You who are their end. It considers the past, looks at the present, and scans the future always in relation to You. From this orientation, peace, the sweet fruit of wisdom, is born in our hearts. He who possesses this peace is always serene : he is not troubled by the past or the present, and he looks peacefully toward the future, because he knows that everything is permitted and arranged by Your sovereign goodness.

“ O eternal Father, give us light to know this peace, the cause of so many blessings, and without which we fall into so many faults and evils!

“ Oh! why can I not communicate this peace to every creature? If I were what I should be, I certainly could diffuse it everywhere! O Lord, give me Your peace, the peace of a heart which lives united to You, for of myself I can have no good and without You I cannot have peace” (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

“ O most benign Jesus, give me above all desires the desire to rest in You, and in You let my heart find peace. You are the true peace of the heart; You are its only refuge; without You all things are difficult and troubled. In this peace, then, that is, in You, the one sovereign eternal Good, I will sleep and take my rest” (*Imit. III*, 15,4).

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THE POWER AND LOVE OF JESUS

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, grant me the grace to correspond always with the gifts of Your love.

MEDITATION

1. A poor paralytic is presented to Our Lord; he probably had himself brought there to ask for bodily health, but in the presence of the purity and holiness which emanates from the Person of Jesus, he realizes that he is a sinner and remains confused and humiliated before Our Lord. Jesus has already read his heart, and seeing his faith and humility, He does not even wait for him to speak, but suddenly says to him with infinite kindness : " Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee " (*Gosp : Mt 9,1-8*). The first and the greatest miracle has taken place: the man is no longer a slave of Satan; he is a child of God. Jesus, who came to save souls, rightfully healed the soul before the body.

This miracle, however, does not please the scribes who, not believing in the divinity of Jesus, begin immediately in the secret of their hearts to accuse Him of blasphemy. But the Master, who had read the soul of the paralytic, also reads theirs. " Why do you think evil in your hearts? " If Jesus had seen there even a little humility and faith, He would have been as ready to heal them as He was to heal the heart of the paralytic; but unfortunately, He found nothing but pride and obstinacy. However, He wishes to use every means to soften them, so He gives them the strongest proof of His divinity. " But that you may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins — then He said to the man sick of the palsy — ' Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house. ' And he arose and went into his house. " The miracle was striking and instantaneous. The word of Jesus effected immediately what it expressed. The words of God alone could have such power. But the scribes will not admit that they are defeated :

when the heart is proud and obstinate, not even factual evidence is capable of moving it.

Let us never say our faith is weak because we do not see or touch with our hand the truth which is proposed for our belief; let us rather admit that it is weak because our heart is not sufficiently docile to grace, nor entirely free from pride. If we want to have strong faith, let us be as humble and simple as children; if we wish to share in the grace of sanctification which was given to the paralytic, let us offer ourselves to Our Lord with contrite, humble hearts, thoroughly convinced that we need His help and forgiveness.

2. The Gospel presents Jesus to us in all the splendor of His divine personality, possessing all the powers proper to God. The Epistle (*i Cor 1,4-8*) shows Him in the act of putting His divinity at our service, as it were, to sanctify us and make us divine. Jesus continues to do for our souls what He did for the soul of the paralytic, and today's Epistle is a beautiful synthesis of His action in us, an action far-reaching and complete, embracing our whole being. Contemplating this action, St. Paul bursts forth in a hymn of gratitude : "I give thanks to my God always for you, for the grace of God that is given you in Christ Jesus, that in all things you are made rich in Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge... so that nothing is wanting to you in any grace." Yes, every grace, every gift comes to us from Jesus, and through them our person and our life are sanctified. By means of sanctifying grace, He sanctifies our soul; through the infused virtues, He sanctifies our faculties; and by actual grace, He sanctifies our activity, enabling us to act supernaturally. Yet even this does not satisfy His liberality : He is not content with setting us on the road to God, supernaturalized by grace and the virtues, but He wishes to substitute His divine way of acting for our human way; therefore, He enriches us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which make us capable of being moved by God Himself. All this is the gift of Jesus to us, the fruit of His Passion. The Holy Spirit is also His gift, the Gift par excellence, which He merited for us by His death on the Cross, the Gift which He and the Father are continually sending to us from heaven to enlighten and direct our souls.

It seems as if Jesus, the true Son of God, is not jealous of His divinity or His prerogatives, but seeks every possible means to make us share by grace what He possesses by

nature. How true it is that the characteristic of love is to give oneself and to place those one loves on a plane of equality with oneself!

Let our hearts be filled with gratitude; let us correspond to the infinite love of Jesus and always keep ourselves under its influence, for He wills to "confirm us unto the end without crime, in the day of His coming" (cf. *I Cor 1,8*).

COLLOQUY

"O Jesus, You have taken away my death by giving me Your life; You have taken my flesh to give me Your Spirit; You have charged Yourself with my sins to bestow grace on me.

"Thus, O my Redeemer, all Your pains are my treasure and my wealth. You clothe me with Your purple, You honor me with Your crown, Your sorrows are a gift to me, Your grief sustains me, Your wounds heal me, Your Blood enriches me, Your love inebriates me.

"You are the repose, the fire, and the desire of my soul. You are the Shepherd, and the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. You are the eternal Pontiff, powerful to appease the wrath of the supreme Father. Who would not praise You, O Lord? Who would not love You with all his heart? O benign Jesus, inflame my soul with this love, show me Your beautiful countenance, make my eyes happy because they see Yours, and refuse not the kiss of peace to one who loves You. You are the Spouse of my soul; it seeks You and calls You tearfully. You, O Holy One, have delivered it from death by Your death, and, wounding it with Your love, You have not despised it. Why does my misery not feel the sweetness of Your presence? Listen, my God and Savior, give me a heart that will love You, for there is nothing sweeter than to burn always with Your love." (Ven. Louis of Granada).

OUR MEETING WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

PRESENCE OF GOD - Come, Holy Spirit, invade me with Your action.

MEDITATION

1. Considering the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the beatitudes which are their fruits, we arrive at a better understanding of the marvelous riches God has bestowed upon us. Every Christian possesses these gifts from the day of his Baptism; hence, there is no temerity in the desire that they attain their full maturity in us, so that our soul may be completely invaded by the action of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, by this desire, we respond to a like desire on the part of God, who has given us these gifts that we may be moved and directed by His Spirit, "for whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (*Rom 8,14*). And if we desire to be true children of God, does not our heavenly Father, who for this very purpose created us and raised us to the state of grace, desire it infinitely more?

Let us, then, nourish great desires in our souls. It is not too much, it is not rash, it is not presumptuous : God wills it. "*Voluntas Dei sanctificatio vestra*" (*1 Thes 4,3*) ; this is the will of God, your sanctification! If, however, our desires are to be effective, we must apply ourselves with ever-increasing generosity to dispose our soul for the action of the Holy Spirit. Let us be persuaded that before we can *experience* God and His divine union, the divine Paraclete must accomplish in us a work of thorough purification, for, as the green wood cannot be penetrated by the fire unless it is first dried and freed of all moisture, neither can our soul be invaded and transformed by the fire of divine love if it is not first purified of all its imperfections. Let us then prepare ourselves to undergo this indispensable purification courageously; or rather, let us try ourselves to anticipate it by mercilessly cutting all the ties which still bind us to earth, especially those which attach us to our self-love, our pride. "O humility, humility!..." exclaims St. Teresa of Jesus, "it is the lack of this...which prevents us from

making progress, for the foundation of the whole [spiritual] edifice is humility, and, if you have not true humility, the Lord will not raise it very high for it lacks solidity." (*Int C III, 1-2 – VII, 4*).

2. Generosity, detachment, and humility, must be united to fervent prayer to implore the action of the Holy Spirit. Let us send our supplications up to Him in the words of the Church :

*Veni, Creator Spiritus . . .
Accende lumen sensibus,
Infunde amorem cordibus,
Infirma nostri corporis,
Virtute firmans perpeti.*

Come, Creator Spirit . . .
O guide our minds with Thy blest light,
With love our hearts inflame,
And, with Thy strength which ne'er decays,
Confirm our mortal frame.

We need interior light because of the darkness of our senses; may the divine Spirit come and enkindle this flame within us, making us know God through loving contemplation. We need charity; may He come and pour it into our hearts, so often cold and dry because they are full of self-love and egoism. "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost" (*Rom 5,5*), and only from Him can we receive it. We need fortitude to conquer ourselves, to face difficulties, to keep ourselves serene and generous. May He come and sustain us with His gifts, and we shall no longer follow the foolish demands of self-love; we shall no longer let ourselves be frightened and affected by suffering and difficulties; we shall not so easily lose our peace in the midst of contradictions; but, strong in His strength, we shall maintain our interior composure with a serenity which will permit us to be generous always, and to be ever careful to give ourselves wholly to God.

*Hostem repellas longius,
Pacemque dones protinus.*

Drive far from us our deadly foe,
And grant us Thy true peace to know.

When the Holy Spirit has brought us to that perfect equilibrium which is sanctity itself, we shall no longer have anything to fear from the devil; he will flee far away, and if sometimes he succeeds in disturbing us, he will not be able to go beyond the threshold of our sensibility. Under the powerful protection of the Holy Spirit, the depths of our soul will remain in peace.

Perfect stability and lasting peace are the characteristics of the life of union with God. The Holy Spirit will introduce us to this union and cause us to advance in it, until He brings us into the sanctuary of the intimate life of God, into the very life of the Trinity. This is the most beautiful fruit of His action in our souls: an exquisite fruit, a pledge of eternal glory, a fruit which will attain perfect maturity in heaven, in the beatific vision of the God whom we love.

COLLOQUY

"O Holy Spirit, You have taken, so to speak, a clear, luminous ray from the glory of the Father and from the Incarnate Word, a glowing dart of love to illumine and to obscure, to wound and to heal, to inflame and to cool, to cast down or to blind, in order to glorify the creatures who receive You into their hearts and to help them advance with love. Who can ever tell the quality and number of Your inspirations? They are innumerable.

"But where do You pour out Your gifts and graces? In souls that You find ready to accept them. You renew those souls and bring them to the knowledge of God. What then, O my God, deprives the soul of Your Spirit? It is perverse self-love, the source and origin of every sin. Alas! I well see that the world remains wholly submerged and drowned in self-love! Some persons are sunk in it by their intellect, some by their memory, some by their will and some, with their whole soul, submerge themselves in it. What is most displeasing to You, O God, is that this perverse self-love dwells even in Your priests and in Your spouses. The disorder of our self-love, of our attachment to our own will is no small thing. It does not require mountains of enormous sins to block the course of this rapid stream, this ocean of love; the sands of our defects, which we think trivial, but which are not, suffice to do so.

"O Holy Spirit, purify the whole world, purify my soul of self-love, and do not permit it to return!" (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

"O Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, omnipotent God, essential Love of the Father and the Son, adorable bond of the august Trinity, I adore You and I love You with all my heart. Inexhaustible fountain of grace and love, enlighten my mind, sanctify my soul, and inflame my heart. God of goodness and mercy, come to me, visit me, fill me, abide in me, and make my heart a living temple and sanctuary where You can receive my adoration and worship and where You can find Your delight. Fountain of living water, springing up to eternal life, water my soul and quench its thirst for justice. Sacred Fire, purify me, make me burn with Your flames and never let them be extinguished in me. Ineffable Light, illumine me; perfect Sanctity, sanctify me. Spirit of Truth, without You I am in error; Spirit of Love, without You I am cold; Spirit of Unction, without You I am in aridity; life-giving Spirit of Life, without You I am dead.

"O divine Spirit, do gentle violence to my heart, and force it to desire You, to seek You, to obey You, to love You, and to possess You in time and in eternity. Amen" (Fr. Aurillon).