

EASTER SUNDAY TO THE FEAST  
OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

THE LIFE OF PRAYER : VOCAL AND MENTAL PRAYER,  
DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER,  
LITURGICAL PRAYER – OUR BLESSED  
LADY : HER PRIVILEGES AND  
VIRTUES – THE HOLY  
SPIRIT AND HIS  
ACTION IN  
US.



*THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD*

EASTER SUNDAY

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O risen Jesus, make me worthy to share in the joy of Your Resurrection.

**MEDITATION**

1. "This is the day which the Lord hath made; let us be glad and rejoice therein" (*RB*). This is the most excellent day, the happiest day in the whole year, because it is the day when "Christ, our Pasch, has been sacrificed." Christmas, too, is a joyous feast, but whereas Christmas vibrates with a characteristic note of sweetness, the Paschal solemnity resounds with an unmistakable note of triumph; it is joy for the triumph of Christ, for His victory. The liturgy of the Mass shows us this Paschal joy under two aspects : joy in truth (*Ep* : 1 *Cor* 5,7.8) and joy in charity (*Postcommunion*).

Joy in truth : According to the vibrant admonition of St. Paul, "Let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven... but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." In this world there are many ephemeral joys, based on fragile, insecure foundations; but the Paschal joy is solidly grounded on the knowledge that we are in the truth, the truth which Christ brought to the world and which He confirmed by His Resurrection. The Resurrection tells us that our faith is not in vain, that our hope is not founded on a dead man, but on a living one, the *Living One* par excellence, whose life is so strong that it vivifies, in time as in eternity, all those who believe in Him. "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in Me, although he be dead, shall live" (*Jn* 11,25). Joy in truth : for only sincere and upright souls who seek the truth lovingly and, still more, "do the truth" can fully rejoice in the Resurrection. We are sincere when we recognize ourselves for what we are, with all our faults, deficiencies, and need for conversion. From this knowledge of our miseries springs

the sincere resolve to purify ourselves of the old leaven of the passions in order to be renewed completely in the risen Christ.

Truth, however, must be accomplished in charity—*veritatem facientes in caritatem*, doing the truth in charity (*Eph 4,15*); therefore the Postcommunion prayer that is placed on our lips is more timely than ever : “ Pour forth upon us, O Lord, the spirit of Thy love, to make us of one heart.” Without unity and mutual charity there can be no real Paschal joy.

2. The Gospel (*Mk 16,1-7*) places before our eyes the faithful holy women who, at the first rays of the Sunday dawn, run to the sepulcher, and on the way, wonder : “ Who will roll back the stone from the door of the sepulcher for us? ” This preoccupation, although it is well justified on account of the size and weight of the stone, does not deter them from proceeding with their plans; they are too much taken up with the desire of finding Jesus! And behold! hardly have they arrived when they see “ the stone rolled back.” They enter the tomb and find an Angel who greets them with the glad announcement : “ He is risen; He is not here.” At this time, Jesus does not let Himself be found or seen; but a little later when, in obedience to the command of the Angel, the women leave the tomb to bring the news to the disciples, He will appear before them saying, “ All hail! ” (*Mt 28,9*), and their joy will be overwhelming.

We, too, have a keen desire to find the Lord; perhaps we have been seeking Him for many long years. Further, this desire may have been accompanied by serious preoccupation with the question of how we might rid ourselves of the obstacles and roll away from our souls the stone which has prevented us thus far from finding the Lord, from giving ourselves entirely to Him, and from letting Him triumph in us. Precisely because we want to find the Lord, we have already overcome many obstacles, sustained by His grace; divine Providence has helped us roll away many stones, overcome many difficulties. Nevertheless, the search for God is progressive, and must be maintained during our whole life. For this reason, following the example of the holy women, we must always have a holy preoccupation about finding the Lord, a preoccupation which will make us industrious and diligent in seeking Him, and at the same time confident of the divine aid, since the Lord will certainly take care that we arrive where our own strength could never

bring us, because He will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Every year Easter marks a time of renewal in our spiritual life, in our search for God; every year we reascend the path toward Him *in novitate vitae*, in newness of life (*Rom 6,4*).

#### COLLOQUY

“ Lord Jesus, good and gentle Jesus, who deigned to die for our sins and to rise for our justification, I beg You, by Your glorious Resurrection, to bring me out of the sepulcher of my vices and sins, so that I may merit to have a real share in Your Resurrection. O most kind Lord, who ascended to Heaven in the triumph of Your glory and are seated at the right hand of the Father, You who are all-powerful, raise me up to You, so that I may run in the odor of Your ointments, run without slackening, while You call and guide me. My soul thirsts; draw me to the divine spring of eternal satiety; lift me out of the abyss toward this living spring, so that I may drink as much as I can of it, and live on it forever, O my God, my Life.

“ I pray You, Lord, give my soul the wings of an eagle, that I may fly without weakening, fly, until I reach the splendor of Your glory. There, You will feed me on Your secrets at the table of the heavenly citizens, in the place of Your Pasch, near the celestial fount of eternal satiety. Let my heart rest in You, my heart which resembles a great ocean, agitated by tumultuous waves.

“ When shall I see You, O precious, long-desired, amiable Lord? When shall I appear before Your face? When shall I be satiated with Your beauty? When will You take me out of this dark prison, that I may confess Your Name, without being confused any longer? What shall I do, a wretch loaded down with the chains of my human condition? What shall I do? As long as we are in the body, we are journeying toward the Lord. We have not here a lasting dwelling, but we seek a future city, for our homeland is in heaven.

“ As long as I carry about with me these fragile members, give me the grace, O Lord, to cling to You, for he who adheres to the Lord is one spirit with Him” (St. Augustine).

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*STAY WITH US*

EASTER MONDAY

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - Do not leave me, O Jesus, gentle Pilgrim; I have need of You.

## MEDITATION

1. God has made us for Himself, and we cannot live without Him; we need Him, we hunger and thirst for Him; He is the only One who can satisfy our hearts. The Easter liturgy is impregnated with this longing for God, for Him who is from on high; it even makes it the distinctive sign of our participation in the Paschal mystery. "If you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God; mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth" (*Col. 3,1.2*). The more the soul revives itself in the Resurrection of Christ, the more it feels the need of God and of heavenly truths; it detaches itself more and more from earthly things to turn toward those of heaven.

Just as physical hunger is an indication of a living, healthy organism, so spiritual hunger is a sign of a robust spirit, one that is active and continually developing. The soul which feels no hunger for God, no need to seek Him and to find Him, and which does not vibrate or suffer with anxiety in its search, does not bear within itself the signs of the Resurrection. It is a dead soul, or at least one which has been weakened and rendered insensible by lukewarmness. The Paschal *alleluia* is a cry of triumph at Christ's Resurrection, but at the same time it is an urgent invitation for us to rise also. Like the sound of reveille, it calls us to the battles of the spirit, and invites us to rouse and renew ourselves, to participate ever more profoundly in Christ's Resurrection. Who can say, however advanced he may be in the ways of the spirit, that he has wholly attained to his resurrection?

2. We read in today's Gospel the very beautiful story of the disciples at Emmaus (*Lk 24,13-35*). Here we find the earnest supplication : "Stay with us, because it is towards evening, and the day is now far spent."

Stay with us, Lord! It is the cry of the soul who has found its God and never again wishes to be separated from Him. Let us too, as the disciples at Emmaus, go in search of the Lord. Our whole life is a continuous journey toward Him, and we are often sad, even as they were, because we do not succeed in finding Him, because, not understanding His mysterious ways, it seems that He has abandoned us. "We hoped that it was He that should have redeemed Israel...but..." said the two disciples, frustrated by the death of Jesus, and not perceiving that Jesus, at the very moment when they were about to relinquish all hope, was there close to them, disguised as their fellow traveler. We have often shared this experience of Him. Hidden in the obscurity of faith, God draws near our soul, makes Himself our traveling companion, and still more, lives in us by grace. It is true that here below He does not reveal Himself in the clarity of the "face to face" vision which is reserved for eternity; we see Him only as "through a glass in a dark manner" (*1 Cor 13,12*); nevertheless, God knows how to make Himself known. To us as to the disciples at Emmaus, His presence is revealed in an obscure manner; yes, but unmistakably, because of the unique ardor which He alone can kindle in our hearts. "Was not our heart burning within us whilst He spoke in the way?" The soul who has found the Lord, even but once in this manner, not outside itself, but within itself, living and acting in its heart, cannot fail to direct to Him the cry : "Stay with me!"

Yet this cry is already heard, it is already a permanent reality, because God always dwells with a soul in the state of grace. God is always with us, even when we do not feel Him, even when we do not notice His presence. God is there, God remains with us; it is for us to remain with Him. If at certain moments He permits Himself to be recognized by our soul, He does so just to invite us to dwell with Him in His intimacy. Let us, therefore, beg Him ardently : teach us, O Lord, to stay with You, to live with You.

## COLLOQUY

"O my hope, my Father, my Creator, true God and Brother, when I think of what You said—that Your delights are to be with the children of men—my soul rejoices greatly. O Lord of heaven and earth, how can any sinner, after hearing such words, still despair? Do You lack souls in whom to delight, Lord, that You seek so unsavory a worm as I?... O what exceeding mercy! What favor far beyond our deserving!

"Rejoice, O my soul... and since the Lord finds His delights in you, may all things on earth not suffice to make you cease to delight in Him and rejoice in the greatness of your God.

"I desire neither the world, nor anything that is worldly; and nothing seems to give me pleasure but You; everything else seems to me a heavy cross.

"O my God, I am afraid, and with good reason, that You may forsake me; for I know well how little my strength and insufficiency of virtue can achieve, if You are not always granting me Your grace and helping me not to forsake You. It seems to me, my Lord, that it would be impossible for me to leave You.... But as I have done it so many times I cannot but fear, for when You withdraw but a little from me I fall utterly to the ground. But blessed may You be forever, O Lord! For though I have forsaken You, You have not so completely forsaken me as not to raise me up again by continually giving me Your hand.... Remember my great misery, O Lord, and look upon my weakness, since You know all things" (*T.J. Exc, 7 - Life, 6*).

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*WHOM SEEK YOU?*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Lord, may I always seek You alone, and seeking You, may I have the grace to find You.

**MEDITATION**

1. In the Masses of Easter week the Gospels recount the various apparitions of the risen Jesus; the first, and one of the most moving, is that to Mary Magdalen (*Jn* 20,11-18). In this episode Mary appears with her characteristic trait, that of a soul completely possessed by the love of God. When she reaches the sepulcher, she has scarcely seen "the stone rolled away," before she is seized with one only anxiety : "They have taken away my Lord." Who could have taken Him? Where could they have put Him? She repeats these questions to everyone she meets, supposing that they are filled with a like apprehension. She tells it to Peter and John who come running to see for themselves; she tells it to the Angels, and she tells it even to Jesus. The other women, finding the sepulcher open, go in to find out what has happened, but Magdalen runs off quickly to bring the news to the Apostles. Then she returns. What will she do near that empty tomb? She does not know, but love has impelled her to return, and it keeps her at the place where the body of the Master had been, the body that she wants to find at any cost.

She sees the Angels, but she does not marvel or become frightened like the other women; she is so possessed by her grief that there is no room in her soul for other emotions. When the Angels ask her : "Woman, why weepest thou?" she has only one answer : "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." Later, Jesus asks her the same question and Mary, absorbed in her same thoughts, does not even recognize Him, but "thinking that it was the gardener," she says to Him : "Sir, if thou hast taken Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." The thought of finding Jesus so occupies her mind that she does not even

feel the need of giving His name; it seems to her that everyone must be thinking of Him, that everyone would understand immediately—as though everyone were in the same state of mind as she.

When love of God and desire for Him have taken full possession of a soul, there is no longer room in it for other loves, other desires, other preoccupations. All its movements are directed to God, and through all things the soul does nothing but seek God alone.

2. "If a soul seeks for God, her Beloved seeks for her even more" (*J.C. LF*, 3,28). Mary sought with much love, and lo! the Lord Himself seeks her, and seeks her calling, "Mary!" Although He has risen gloriously, Jesus is always the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep individually; and He " calleth His own sheep by name... and the sheep follow Him because they know His voice" (*Jn 10,3,4*). When Mary hears her name, she recognizes the Lord and cries: "Rabboni! Master!"

Once again Mary is at the feet of Jesus, her favorite place. We saw her in the same attitude at Bethany, while Martha was busy preparing the meal. We remember her in the house of Simon the leper, the Saturday before the Passion, when she broke the vase of precious ointment, pouring it over the feet of Jesus, bathing those feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair. We met her again at the foot of the Cross, unwilling to tear herself away from the Crucified. Always it is the same ardent love which makes her forgetful, makes her indifferent to everything else. Mary seeks only the Lord, she wants Him and Him alone; the rest does not interest her, does not concern her.

She wanted to clasp those sacred feet again and remain there in loving contemplation, but Jesus said to her gently: "Do not touch Me!" Without doubt the Lord reveals Himself and gives Himself to the soul that seeks Him, but at the same time He always remains God, the Most High, the Inaccessible: "Do not touch Me!" Although admitted to divine intimacy, the soul should not lose the sense of the transcendence of God, and of the infinite distance that lies between the creature and the Creator, between the one who is not and the One who is. Thus, the nearer the soul comes to God, the more it realizes this infinite distance, and together with confidence and love, there is born in it

a profound sentiment of reverence for the supreme majesty of God.

"Whom seekest thou?" It is to each one of us, as to Mary Magdalen, that Jesus addresses this question today. Can we reply that we are seeking Him alone? Jesus appeared to Mary who "loved Him much" before appearing to the other holy women. If we wish to find the Lord quickly, we must love Him much and seek Him with great love.

#### COLLOQUY

"O Lord Jesus Christ, how good, blissful and desirable it is to feel the violence of Your love! Ah! enlighten my heart every day with the rays of this love, dissipate the darkness of my mind, illuminate the secret places in my heart, strengthen and inflame my intellect, and rejoice and fortify my soul! Oh! how tender is Your mercy, how great and sweet Your love, O Lord Jesus Christ. You lavish Your love to be enjoyed by those who love none but You, and who think of nothing but You! Loving us first, You invite us to love You; You delight us and draw us, so great is the power of Your love. Nothing invites us, nothing delights and attracts us more than this kind attention of love; the heart, which at first was torpid, feels itself inflamed; and the heart that is fervent, when it knows it is loved and has been loved by You, it becomes still more ardent.

"O most loving Lord Jesus Christ, although You have loved me inexpressibly, I, a wicked sinner, enclosing in my bosom a heart of stone and iron, have not recognized Your burning love; and even though I desired Your affection, I did not want to love You. Deign, then, to come to my aid, O most merciful Lord Jesus Christ, and by the violence of Your most sweet love, force my rebellious soul to love You, so that I may serve You in peace and attain the unending life of love" (Ven. R. Giordano).

*THE LIVING WATER*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, my soul thirsts for You, the source of living water; grant that I may draw near You and drink!

## MEDITATION

1. Jesus stated on several occasions that He was the fountain of living water for all who believed in Him, and He invited souls to draw near this spring because, as He said to the Samaritan woman, "He that shall drink of the water that I will give him, shall not thirst forever" (*Jn* 4,13). The most solemn invitation to drink from this fountain, however, was given by Jesus, during the last year of His ministry, to the crowd which thronged the Temple on the Feast of Tabernacles. Standing erect in the midst of the crowd, He said in a loud voice : "If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink. He that believeth in Me ... within him shall flow rivers of living water" (*ibid.* 7,37-38). The thirst of which Jesus was speaking is the thirst for truth, for justice, the thirst for peace and true happiness, and above all the thirst for God, the keen, ardent desire for Him. The soul who has tried to drink at the spring of earthly delights has found that they do not serve to quench its thirst; instead, if they have given the soul a tiny drop of truth, justice, peace, and joy, they have left it more thirsty than before. Only then does the soul understand that God alone is the fountain which can quench its thirst. But what is this water of which Jesus declares that He is the source and which He promises to all? It is the life-giving water of grace, the only water capable of quenching our thirst for the infinite, because, by making us sharers in the divine nature, it permits us to enter into intimate relations with God; it permits us to live with the Trinity dwelling in our soul; in a word, it opens the door to divine intimacy.

St. John Chrysostom teaches : "When the grace of the Holy Spirit enters a soul and is established there, it gushes forth more powerfully than any other spring; it neither ceases, dries up, nor is exhausted. And the Savior, to

signify this inexhaustible gift of grace, calls it a spring and a torrent; He also calls it gushing water, to indicate its force and impetus." The power of grace is so great that it can cast the soul into God and bring it to divine intimacy and union, first in this life, by faith and love, and then in heaven, by the Beatific Vision.

2. Mortification frees the soul from every obstacle which might retard the growth of grace, which might hinder the soul's love for God and its flight toward Him; whereas prayer which consists essentially in intimate conversation with God feeds this love and quickens this flight. Mortification prepares a suitable place for a loving meeting with God; prayer effects this meeting, and by placing the soul in real contact with God, the source of living water, it quenches its thirst and reanimates it. It is in this sense that the saints, and particularly the contemplative saints, have always seen in the living water promised by Jesus, not only sanctifying grace, but also those special graces of light and love which are its consequences and which the soul attains to in prayer, in the moments of intimate contact with God. This light and love are not the fruit of the activity of the soul alone; but rather, God Himself, by means of the actuation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, infuses them into the soul, causing it to acquire a completely new "sense" of God. This does not mean new ideas and concepts, but rather an experimental knowledge derived from love—especially from the love which God Himself awakens in the soul. It means a profound "sense" of the divinity, by means of which the soul becomes aware—not by reasoning or demonstration, but more by way of experience—that God is so different from creatures, so unique, so great, that He truly deserves all the love of the heart. This new way of loving God, this new experience of God and divine things is really living water which quenches the soul's thirst. It is the living water of prayer, which, as a result of divine action, has now become deeper, more intimate, more contemplative; it is the living water of contemplation. This contemplation is a gift of God. "He gives it," says St. Teresa of Jesus, "when and as He wishes" (*Life*, 34). Although He offers it to all, in one form or another, He will grant it only to those souls who apply themselves generously to mortification and prayer.

**COLLOQUY**

“ O Truth, light of my soul, do not permit the darkness to frighten me. You have allowed me to walk in it, and now I am in obscurity. But even from the darkness, yes, even from there, I have loved You. I have sinned, and I have remembered You. I have heard Your voice behind me, inviting me to come back; I heard it with difficulty because of the noise of my rebellious passions. Here I am again at Your spring, burning with thirst. Let nothing hold me back henceforth! Let me drink at Your spring, and live....

“ As the heart pants after the fountain, so does my soul sigh for You, Lord! My soul thirsts for You, O God, the living source; when shall I go to appear in Your presence? ’ O fount of life, vein of living water, when shall I reach the waters of Your sweetness in this desert land, dry and full of rocks, and see Your power and glory, and quench my thirst with the waters of Your mercy? I thirst, O Lord, I thirst for You, living fountain....

“ O fire that ever burns and is never consumed, enkindle me! O Light that shineth ever and is never veiled, illumine me! Oh! if I could only burn with Your flame, O sacred fire! How gently You burn; how secretly You shine; how wonderful it is to be enkindled by You! Woe to those who do not burn with Your love! Woe to those who are not illuminated by You, O true Light that enlighteneth every man, O Light that filleth the world with Your brightness!

“ I give You thanks, who illumine me and deliver me, for You have enlightened me and I have known You. Late have I known You, O ancient Truth; late have I known You, O eternal Truth! You were in the light and I was in darkness, and I did not know You, for I had no light without You, and without You, there is no light!”  
(St. Augustine).

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*GOD INVITES ALL SOULS*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Lord, I answer Your invitation, I run to Your fountain : quench my thirst!

**MEDITATION**

1. Commenting on the invitation of Jesus : " If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink " (*Jn 7,37*), St. Teresa of Avila says, " Consider that the Lord calls everyone. Now, He is Truth itself, we cannot doubt His word. If His invitation were not addressed to all, He would not call all of us.... But, as He puts no restriction on it... I am certain that all who do not stop on the way will drink this living water " (*Way*, 19). Therefore, it is not amiss for an interior soul to aspire to contemplation; in fact, it would be logical, since the Lord offers it to everyone, and since contemplation is a great means of introducing us into divine intimacy, of making us understand and enjoy the infinite greatness of God, of filling us with love for Him, and of quenching all thirst for earthly things. If Jesus has offered this living water to all souls, and if it is so precious, why should we not desire it?

However, the Saint instructs us to desire it without pretension, in humility and full abandonment to the divine will. God alone is Master of His gifts, and it is His privilege to distribute them to souls in the form and amount, and at the time He wishes. " God gives them as He wishes, when He wishes, and to whom He wishes, without prejudice to anyone " (*Int C IV*, 1). St. Teresa clarifies any mistaken ideas we may have in this regard. To demand the favor of contemplation from God, would be exposing ourselves to illusions and deceptions. Besides, it would be a true sin of pride to interfere with the divine plans. Nevertheless, when a soul gives itself generously to God, He, who never lets Himself be outdone in generosity, will not refuse it at least a few sips of the living water which He offers to everyone.

2. " God does not force anyone, " says St. Teresa of Jesus, " but to those who follow Him, He gives them to drink in

many ways, so that none may lack comfort or die of thirst" (*Way*, 20). This tells us that there are many forms and degrees of contemplation. In order to give us a better understanding of this, the Saint compares contemplation to "an abundant fountain from which spring many streams, some small, others large, and there are also little pools" (*ibid.*). The Lord invites everyone and gives water to all, but He does not reveal to us from what kind of stream we are called to drink. He does not tell us at what moment of our life we shall drink, and much less is He obliged to make us drink from a big stream rather than from a little one. There have been saints, like Teresa of Jesus, who drank abundantly; there have been others, like Thérèse of Lisieux, who have partaken only of a tiny rivulet, and yet both types have attained sanctity. Just as several streams may rise from the same source and all contain the same water, although they are not all of the same size, so there are many varied forms of contemplation: some are sweet, others arid; some give great clarity and ineffable sweetness, while others are obscure, even painful, although no less useful to the soul. Despite the varying degrees, it is essentially the same life-giving water which plunges the soul into God, makes it penetrate the divine mystery, and makes it understand the All of God and the nothingness of the creature; it is the same life-giving water which opens the way to divine intimacy and conducts the soul to sanctity.

Yes, God gives "to whom He wishes, as He wishes, when He wishes." This statement concerns the form and the degree of contemplation, as well as the time when it will be granted, all of which depends solely on God. However, St. Teresa assures us that God never refuses this life-giving water to anyone who "seeks it in the right way." Therefore, it depends on us, too, and our part consists in disposing ourselves in such a way that God will not find us unworthy of His gifts.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a complete treatise on this subject, see the posthumous work of FR. GABRIEL OF ST. MARY MAGDALEN. *La via dell'orazione*, Carmelo S. Giuseppe, Rome, 1955.

## COLLOQUY

"O compassionate and tender Sovereign of my soul! You also say : ' If anyone thirst, let him come to Me, and I will give him to drink. '

"Oh! how our souls need this water! I know, O my God, that out of Your bounty You will give it to us. You Yourself have promised it, and Your words cannot fail. Knowing our weakness, You, in Your mercy, have increased Your help. But You have not said, ' Let some come this way and others that way. ' On the contrary, Your bounty is so great that You have not forbidden anyone to drink from this fountain of life. Be forever blessed for this! How justly could You have forbidden me! But since you did not bid me go away from this fountain when I had begun to slake my thirst there, nor cast me into the abyss, You certainly will not drive anyone away from it. You call all souls with a loud voice.

"O Lord, You told the Samaritan woman that he who drinks of this water will not thirst forever. Oh! How true are these words spoken by You, Truth itself! The soul who drinks this water never thirsts for the things of this life, but it does thirst more and more with the desire to possess You and a desire for eternal things. How it thirsts to have this thirst which brings with it a sweetness which softens its difficulties, for as it quenches the desire for the things of earth, it fills the soul with celestial goods. When, O God, You condescend to quench our thirst with this water, one of the greatest graces You can give the soul is to still leave it thirsting. Every time it drinks this water, it always ardently desires to drink still more of it.

"This water is so potent that it always increases the fire of Your love. O great God! how marvelous is the fire which is enkindled more and more by water, a water which activates the fire of love in souls!

"O Lord, give me to drink of this water, and I shall never thirst again! O my Lord! How good it is for me to be engulfed in this living water, and to lose my life in it! O You who have promised it to us, give us the grace to seek it as we should" (*T.J. Exc, 9 - Way, 20 - 19*).

*OUR PREPARATION*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Lord, make me generous and faithful in Your service; grant that I may never put an obstacle to Your action in me.

**MEDITATION**

1. The fount of living water, from which springs the loving experience of God and contemplative light, is really the operation of the Holy Spirit acting in the soul by the actuation of His gifts. Since at Baptism we have all received the gifts of the Holy Spirit—those supernatural dispositions that make us capable of receiving the divine activity—it is clear that God has given them to us, not that they may remain inoperative, but that they may be put into action. Hence their actuation cannot be considered extraordinary, but connatural; and this to such a point that the loving experience of God and the contemplative light which comes from it cannot be considered extraneous to the full development of grace. In other words, if a soul opens itself generously to the action of grace, if it seconds this action with all good will, it can well think that the Lord will not refuse to give it at least a few drops of living water, that is, some form of contemplative knowledge. St. Teresa strongly affirms this and says, "We must not be afraid that we shall die of thirst. On this road, the water of consolation never fails" (*Way*, 20); but we must understand that the "road" of which the Saint speaks is the road of total giving, of unlimited generosity which never says, "This is too much," of generosity which gives itself without counting the cost, and perseveres in spite of the hardships on the road, the interior aridity, and the exterior difficulties.

If it be right that a soul who feels itself called to divine intimacy appreciate and long for contemplation, it cannot be wrong for it to try to prepare itself for it. Many souls are refused this grace by God simply because He does not find them suitably disposed. It is, therefore, necessary

for us to work, so that we shall not be deprived of contemplation through our own fault. On the other hand, if we have done all that depends on us as best we can, we should not fear that our work will be wasted; sooner or later, in one way or another, the Lord will always give us to drink.

2. In speaking of the spiritual atmosphere in which contemplation usually flourishes, Teresa of Jesus suggests, first of all, an intense practice of virtue, especially total detachment and profound humility. We must note that she does not mean any kind of practice, but exacts that it be a very generous practice, and even requires that it be really heroic. The reason is this : as contemplation is a free gift of God, it requires generosity on our part. Souls who are not generous are precisely the ones who will never experience it. This is always the great principle which the Saint inculcates : "God refuses to force our will; He takes what we give Him. But He will not give Himself wholly until we have given ourselves wholly to Him" (*Way*, 28).

In addition to this atmosphere of generosity, there is also required a gentle and constant application to recollection and prayer. The more a soul knows how to be recollected in God, making its prayer and its vital contact with Him always more intimate and profound, the more apt it will be to receive the divine motions. Here then, in synthesis, is what our preparation ought to be : on the one hand, an intense exercise of mortification, abnegation, and detachment —and this is the practice of the virtues<sup>1</sup>—and on the other hand, an intense application to the life of prayer.

Of course, in preparing for contemplation, we do not intend to make it the end of our spiritual life. The goal is always love, for sanctity consists essentially in the perfection of charity. Nevertheless, contemplation is a very potent means of bringing us quickly to the plenitude of love, and it is for this reason that we desire it. Our life is a journey toward God, a continual tending, a continual directing of all our energies toward Him. Happy the soul who is strongly attracted to God! Her way is much quicker and easier. This is the great help which contemplation, properly speaking,

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<sup>1</sup> This subject was fully treated in the first part of this work; here we shall take up the subject of prayer.

gives us. Summarily then, we understand that we must prepare ourselves for it, not to enjoy its sweetness, but to enter fully into the way of divine intimacy, into the way of perfect love, since nothing can direct us toward God and His glory as much as this loving experience and contemplative light which are the essence of contemplation.

#### COLLOQUY

“ My God, if You desire to enter my soul to find Your delight in it and to shower it with blessings, there is only one thing necessary : the soul must be simple, pure, and desirous of receiving You. But if, instead of clearing the way, we place many obstacles in it, how can You enter? How do we expect You to give us Your graces?

“ It is really astonishing! We are still full of faults and imperfections, virtue has scarcely taken root in us—and please God that it has begun!—we are barely able to walk; yet we are not ashamed to complain about aridity and to look for consolation in prayer!

“ But Lord, You know better than I what is good for me; I do not have to advise You what to give me, because You could justly tell me that I do not know what I am asking. I want to give myself to prayer and to prepare myself to receive Your gifts; my one ambition must be to work, with all the diligence possible, to strengthen this resolution and to be ready to conform my will to Yours. O my God, You have taught me that the highest perfection to be attained in the spiritual way consists in this. The more perfect this conformity is, the more You will overwhelm me with favors and the more progress I shall make ” (*T.J. Life*, 8 – *Int C II*, 1). Grant, then, O Lord, that I may make generous resolutions, and give myself unreservedly to You, without any division. You are waiting for this, so that You may come and finish Your work.

“ I am Yours, O my God! Do what You wish with me and lead me by whatever path suits You. If, with Your help, I am really humble and detached from everything, You will not fail to grant me the gift of prayer, and many others in addition, which will far exceed my desires ” (*cf. T.J. Int C IV*, 2).

*PRAYER*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, I come to ask of You the true spirit of prayer.

**MEDITATION**

1. Prayer is essentially an intimate conversation with God in which the soul seeks His presence, so that it may speak with Him in a friendly and affectionate way. It is a child talking with its Father, a friend conversing with his Friend. From its very nature, then, prayer is something intimate and interior. "For me," said St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, "prayer is an uplifting of the heart, a glance toward heaven, a cry of gratitude and of love in times of sorrow as well as of joy" (*St*, 11). In this perspective we must understand the traditional definition of prayer : *elevatio mentis ad Deum*, the raising of the mind to God, and not only the mind, but also, and especially, the heart. Prayer may be a silent movement of the mind, or simply a cry, a request, a colloquy; in these latter motions are verified the other aspects of prayer : *pia locutio ad Deum*, a pious conversation with God, and *petitio decentium a Deo*, a confident request for His graces.

Whatever form it takes, true prayer is not complicated or constrained; it is the breath of the soul that loves its God, the habitual attitude of the heart which tends toward God. The soul seeks Him, wants to live with Him, knows that every benefit, every help, comes from Him. Thus, spontaneously, without even thinking about it, the soul passes from the simple elevation toward God to the prayer of petition or to intimate colloquy, to arrive finally at the transport of the heart, the glance toward heaven. Prayer understood in this way is always possible, in all kinds of circumstances and in the midst of varying occupations; furthermore, for a soul who really loves God, it would be as impossible for it to interrupt prayer as it would be for it to stop breathing. We can thus understand how everyone, even those living in the world, can fulfill the words

of the Gospel : " Pray always " (*Lk* 18,1). The one condition necessary is to have a heart capable of loving; the stronger and more vigorous this love is, the deeper and more continuous will the prayer be.

2. Although it may be a simple matter, it is not always easy to pray and to pray well. It is an art to be learned by studying the various forms and methods of prayer, or better still, by diligently applying ourselves to prayer itself. While the essence of prayer is always the interior movement, the elevation of mind and heart to God, the forms of it differ : there is vocal prayer and mental prayer, discursive prayer and affective prayer, private prayer and liturgical prayer. We employ one or another of these, in conformity with what is required by our duties. Thus, for example, all Christians are bound to certain vocal and liturgical prayers, such as morning and evening prayers, attendance at Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation; but after that, we are free to choose, according to the particular attraction of the moment, special circumstances, or individual needs. All these forms are good and serve to nourish our love for God, provided that we really put ourselves in touch with Him. We should always be careful about this point, because it is the substance of prayer; and if this were lacking, the form would be useless, and God could say of us : " This people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me " (*Mt* 15,8).

However, a soul aspiring to divine intimacy will turn spontaneously toward a wholly interior form of prayer, a form which will facilitate an intimate contact with God, a silent, profound union. All forms of prayer will assume this special characteristic of interiority. Therefore, through vocal and liturgical prayer, as well as through mental prayer, the soul will make its way toward God and dispose itself for an ever-increasing intimacy with Him, until God Himself, by means of the loving experience and the contemplative light, will introduce it into a prayer which is more profound and capable of immersing it in Him.

**COLLOQUY**

"Grant, O good Jesus, that my soul may always fly toward You, that my entire life may be one continual act of love. Make me understand that any work which is not done in Your honor is a dead work. Grant that my piety may not become just a habit, but a continual elevation of my heart!"

"O my Jesus, supreme Goodness, I ask of you a heart so enraptured with You that nothing can distract it. I wish to become indifferent to everything that goes on in the world, and to want You alone, to love everything that refers to You, but You above everything else, O my God! And my spirit, O Lord, my spirit—grant that it may be zealous in seeking You and may succeed in finding You, O sovereign Wisdom!" (St. Thomas).

O Lord, give me a heart which will love You, seek You uncompromisingly, always long for You, and have no other desire than to be closely united to You.

"May my soul languish and sigh for You; my heart and my senses cry eagerly for You, O living God. As the sparrow has found herself a house, and the turtledove a nest, so do I long to dwell near Your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God! Blessed are they that dwell in Your house, O Lord, and who pray to You always!" (cf. Ps 83,1-5). I also, from morning until night, wish to chant in the temple of my heart hymns of praise and love in Your honor, O Most High God, who condescend to dwell in me. If my tongue is silent or occupied with other discourses, if my mind and body are busy working, my heart is always free to love You and to turn toward You at every instant, in every action. O Lord, I beg this great grace of You : may I always seek You in the depths of my soul and unite myself to You in the affection of my heart.

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*THE PASCHAL HARVEST*

LOW SUNDAY

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Jesus, I come to You like Thomas; grant that I may not be unbelieving, but faithful.

## MEDITATION

1. Today's liturgy is concerned in a very special way with the newly baptized, who, at the close of Easter week, laid aside the white garments which they had received at the baptismal font. It is actually to them that St. Peter addressed his affectionate recommendation which we read in the Introit of the Mass : "As newborn babes, desire the pure spiritual milk." These words continue to express the maternal solicitude of the Church for the children whom she has regenerated in Christ, and especially for the newly born. We, too, are the object of this solicitude. Although we were baptized as infants, we can say that every Easter regenerates us in Christ by means of our spiritual resurrection in Him. Therefore, we also must be like "newborn babes," in whom there is no malice, deceit, pride, or presumption, but only candor and simplicity, confidence and love. This is a wonderful invitation to the spiritual childhood which Jesus told us is an indispensable condition for attaining salvation : "Unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (*Mt 18,3*). Each wave of grace purifies and cleanses our soul from sin and its roots, giving us rebirth to a new life in Christ, a pure, innocent life, which craves only "the pure spiritual milk" of the doctrine of Christ, His love and His grace. Today, however, the Church wishes to turn our desires in a very special way toward faith : that faith which makes us cling to Jesus so as to be taught by Him, and nourished and guided toward eternal life. The Master's words upon which we meditated last week are equally appropriate here : "He that believeth in Me... from within him shall flow rivers of living water..."

springing up into life everlasting" (*Jn* 7,38-4,14). Let us draw near to Jesus with the simple, sincere faith of a little child, and He will give us the abundance of His grace as a pledge of eternal life.

2. Today's Gospel (*Jn* 20,19-31) has the particular value of strengthening us in our faith.

Thomas' doubt confirms us in the faith, for as St. Gregory says, "His disbelief was more useful to us than the faith of the other Apostles." If he had not doubted, no man would have "put his finger in the wounds of the nails, nor his hand into the side" of Our Lord. Jesus had pity on the tottering faith of the Apostle, and on ours, too; and He allowed him not only to see Him, as He had allowed the others, but also to touch Him, thereby permitting Thomas, the incredulous, to do what He had not permitted Mary Magdalen, the most faithful one. From this incident we derive a better understanding of God's ways. Whereas He gives sensible consolations and more or less palpable signs of His presence to souls who are still wavering in the faith, He often leads by very obscure paths those who have irreversibly given themselves to Him and on whose faith He can count. God is a Father. He never denies to any soul who seeks Him with sincerity the necessary props to support its faith, but He often refuses to the strong what He grants to the weak. Is this not Jesus' own teaching : "Blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed"? Blessed are they who, in order to believe in God, do not need to see Him or to touch Him and do not require sensible signs, but who can unreservedly affirm : *Scio cui credidi*, "I know whom I have believed" (*2 Tm* 1,12), and I am sure of Him. Faith such as this is more meritorious for us, because, being founded solely on the word of God, it is entirely supernatural. It shows greater honor to God, because it gives Him full credence, without demanding any proof, and because it perseveres even in obscurity and in the midst of the most disconcerting events—even when it seems that heaven is closed and the Lord is deaf to our groanings.

Such a strong faith as this is certainly the fruit of divine grace, but we must prepare ourselves to receive it, both by asking for it in prayer, and by exercising ourselves in this same faith.

## COLLOQUY

My God, give me a simple, pure heart, free of malice and hypocrisy. "O Lord, grant me true purity and simplicity : in my looks, words, heart, intentions, works, and in all my interior and exterior acts. I should like to know, O Lord, what there is in me that impedes these virtues. I shall tell you, O my soul, since I cannot make anyone else understand. Do you know that the obstacle is the smallest glance that is not directed to God, and all the words that are not spoken in praise of Him or for the benefit of your neighbor. Do you know how you drive these virtues out of your heart? You banish them every time you fail to have the pure intention of honoring God or helping your neighbor; you also expel them when you try to cover up and excuse your faults, forgetting that God sees everything, including your heart. O Lord, give me real purity and true simplicity, for You cannot find Your rest in a soul which is without them" (cf. St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

O Lord, cleanse my heart and lips in the fire of Your charity, so that I may love You and seek You with the purity and simplicity of a child. Give me also the simple faith of a child, faith without a shadow, without uncertainty or useless reasoning; an upright, pure faith which finds its satisfaction in Your word, in your testimony, for in this it is at peace and desires nothing else.

"O Lord, what is it to me whether I feel or do not feel, whether I am in darkness or in light, whether I have joy or suffering, when I can be recollected in the light created in me by Your words? I feel a kind of shame in differentiating between such matters, and while I feel that I am still affected by them, I heartily despise myself for my want of love, but I quickly turn my gaze upon you, my divine Master, to be delivered by You.... I will exalt You above Your sweetness and sensible consolations, for I am resolved to pass by all else in order to be united with You" (cf. E.T. II, 4).

*VOCAL PRAYER*

PRESENCE OF GOD - Lord, teach me to pray!

## MEDITATION

1. When one of His disciples said to Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray" (*Lk 11,1*), He taught them a very simple vocal prayer : the *Our Father*. It is certainly the most sublime formula possible and contains the whole essence of the most elevated mental prayer. However, Jesus gave it as a formula for vocal prayer : "When you pray, say . . ." (*ibid. 11,2*). This is enough to make us understand the value and importance of vocal prayer, which is within the reach of everyone—even children, the uneducated, the sick, the weary.... But we must realize that vocal prayer does not consist only in the repetition of a certain formula. If this were true, we should have a recitation but not a prayer, for prayer always requires a movement, an elevation of the soul toward God. In this sense, Jesus instructed His disciples : "When thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret.... And when you are praying, speak not much as the heathens" (*Mt 6,6.7*). It is interesting to note that in St. Matthew these prescriptions concerning the exterior and interior dispositions necessary for well-made prayer immediately precede the teaching of the *Pater Noster*.

Therefore, in order that our vocal prayer be real prayer, we must first recollect ourselves in the presence of God, approach Him, and make contact with Him. Only when we have such dispositions will the words we pronounce with our lips express our interior devotion and be able to sustain and nourish it. Unfortunately, inclined as we are to grasp the material part of things instead of the spiritual, it is only too easy in our vocal prayer to content ourselves with a mechanical recitation, without taking care to direct our heart to God; hence we should always be vigilant and alert. Vocal prayer made only by the lips dissipates and wearies the soul instead of recollecting it in God; it cannot be said that this is a means of uniting us more closely to Him.

2. St. Teresa wanted to educate souls and to dispose them for intimate converse with God. Thus, she orientates vocal prayer to this end by saying : " I shall always recommend you to join vocal prayer with mental prayer " (*Way*, 22). She explains her idea in this way : " If while I am speaking with God, I have a clear realization that I am doing so, and if this is more real to me than the words I am uttering, then I am uniting mental prayer to vocal prayer " (*ibid.*). The Saint does not mean that we should disregard the care which is demanded by the recitation, and which is of great importance—especially in liturgical prayer like the Divine Office—but she does mean that the most important thing is to be always attentive to God. Especially when we are saying prayers of some length, it is almost impossible to give our attention to the meaning of all the words, but it is always possible to keep ourselves in the presence of God while reciting them. We can nourish the desire to praise God, or to unite ourselves to Him, to implore His help in general, or to ask for a particular grace, each according to his own actual dispositions. A general thought about the meaning of the words might be sufficient, or a simple glance at God to whom we are addressing our prayer. In short, it is not only a question of reciting words, but also of being with God. This is why the Saint insists : " You should consider [before praying] who it is that you are addressing, and who you are, if only that you may speak to Him with respect... " (*ibid.*); and this, she concludes, is already to make mental prayer. This does not mean, of course, intense mental prayer, such as we make at the time devoted exclusively to this prayer, without any attempt to recite vocally. Still it is mental prayer in the sense that the mind and heart are orientated to God and that we are trying to get into close contact with Him by means of it.

Vocal prayer practiced in this way has great value : first, because it is made in a manner very becoming and respectful toward the majesty of God, and secondly, because it gradually accustoms the soul to mental prayer, to intimate converse with Him.

## COLLOQUY

"Never permit it to be thought right, my God, that those who come to speak with You do it with their lips alone.

"I must not be unmannerly because You are good, addressing You in the same careless way I might adopt in speaking to a peasant. If only to show You my gratitude for enduring my foul odor and allowing one like myself to come near You, it is well that I should try to realize who You are....

"O my Emperor, Supreme Power, Supreme Goodness, Wisdom itself, without beginning, without end, and without measure in Your works; infinite are these and incomprehensible, a fathomless ocean of wonders, O Beauty, containing within Yourself all beauties. O very Strength. God help me. Would that I could command all the eloquence of mortals and all wisdom, so as to understand, as far as is possible here below, that to know nothing is everything, and thus to describe some of the many things on which we may meditate in order to learn something of Your nature, my Lord and my God.

"When we approach You, then, let us try to realize who You are with whom we are about to speak. If we had a thousand lives we should never fully understand what are Your merits, Lord, and how we should behave before You, before whom the angels tremble.... We cannot approach a prince and address him in a careless way. Shall less respect be paid then to You, my Spouse, than to men?... I cannot distinguish mental prayer from vocal prayer when faithfully recited with a realization that it is You, O Lord, that we are addressing. Further, are we not under the obligation of trying to pray attentively?" (T.J. Way, 22-24).

*MEDITATIVE READING*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Lord, teach me to seek You, even when my heart is dry and my mind distracted.

**MEDITATION**

1. The simplest way of conversing with God is certainly vocal prayer, properly made; but as the soul progresses in the spiritual life, it is natural for it to feel the need of a more interior prayer, of one that is more intimate; and so it spontaneously turns toward mental prayer. If the divine attraction takes hold of the soul by giving it some sensible devotion, no difficulty is experienced in becoming recollected in God; on the contrary, this exercise becomes extremely easy and pleasant. But it is quite different when the soul is left to itself, especially if an excessive activity of the imagination makes thoughts on a definite subject almost impossible. St. Teresa remarks that there are many who suffer from these continual wanderings of the mind, in which "they go here and there, and are always upset, whether the fault is in their own nature, or whether God permits it" (*Way*, 19).

Those who are in this condition are easily tempted to give up mental prayer, which has become so painful that they find it almost impossible. The Saint has an entirely different opinion, and insists that even these can apply themselves to mental prayer with profit, although they ought to do it in a somewhat special way. This way consists in helping themselves by reading a book, which, she says, "will be a great help to recollection, and is practically indispensable; let them read, therefore, even if only a little, but let them read" (*Life*, 4).

This does not mean that we are to spend the time allotted to mental prayer in continual reading. Rather, we should use some devout book in which we can find, from time to time, a good thought which serves to recollect us in God, to put us in contact with Him. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, who suffered habitually from aridity, often used this

method. "In my helplessness," she said, "the Holy Scriptures and the *Imitation* are of the greatest assistance.... It is from the Gospels, however, that I derive most help in the time of prayer; I find in their pages all that my poor soul needs, and I am always discovering there new lights and hidden, mysterious meanings" (*St.*, 8).

2. St. Teresa of Jesus, who before she was raised to the highest states of contemplation had long known aridity and the torment of importunate thoughts during prayer, confesses : "I passed more than fourteen years unable to meditate, except with the help of a book.... With this help, I was able to collect my wandering thoughts, and the book acted like a bait to my soul. Often, I only needed to open the book; sometimes I read a little, at other times much, according to the favor which the Lord showed me" (*Way*, 17 — *Life*, 4).

It is important to choose a book which will arouse devotion, such as, in general, the writings of the saints. It will usually be preferable to take a book we have already read and one which we know will be helpful. We may even have marked some passages in it which have made an impression on us, whereas with a new book we would be somewhat lost, and perhaps exposed to the temptation of reading out of curiosity. We must avoid selecting authors who are too speculative, and choose instead those who are more practical and affective, since we are not interested in studying or learning but in *praying*, which consists much more in the exercise of love than in the work of the mind. Hence we should read, from time to time, only what is necessary to put the soul in a proper mood for conversing with God. As soon as we have read enough—and it may be only a sentence—to arouse in us good thoughts and holy affections which will occupy our mind devoutly, we must stop reading and turn our attention directly to God : meditating in His presence on the thoughts we have read, or savoring in silence the devotion they have awakened in our heart, or even speaking to Him the loving words inspired by the reading. Like birds, who, when they drink, bend their heads toward the water, take a few drops, and raising their beaks toward the sky, swallow gradually, and then begin again, let us also bend our heads toward the devout book to gather a few drops of devotion, and then let us raise them to God, so that our minds may be fully

impregnated with these thoughts. In this way, it will not be difficult to finish the prayer which we have begun by reading in an intimate colloquy with God.

### COLLOQUY

O Lord, teach me how to seek You! Do not hide from my eyes, for I need to find You, to converse with You, to approach You, O infinite Love, to be inflamed and attracted by You.

“Although I am but dust and ashes, shall I speak to You, O Lord? Yes, from this vale of tears, from this place of exile, I dare to raise my eyes and fix them on You, supreme Goodness! Just as faithful servants and handmaids watch attentively for the slightest sign from their masters, so my eyes are on Your hands, O Lord. I beg You, have mercy on me.

“O good God, have pity on the work of Your hands. I am incapable, Lord, of formulating by myself any good thought, since all my sufficiency comes from You; nor can I worthily invoke Your Name without the help of the Holy Spirit. May it please You, then, to send me Your Spirit, in order that the rays of Your light may shine down upon me from the height of heaven. Come, O sweet Holy Spirit; come, Father of the poor; come, dispenser of graces; come, light of hearts; come, wonderful comforter; come, sweet guest and refreshment of our souls. You are rest in toil, dew on a summer morning, consolation in sorrow. O blessed Light! fill the inmost places of my heart” (cf. St. Peter of Alcantara).

O Lord, enlighten my heart, for without Your light, without Your Spirit, even the holiest books leave me cold and dry and do not speak to me of You. When, on the contrary, You come to my aid and give me Your interior grace, then everything is illumined with a new light, and even the simplest words are food for my soul. Grant me then, O Lord, this grace, without which no reading, however sublime, can inspire me with devotion; no reasoning, however lofty, can move my heart to love You and my will to accomplish good.

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*MEDITATION*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - Inspire me, O Lord, with piety, so that I may learn how to converse with You in a spirit of real filial love.

**MEDITATION**

1. The teachings of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Jesus suggest a method of meditation which is especially well adapted for bringing souls to divine intimacy and preparing them for contemplation.

St. John of the Cross gives us the distinctive note of this method : "The end of meditation and mental consideration of divine things is," he says, "to obtain some knowledge and love of God" (*AS II*, 14,2). We see at once that the emphasis is not placed on the work of the intellect, nor on the "speculative knowledge" of God and of the truths of faith. Rather, it rests on "loving knowledge," which, of course, has its support in thought, but thought that is affectionate, permeated with love, and that surges from a loving heart. When we love a person, we come to know him intuitively, and thus, better and more easily than those who might study him more minutely, but without love.

St. Teresa of Jesus speaks in the same sense and says that prayer consists "not in thinking much, but in loving much" (*Int C IV*, 1). Thought is always subordinated to love. While we do think during the meditation, our purpose is not to become more learned, but to increase our ability to love God more. Consequently, the work of the mind will be orientated especially to the realization of God's love for us; and this, by reflection on the various manifestations of infinite love. It can well be said that there is no divine mystery or truth of faith which does not, in some way, speak of the excessive love of the Lord. The more we are convinced of this love, the more profound will be our "loving knowledge" of God; and at the same time, we shall feel an ever increasing impulse to return love to Him who has first loved us so greatly. Thus, meditation, the discourse of the intellect, will bring us spontaneously to the exercise of love. For this

reason we do not give the principal place in our prayer to reflection and reasoning, however lofty and sublime they may be; but we make use of them only insofar as is necessary to awaken love within us, to place us and maintain us in the actual exercise of love.

2. If in meditation we should not give first place to thought, neither should we go to the opposite extreme and neglect the necessary effort and application. We should apply the following method :

Even before reading the point of the meditation, we should take great care to put ourselves in the presence of God, seeking by means of an energetic act of the will to put aside all alien thoughts, all preoccupation and haste.

Mental prayer is an intimate conversation with God; but it is clear that we cannot treat intimately with Him if He is far from our minds and hearts. It is true that God is always present to us, but it is we who are not always present to Him. Therefore, we must establish contact with Our Lord, and place ourselves near Him, by a conscious realization of His presence. Each one of us can do this in the way which seems most suitable—either by considering the Most Holy Trinity dwelling in our heart, or by drawing near to Jesus present in the tabernacle, or perhaps by picturing to ourselves interiorly some episode in the life or the Passion of our Savior. Thus, in the presence of God and beneath His gaze, we read the point of the meditation tranquilly, and reflects upon it calmly and gently, not as if reasoning with ourselves, but rather as if speaking to God in whose presence we are. The more the soul becomes accustomed to this way of reflecting, that is, treating and developing the subject of our meditation with God, the more quickly will this method attain its end, which is to enable the soul to converse with the Lord, to speak affectionately with Him as a son speaks with its father, as a friend with a friend. Throughout the time of prayer application and effort are certainly needed; but these must be directed more to the sustaining of the soul in loving contact with God than to its preoccupation with abstract, narrow reasoning. The thoughts drawn from the meditation—and we may refer to the text whenever we feel the need of doing so—will serve to nourish this contact and to give the soul a subject for conversation with God. The work of the intellect must not make us forget that the essence

of prayer consists in an intimate communing with God in which an interchange of love, not reasoning, predominates.

#### COLLOQUY

"Teach me, O Lord, how to meditate; teach me to pray, for I can do neither the one nor the other as I should, and You alone can teach me. Give me ears to hear You in the reading and in the meditation; give me a tongue to speak with You in prayer. Inspire me with Your divine Spirit, so that He may enable me to know the subject on which I should reflect, what I should say and ask, and how I should ask in order to obtain it. Let the Holy Spirit teach me to groan in Your presence; or rather, may He Himself form in me those holy groanings which You always hear and never reject. Inspire me, O Lord, with a great love for Your divine truths and doctrines, so that when I read of them, I shall understand and relish them. Open my mind and my heart; make me faithfully believe what You teach and practice what You command" (an ancient author).

Above all, O Lord, grant that meditation on Your mysteries may serve to inflame me with Your holy love, so that I shall become more capable of loving You and more disposed to give myself generously to Your service. Teach me to meditate, not only with my mind, but especially with my heart; teach me to reflect devoutly and lovingly. Then, indeed, meditation will strike new sparks of love in my heart, and, as I hope, with Your grace, a flame will rise from it, ever stronger and more ardent, more and more able to purify my soul and to urge me ardently to accomplish Your will. How happy shall I be, O Lord, if at the powerful breath of the Holy Spirit, this flame should burst forth into a conflagration of divine love! My coldness, my meanness, my selfishness make me unworthy and incapable of this, but You who can raise up sons of Abraham even from stones, break my heart, so hard and cold, and light in it the living flame of Your love.

"O eternal God, You are eternal and infinite Goodness, no one can understand You or know You wholly, except insofar as You give him the grace to do so. And You give as much of this knowledge as we prepare our souls to receive. O sweet Love, all my life I have never loved You.

But my soul always longs for You; and the more it possesses You, so much the more it seeks You; the more it desires You, so much the more it finds You and relishes You, O sovereign, eternal fire, abyss of charity" (St. Catherine of Siena).

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*INTIMATE CONVERSE WITH GOD*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, although I am so unworthy, deign to admit me to intimacy with You.

## MEDITATION

1. Meditation, like meditative reading, is a means to attain to the heart of prayer which, according to St. Teresa of Jesus, is "nothing but friendly intercourse, and frequent solitary converse with Him who we know loves us" (*Life*, 8). It makes no difference whether we attain this end by means of meditation, or reading, or even by the slow, pious recitation of a vocal prayer. All these ways are good; the best for each one, however, will be that which will lead him more quickly to the end, that is, to intimate converse with God. Once we reach the heart of prayer, we must learn how to persevere in it, in other words, to converse "in friendly intercourse with the Lord." Here, likewise, the manner will differ according to one's attraction and personal dispositions, which will often vary with the days and with circumstances. Sometimes, as soon as we are sufficiently convinced of God's love for us, we feel incited to express our gratitude to Him, desiring to return love for love, and we spontaneously begin an intimate conversation with the Lord. We express our gratitude, protesting that we want to be more generous in giving ourselves to Him; we beg His pardon for not having done so in the past; finally, we go on to make practical resolutions and to ask His help to keep them faithfully. Of course, this means an intimate colloquy, wholly personal and spontaneous, without preoccupation about form or order, and proceeding only from the superabundance of the heart. In this way, having interrupted the reading or the meditation

which has aroused in us so many good thoughts, we "stop to have solitary converse with God," returning to the book or the reflection when we feel the need of seeking new reasons or of arousing new affections to maintain our colloquy with God. Here is a genuine colloquy, because not only does the soul speak, but God often answers—not audibly, of course, but by sending it graces of light and love through which the soul will have a better understanding of the divine ways, and will feel more eager to advance in them with generosity. It is well, therefore, not to make use of many words in the colloquy, but to stop often and listen interiorly in order to perceive the movements of grace, which are really God's answer.

2. We must not believe that in order to treat intimately with God and to show Him our love, it is always necessary to do so by means of words. On the contrary—and this happens spontaneously with progress in the spiritual life—we will often prefer to be silent in order to fix our gaze calmly on the Lord, to listen to Him, the interior Master, and to return Him love in silence. The manifestation of our love thus becomes less lively and impetuous, but it gains in depth what it loses in emotion and outward appearance. We expresse our love more tranquilly, but the movement of our will toward God is much firmer and more serious. Leaving aside reasonings and words, we concentrates all in a loving, intuitive look on God, and this gaze, far more than reasonings and colloquies, allows us to penetrate the depths of the divine mysteries. Before reaching this point, we have read, meditated, analyzed; now, enjoying as it were the fruit of our investigation, we stop to contemplate God in silence and love. Our colloquy now becomes silent, contemplative, according to the traditional idea of "contemplation," *simplex intuitus veritatis*, that is, a simple look which penetrates truth. But let us repeat, this is not a speculative look, but a look of love which keeps the soul in intimate contact with God, in a real exchange of friendship with Him. The more the soul contemplates God, and the more it falls in love with Him, the greater need it feels to concentrate its love in total generosity. The Lord in turn answers this seeking love of the soul. He lets Himself be found and felt by illuminating the soul with His light and drawing it more intensely to Himself by His grace.

The soul will not always be able to continue long in this contemplative look, this silent colloquy; now and again it will need to come back to reflection, to the verbal expression of its thoughts, and—especially when it is not yet accustomed to this manner of prayer—it will be well for it to do so rather often, in order to avoid vagueness and distractions. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that more is gained in these silent pauses at the feet of Our Lord than in a thousand reasonings and discourses.

#### COLLOQUY

“ Grant, O Lord, that the purpose of my prayer may be to occupy my heart with loving You; and since I can find no better way to practice love than by this intimate recollection in silence and detachment from all creatures, I beg You, my God, to take away my life rather than deprive me of this interior exchange with You, my paradise on earth ” (cf. St. Leonard of Port Maurice).

“ O Lord, there is no profit for You in staying with us; and yet You love us enough to say that Your delight is to dwell in our company. Why do You love us so much as to give Yourself to us more freely than the things we ask of You? It is certain that I no longer desire to possess anything else; since, if I ask You properly, I can receive You, my God, and converse intimately with You. I shall adorn myself with the jewels of the virtues, and invite You to the nuptial couch of my heart where I shall rest with You. I know that You neither ask nor wish for anything else than to visit my soul, that You want to enter, and have been knocking at its door for a long time, and I regret that I have so long deprived myself of this great gift. So I shall come near You in the secret place of my heart and say to You : I know that You love me more than I love myself, I shall no longer be concerned for myself, but shall have no thought save for You alone, and You will take care of me. I cannot pay attention to You and to myself at the same time; therefore, in a loving mutual exchange, You will think of me, comforting my infirmity, and I shall think of You, finding my joy in Your goodness. Whereas I have much to gain from You, You have nothing to gain from me; yet I know that You are with me very willingly, and more desirous of helping me than

I am of remaining with You and enjoying Your goodness. Whence does this come? Certainly it arises from this : that I love myself poorly, and You love me well.... But if You wished, O Lord, to set before my eyes all the marks of Your love, I would faint away, for even if I had all the tongues of men and of angels, I could never express all the gifts of nature, grace, and glory which You have given me.... How then, O Lord, can I think or meditate on anything except Your love? What is sweeter than that? Why should I desire anything else? And how does it happen that I am not seized and bound by Your love? It surrounds me on all sides, and yet I do not comprehend it" (cf. St. Bonaventure).

152

### *PRA YER OF RECOLLECTION*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - May I find You within me, O my God, in the little heaven of my soul!

#### MEDITATION

i. St. Teresa of Jesus warmly recommends to interior souls another kind of prayer, much simpler and more profitable—the prayer of recollection. The foundation of this prayer is the divine presence in our souls : the *presence of immensity*, by which God is in us as Creator and Preserver in so real and essential a manner that "in Him we live, and move, and are" (*Acts 17,28*), so that if He ceased to be present in us, we should cease to exist; the *presence of friendship*, by which in a soul in the state of grace, God is present as a Father, as a Friend and as a sweet Guest, who invites that soul to dwell with the three divine Persons : with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is the consoling promise of Jesus to the soul who loves Him : "If anyone love Me... My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make our abode with him" (*Jn 14,23*).

The prayer of recollection consists in the realization of this great truth : God is in me, my soul is His temple; I recollect myself in the intimacy of this temple to adore Him,

love Him, and unite myself to Him. "O soul, most beautiful of all creatures," exclaims St. John of the Cross, "that so greatly desireth to know the place where your Beloved is, in order to seek Him and be united with Him.... It is a matter of great contentment and joy for you to see that He is so near you as to be within you. Rejoice and be glad in your inward recollection with Him, since you have Him so near. There desire Him, there adore Him, and do not go to seek Him outside yourself" (*SC*, 1,7.8). The soul who has the sense of the presence of God within it, possesses one of the most efficacious means of making prayer. "Do you believe," says St. Teresa of Jesus, "that it is of little importance for a soul who is easily distracted, to understand this truth [that God is in it] and to know that, in order to speak with its heavenly Father and to enjoy His company, it does not have to go up to heaven or even to raise its voice? No matter how softly it speaks, He always hears it, because He is so near. It does not need wings to go to contemplate Him in itself" (*Way*, 28).

2. Although the prayer of recollection is the highest of the active forms of prayer, St. Teresa notes that we can obtain it for ourselves, "for this is not a supernatural state [a passive recollection which can only be produced by divine motion], but depends upon our volition; and by God's favor, we can enter it of our own accord" (*ibid.*, 29).

Therefore, it is important to know what the soul should do in order to practice this prayer, and this can be reduced to two things : "The soul collects together all its faculties and enters within itself to be with its God" (*ibid.*, 28). Our senses, imagination, and intellect tend spontaneously toward exterior things, on which they are dispersed; therefore, the soul, by a prolonged, resolute act of the will, ought to withdraw them from these exterior things in order to concentrate them on interior things—in this little heaven of the soul where the Blessed Trinity dwells. This exercise, especially in the beginning, requires effort and energy and it will not be easy at first. However, the Saint teaches, "let the soul try to cultivate the habit, despite the fatigue entailed in recollecting itself and overcoming the body which is trying to reclaim its rights." Little by little, "as a reward for the violence which it has previously done to itself" (*ibid.*), recollection

will become easy and delightful; the senses will obey promptly; and even if the soul is not entirely free from distractions, it will not be so hard to overcome them.

In this way, we shall be able to concentrate entirely on God present within us, and there at His feet will be able to converse with Him to our heart's delight. It will not be difficult to spend even the whole time of prayer in acts of faith, love, and adoration, admiring and contemplating the great mystery of the indwelling of the Trinity in our poor heart, and offering our humble homage to the three divine Persons. But if this is not enough, we can also use other practices : " Hidden there within our soul, we can think about the Passion, and picture the Son, and offer Him to the Father, without tiring the mind by going to seek Him on Mount Calvary, or in the Garden, or at the Column "; or else, more simply, we can " speak with Him as with a Father, a Brother, a Lord, and a Spouse—sometimes in one way, sometimes in another...we can tell Him our troubles, beg Him to put them right, and yet realize that we are not worthy to be called His child " (*ibid.*). And the Saint concludes with these words : " Those who are able to shut themselves up in this way within this little heaven of the soul, where dwells the Maker of heaven and earth...may be sure that they are walking on an excellent road and will come without fail to drink of the water of the fountain " (*ibid.*).

#### COLLOQUY

" Give me the grace to recollect myself in the little heaven of my soul where You have established Your dwelling. There You let me find You, there I feel that You are closer to me than anywhere else, and there You prepare my soul quickly to enter into intimacy with You. Then, the soul, understanding that all the things of the world are but toys, seems all of a sudden to rise above everything created and escape it.... My God, if I could only recall often that You are dwelling within my soul, I think that it would be impossible for me to give myself up to the things of the world, for compared with what I have within me, they seem to me to have no value at all.

" Help me, O Lord, to withdraw my senses from exterior things, make them docile to the commands of my will, so

that when I want to converse with You, they will retire at once, like bees shutting themselves up in the hive in order to make honey" (cf. T.J. *Way*, 28).

"O Lord, You say to my soul, ' My kingdom is within you.' It is very comforting to know that You never leave me, and that I cannot exist without You. What more do you want, O my soul, and what do you seek elsewhere, since you possess within yourself your wealth, your love, your peace, your plenitude, and your kingdom, that is, the Beloved whom you desire and for whom you sigh?" (cf. J.C. *SC*, 1,7.8).

"O my God, You are in me and I am in You. I have found my heaven on earth, since heaven is You, O Lord, and You are in my soul. I can find You there always; even when I do not feel Your presence, You are there nevertheless, and I like to seek You there. Oh! if only I could never leave You alone!" (cf. E.T. *L*).

## 153

*ARIDITY*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Lord, help me to be faithful to You, so that the spirit of prayer will not be extinguished in me through my own fault.

**MEDITATION**

1. At the beginning of a more intense spiritual life the soul usually enjoys a sensible fervor which makes spiritual exercises easy and agreeable. Good thoughts, sentiments of love, and outpourings from the heart arise spontaneously. To be recollected and alone with God in prayer is a joy; time passes quickly, and frequently the presence of God becomes almost perceptible; there is a like facility in the practice of mortification and the other virtues. However, this state does not ordinarily last long, and there comes a time when the soul is deprived of all sensible consolation. This suppression of sensible devotion is the state of aridity, which may have various causes.

Sometimes it is the result of infidelity on the part of those who little by little have become lax, allowing themselves many slight satisfactions and pleasures and giving in to their curiosity, selfishness, or pride—which they had previously renounced. If they only realized what benefits they were losing by such conduct, they would be ready for any kind of sacrifice rather than yield to these weaknesses. The habit of mortification, which was acquired at great cost, is quickly lost, and they again become the slaves of their own passions. Self-love, which was not dead, but only sleeping, becomes active again and may become not only the cause of many voluntary imperfections which had previously been overcome, but even of deliberate venial sins. It may ultimately reduce to lukewarmness a once fervent soul. The unfaithful one who has fallen back into mediocrity cannot protest to the Lord in prayer that it loves Him and desires to advance in His love; still less can it taste the joy of knowing that it truly loves God. Hence such a soul inevitably falls into aridity. In this condition the only remedy is to return to its first fervor. This will cost it dearly, but far from becoming discouraged, the soul should begin anew as soon as possible. Besides, Our Lord loves so much to forgive!

2. On the other hand, aridity sometimes arises from physical or moral causes which are entirely independent of ourselves : indisposition, illness, fatigue, or depression caused by troublesome preoccupations or excessive work. These are things which can make all feeling of spiritual consolation disappear, and this often occurs with no way of remedying it. It is a trial which may last a long time, but one in which we must, with good reason, see the hand of God which disposes everything for our good, and realize that He cannot fail to give us the grace necessary to profit by our suffering. Although not feeling any consolation nor experiencing any attraction for prayer, the soul should apply itself to it *through duty*, while trying by some ingenuity to remedy its own powerlessness. St. Teresa of Jesus says that “anyone who cannot make mental prayer should turn to vocal prayer, or reading, or colloquies with God, but should never fail to consecrate to prayer the time set apart for it” (*Way*, 18).

If, in spite of everything, the soul does not succeed in moving its heart, let it love God by the will alone. This requires a great effort, but by it this faculty is strengthened.

Almost without realizing it, the soul is made capable of a more active, generous love. This love will be deprived of feeling, it is true, but we must remember that the substance of love does not consist in *feeling*, but in *willing* to give pleasure, at any cost, to the person loved. One who, in order to please God, perseveres in prayer although he finds no consolation in it, but rather repugnance, gives Him a beautiful proof of true love. Progress in the spiritual life is not measured by the consolation the soul feels; for this is unnecessary, since true devotion consists solely in the promptness of the will in God's service. The will can be very prompt and firmly resolved to serve God, although at the same time it is arid and even forced to struggle against its natural repugnance.

#### COLLOQUY

“ Lord, my God, You who are holy, look and see my affliction! Have pity on the child whom You have engendered in sorrow and do not consider my sins, lest You forget Your power over them. What father will not liberate his son? And what son has not been chastised by his father's compassionate rod? O Father and Lord, although I am a sinner, I am nonetheless Your child, because You have created and recreated me. Can a mother forget the fruit of her womb? If she should forget—You, Father, have promised to remember. Behold! I cry, and You do not hearken to me, I am torn with grief, and You do not console me. What shall I say, what shall I do, miserable creature that I am? Deprived of Your consolation, I am far away from Your sight.

“ O Lord Jesus, where are Your ancient mercies? Shall You be angry with me forever? Be appeased, I beg You, and do not turn Your face away from me.... I confess that I have sinned, but I am certain that Your mercy surpasses all my offenses!

“ Weep, my soul, and complain, miserable one; groan because You have sent away Your Spouse, Jesus Christ, the All-powerful God; do not be angry with me, O Lord, for I could never withstand Your anger. Have pity on me, so that I may not fall into despair. Although I am worthy of condemnation, do not withhold that which can save sinners.

" I hope for much from Your bounty, O Lord, because You Yourself teach us to ask, to seek, and to knock; at Your word, I ask, I seek, I knock. O Lord, You who tell us to ask, grant that I may receive; You who tell us to seek, grant that I may find; You who teach us to knock at the door, open to the one who is knocking! I am weak; strengthen me. Bring me back, because I have wandered away, and revive me, because I am dead. According to Your good pleasure, direct and govern my senses, my thoughts, and my actions, that I may live by You and give myself entirely to You " (St. Augustine).

154

*THE GOOD SHEPHERD*

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

PRESENCE OF GOD - I come to You, O Jesus, my Good Shepherd; lead me to the pastures of eternal life.

## MEDITATION

1. The liturgy today sums up in the gentle figure of the Good Shepherd all that Jesus has done for our souls.

The shepherd is everything to his flock; their life, their sustenance, and their care is entirely in his hands, and if the shepherd is good, they will have nothing to fear under his protection, and they will want for nothing.

Jesus is preeminently the Good Shepherd : He not only loves, feeds, and guards His sheep, but He also gives them life at the cost of His own. In the mystery of the Incarnation, the Son of God comes to earth in search of men who, like stray sheep, have wandered away from the sheepfold and have become lost in the dark valley of sin. He comes as a most loving Shepherd who, in order to take better care of His flock, is not afraid to share their lot. Today's Epistle (*1 Pt 2,21-25*) shows Him to us as He takes our sins upon Himself that He may heal us by His Passion : " Who His own self bore our sins in His Body upon the tree that we, being dead to sin,

should live to justice; by whose stripes you were healed. For you were as sheep going astray; but you are now converted to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (*1 Pt* 2,24-25). Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd, and I give my life for my sheep" and in the Office for Paschal time, the Church chants many times : "The Good Shepherd is risen, He who gave His life for His sheep and who died for His flock." What could be a better synthesis of the whole work of the Redemption? It seems still more wonderful when we hear Jesus declare : "I am come that they may have life and may have it more abundantly" (*Jn* 10,10). In truth, He could well repeat to each one of us : "What more could I have done for you that I have not done?" (*cf. Is* 5,4). Oh, would that our generosity in giving ourselves to Him had no limits, after the pattern of His own liberality in giving Himself to us!

2. Again Jesus said : "I know Mine, and Mine know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father" (*Gosp* : *Jn* 10,11.16). Although there is no question here of equality, but merely that of a simple comparison, it is nevertheless very consoling and glorious for us to see how Jesus likes to compare His relations with us to those He has with His Father. At the Last Supper also, He said : "As the Father hath loved Me, I also have loved you," and again : "as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us" (*Jn* 15,9 – 17,21). This shows that between us, the sheep, and Jesus, our Shepherd, there is not only a relation of acquaintance, but also one of love, and better still, of a communion of life, similar to that which exists between the Son and the Father. It is by means of the grace, faith and charity, which the Good Shepherd acquired for us by His death, that we arrive at such intimacy with our God—so deep that it makes us share in His own divine life.

A close relationship of loving knowledge is here established between the Good Shepherd and His sheep—one so intimate that the Shepherd knows His sheep one by one and can call them by name; and they recognize His voice and follow Him with docility. Each soul can say : "Jesus knows me and loves me, not in a general abstract way, but in the concrete aspect of my needs, of my desires, and of my life; for Him to know me and to love me is to do me good, to encompass me more and more with His grace, and to

sanctify me. Precisely because He loves me, Jesus calls me by name : He calls me when in prayer He opens to me new horizons of the spiritual life, or when He enables me to know my faults and weaknesses better; He calls me when He reprimands me or purifies me by aridity, as well as when He consoles and encourages me by filling me with new fervor; He calls me when He makes me feel the need of greater generosity, and when He asks me for sacrifices or gives me joys, and still more, when He awakens in me a deeper love for Him. Hearing His call, my attitude should be that of a loving little sheep who recognizes the voice of its Shepherd and follows Him always.

#### COLLOQUY

“ O Lord, You are my Shepherd, I shall not want; You make me lie down in green pastures, You lead me to the water of refreshment, You convert my soul and lead me on the paths of justice. Even though I walk in the ravines, in the dark valleys, I shall fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff are my comfort. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup runs over ” (cf. *Ps 22*). O Lord, my Good Shepherd, what more could You have done for me that You have not done? What could You have given to me that You have not given? You willed to be my food and drink. What more delightful and salutary, nourishing and strengthening pasture could You have found than Your own Body and Blood?

“ O good Lord Jesus Christ, my sweet Shepherd, what return shall I make to You for all that You have given me? What shall I give You in exchange for Your gift of Yourself to me? Even if I could give myself to You a thousand times, it would still be nothing, since I am nothing in comparison with You. You, so great, have loved me so much and so gratuitously, I who am so small, so wicked and ungrateful! I know, O Lord, that Your love tends toward the immense, the infinite, because You are immense and infinite. Please tell me, O Lord, how I ought to love You.

“ My love, O Lord, is not gratuitous, it is owed to You.... Although I cannot love You as much as I should,

You accept my weak love. I can love You more when You condescend to increase my virtue, but I can never give You what You deserve. Give me then, Your most ardent love by which, with Your grace, I shall love You, please You, serve You, and fulfill Your commands. May I never be separated from You, either in time or in eternity, but abide, united to You in love, forever and ever" (Ven. R. Jourdain).

## 155

*ARIDITY AND PROGRESS*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Lord, help me to seek for You and to unite myself to You, even through the aridity and powerlessness of my spirit.

**MEDITATION**

i. Even without the presence of the physical or moral causes which we have mentioned before, it is possible to pass from a state of sensible fervor to one of absolute aridity. This happens by the direct work of God which makes it impossible for the soul to pray with the help of the imagination, or to practice acts of sensible love as before. The fact is that, whereas meditation or affectionate converse with God was formerly made with ease and comfort, the soul now finds it impossible to connect two ideas. Thoughts or reading which once moved the soul now leave it indifferent—the heart remains cold and hard as a stone. Even though watching over itself carefully in order to be faithful in mortification and generosity; even though intensifying its preparation for prayer and fervently beseeching the Lord for help, it no longer succeeds in wringing one drop of devotion from its heart. Then the poor soul worries and is afraid, thinking that the Lord has abandoned it because of some fault or other. What she does not realize is that this kind of aridity conceals a great grace—the grace of purification and of progress in the ways of prayer. In fact, by means of aridity, the Lord intends to free it from childish

feelings and to raise it to the purer, firmer level of the will. When it was experiencing so much comfort in prayer, the soul, unknown to itself, was becoming somewhat attached to these sensible consolations. Hence it loved and sought prayer not purely for God, but also a little for itself. Now, deprived of all attraction for prayer, the soul will henceforth learn to apply itself to it solely to give pleasure to the Lord. Furthermore, finding no help in beautiful thoughts and sweet emotions, it will learn to walk by strength of will alone, exercising itself in acts of faith and love which, it is true, are wholly arid, but are all the more meritorious because they are more voluntary. In this way, its love for God will become purer, because it is more disinterested; and stronger, because it is more voluntary.

2. Through aridity, the soul also makes progress in humility. The inability to meditate, to fix its attention, to awaken good sentiments in its heart—all these convince the soul more and more of its nothingness. This state makes it realize, without effort or reasoning, that, apart from God's help, it can really do nothing. Thus, little by little, that high opinion of self, that feeling of confidence in its own strength, which had more or less secretly insinuated itself into the soul when all was easy and pleasant in prayer, now vanishes.

At the same time, seeing how poor and wretched it is in the presence of God, there is born in the soul a feeling of more profound respect and greater reverence before the infinite majesty of God. When it could speak heart to heart with Him in prayer, the soul may have forgotten somewhat the infinite distance which always separates God from His creature. It is true that God wants us to act toward Him with great confidence and He invites us in thousands of ways to His intimacy; however, He always remains the inaccessible one, and we, nothingness and misery. It is very precious, this feeling of greater reverence which ripens in the soul through the experience of its own nothingness, and which always, even in moments of the greatest loving intimacy, will permit it to approach God with true humility of heart.

If, therefore, during the time of prayer we can do nothing but humble ourselves before God, by recognizing our own nothingness and showing Him our impotence, our incapacity, yes, even offering God this very nothingness in adoration

of His infinite majesty, we will have made very good use of our time. Certainly, in this state of aridity, especially when suffering greatly from distractions, we will often feel that we have done nothing during prayer. Let us not be disturbed, however, because as St. Peter of Alcantara says : " He who does the little he can, does much before God. It is not difficult to persevere in prayer when we find consolation in it, but there is great merit in doing so when sensible devotion is reduced to a minimum. Yet it is precisely then that prayer becomes more meritorious and humility is increased, as well as patience and perseverance. "

#### COLLOQUY

" O Lord, blessed be Your Name forever, because You willed me to suffer this tribulation. I cannot escape it, so I have recourse to You, that You may help me to profit by it. O Lord, I am deeply afflicted, my heart can find no rest, and it suffers much on account of this hard trial. What can I say to You, O beloved Father? I am in anguish; Lord, save me! This happens to me in order to glorify You by my very humiliation, but later, You will deliver me. May it please You to deliver me, O Lord, for alone and wretched, what can I do or where can I go without You?

" Give me once more the grace of patience! Help me, O God, and I shall fear nothing, even if the burden is heavy. And now, what shall I say in all these misfortunes? Lord, Your will be done. I well deserve the tribulation which is crushing me. I must bear it. May I do so patiently, until the storm is past and calm re-established " (*Imit. III, 29,1.2.*) .

" O my Jesus, nothing from You but dryness. But I am very happy to suffer that which You want me to suffer. I am happy to see that You show me that I am not a stranger by treating me like this.

" O Lord, make my darkness serve to enlighten souls. I consent, if such is Your will, to continue walking all my life in the darkness of faith, provided that one day I arrive at the goal of the mountain of love.

" I am very happy to have no consolation, for thus my love is not like that of the world's brides who are always looking at their bridegroom's hands to see if they bear a gift,

or at his face in the hope of glimpsing a smile of love to enchant them.... O Jesus, I want to love You for Yourself alone.... I do not desire love that I feel, but only love that You feel" (T.C.J. L, 51,90,93,89).

## 156

*ENERGETIC RESOLVE*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, make me persevere in seeking You and in serving You, in spite of all the difficulties which I may encounter.

## MEDITATION

1. St. Teresa says that anyone who wishes to give himself to prayer with profit must make "an earnest and most determined resolve not to halt" on the way he has chosen. This means that we must give ourselves to prayer, not for a stated time only, but at all times, every day, all our life; let us not be dissuaded from prayer for any reason whatsoever. "Come what may, happen what will, let those complain who will, tire yourself as you must, but even if you die half-way along the road...tend always toward the goal" (*Way*, 21). Let us ever remember that this goal is the living water promised by Jesus to those who sincerely thirst for Him and His love.

Without a strong, determined resolve, the soul will too often find more or less plausible reasons for neglecting prayer. Sometimes aridity will make the soul think that it is a waste of time to devote itself to an exercise from which it seems to draw no fruit, and that it would be better to use this time in good works. Sometimes, too, our numerous employments will seem to justify this idea. At other times, the feeling of our wretchedness—especially when we consider our want of fidelity to grace—will make us think ourselves unworthy of divine intimacy and that, therefore, it is useless to persevere in prayer. It should be evident that all these pretexts are suggestions of the enemy who, sometimes under the pretext of zeal for exterior works, sometimes under that of false

humility or of waste of time, does all he can to draw souls away from prayer. "No temptation," declares St. Teresa, "is more serious" than this one, "and the devil does us the very greatest harm by it" (cf. *Life*, 7 - 8). Therefore, she insists : "One who has begun to make mental prayer must never give it up, in spite of the sins into which he may fall. Prayer is the means which will help him to rise. Without prayer, this would be more difficult. He should not allow himself to be deceived by the devil to abandon prayer under the pretext of humility" (*ibid.*, 8).

2. Even if the soul has fallen into aridity through its own fault, it should not neglect prayer, but should persevere in it in spite of the violence it will have to do to itself and the strong repugnances which must be overcome. "If that soul perseveres, notwithstanding the sins, temptations, and falls of a thousand kinds into which the devil leads it, the Lord, I am certain, will bring it to the harbor of salvation" (*ibid.*). Accept the torture of having to spend the time of prayer in complete aridity, and moreover, with the pain of feeling yourself so unlike to God and so unworthy of Him in whose presence you are; accept the reproaches of your conscience for your infidelities, and offer them all to the Lord in expiation for your faults and omissions, and to obtain the grace to amend your life. Never weary of repeating with a sincere heart the prayer of the publican : "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner" (*Lk* 18,13); and God, who loves those who humbly recognize their own wretchedness, will not fail to come to your aid. However, you must learn to wait patiently for the time fixed by Him. St. Teresa of Jesus spent nearly eighteen years in such aridity. "Many times" says the Saint, "I would have gladly endured the most severe penances rather than try to recollect myself to make prayer. I needed to summon all my courage to force myself, so unbearable was the temptation of the devil to leave off prayer." But, she concludes, "the Lord Himself helped me" (*Life*, 8). This was the reward of her fidelity.

The Saint has, therefore, all the authority which comes from experience, to insist that never, for any motive, should we give up prayer. And she strongly recommends it, saying : "Do not tarry on the way, but strive like strong men until you die in the attempt, for you are here for nothing else than to strive" (*Way*, 20).

We can likewise apply the words of Jesus to prayer : “ The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away ” (*Mt 11,12*).

#### COLLOQUY

“ O Lord, I know that in order that love be true and friendship lasting, equal conditions must exist between the two friends. I also know that there can be nothing wrong in You; while my nature, on the contrary, is vicious, sensual, and ungrateful . . . Hence I cannot love You as You deserve.

“ O infinite goodness of my God! I see who You are and who I am, and seeing how different You are from me, O joy of the angels, I long to be wholly consumed in love for You! How true it is that You bear with those who permit You to be with them! How good a friend You are to them! How You lavish Your favors upon them and bear with them, and wait until their ways become more like Yours. You remember the time spent in loving You, and at the first sign of repentance, You forget all their offenses. This I know from experience, and I do not understand, O my Creator, why the whole world does not strive to draw near You in this intimate friendship. The wicked, who are not like You, ought to come so that You may make them good, allowing You to be with them, at least two hours each day, even though they are not with You but with a thousand cares and thoughts of the world, as I used to be. In exchange for the effort which it costs them to want to be in such good company (for You know that in the beginning they cannot do more, nor afterwards sometimes) You force the devils not to attack them, and make the devils every day less strong against them, and give these souls strength to conquer them. Yea, Life of all lives, You slay none of those who put their trust in You and desire You for their Friend ” (*T.J. Life*, 8).

O Lord, give me also that holy audacity which will make me always persevere in prayer, in spite of exterior and interior difficulties, aridities, weakness, and lack of correspondence with Your grace. . . . You will remedy all my ills.

*ARIDITY AND CONTEMPLATION*

PRESENCE OF GOD - Draw me to You, O Lord, by the road You choose and in any way You will; I ask only for grace to know how to follow You always.

## MEDITATION

1. The aridity which comes from God not only has the advantage of making us go forward in virtue, but it also brings us to a higher form of prayer. St. John of the Cross teaches that it is by means of this kind of aridity that God calls souls to a simpler and more profound form of prayer which he terms "initial contemplation." To distinguish this aridity from that which is caused by other things, he gives three signs. The first sign is : "the soul finds no pleasure or consolation in the things of God, it also fails to find pleasure in anything created" (*DN I*, 9,2). This loss of delight in the things of God may occur, too, when aridity is caused by the soul's own faults; but then it looks for human satisfactions, whereas in the former case, although it no longer experiences the joy of being with God, it does not return to creatures, but rather, remains firm in its decision to keep its heart detached from them. The second sign is that, in spite of aridity, "the memory is ordinarily centered upon God with painful care and solicitude, fearing that it is not serving God" (*ibid.*, 3). In other words, the soul suffers from its spiritual insensibility, fearing that it does not love God and is not serving Him; and at the same time, it continues to seek Him with the anxiety of one who does not succeed in finding its treasure. The soul remains then always occupied with God, although in a negative, painful way, as if suffering because of the absence of a loved one. On the contrary, when the aridity is culpable, especially if it is caused by a state of habitual lukewarmness, the soul is not at all grieved about not loving God; it has become indifferent. The last sign consists in the fact that "the soul can no longer meditate or reflect in the imaginative sphere of sense as it was wont, however much it may of itself endeavor to do so"

(*ibid.*, 8). The soul would like to meditate; it applies itself, tries as hard as possible, and still does not succeed. When this state continues—for if it lasted only a short time it might have arisen from special conditions, either physical or moral—although it may have days of greater or less intensity, it tends to invade the whole soul in such a way as to make meditation habitually impossible. This aridity then means a call from God to more profound prayer.

2. By plunging the soul into aridity, God wishes to elevate it, to make it pass from a too human and low way of treating with Him, to a higher and more supernatural way. In meditation the soul went to God through intellectual effort—an excellent method, but one that is necessarily limited and inadequate in bringing us to know God who, being infinite, immensely exceeds the capacity of our mind. Now when God puts aridity into the soul, He makes meditation impossible for her, and forces her, so to speak, to go to Him by another way.

According to St. John of the Cross, this road is the way of initial contemplation, which consists in the soul's beginning to know God, no longer through the intellect alone, but by means of the experience of love. This experience will not give the soul any new ideas about God, but it will give the "sense" of His greatness. In fact, we have already seen that it is precisely in the midst of aridity that the torturing pain of no longer loving Our Lord, of not feeling this love any longer, is born in the soul. This feeling would not exist if the soul had not acquired a profound sense of the greatness of God and of His worthiness to be loved. This realization is not the result of any reasoning on the part of the soul, but of its experience of love. In fact, although unaware of it, the soul now loves God much more than previously; the best proof of this is that great anxiety which torments it with the fear of not loving Him. See, then, that it is precisely through this painful experience of love, which consists in the preoccupation about not loving and serving its God, that there is born in the soul contemplative knowledge, that is, the "sense" of God. We speak here of a knowledge which for the moment brings no comfort to the soul, but which nevertheless is most precious because, far better than any meditation, it infuses into the soul the "sense" of the divinity and fills it more and more with love for this God, whose infinite lovable ness

it now perceives by intuition. These advantages are so precious that, in order to obtain them, the soul not only ought to accept courageously the aridity which God sends, but also should recognize in it one of the greatest benefits He can bestow.

#### COLLOQUY

"O Jesus, how burdensome and bitter is life when You hide Yourself from our love! What are You doing, my Friend? Do You not see my anguish and the weight which is crushing me? Where are You? Why do You not come to console me, since I have no friend but You?

"But if it pleases You to leave me in this state, help me to accept it for love of You. Make me love You enough to suffer for You whatever You choose—sorrow, aridity, anguish, or even, seeming coldness of heart. Ah! that is indeed a great love, to love You without feeling the sweetness of Your love.

"Many serve You, O Jesus, when You console them; but few are willing to keep You company when You sleep on the raging waters or suffer in the garden of agony. Who, then, will serve You for Yourself? Oh! grant that it may be I!

"The Gospel tells me, O divine Shepherd, that You leave the *faithful* sheep in the desert. What deep things that tells me!... You are *sure* of them, they cannot go astray now, for they are love's captives; so You deprive them of Your visible presence to bring Your consolations to sinners; or even if You do meet them upon Mt. Thabor, it is only for a few moments. O Lord, do with me as You please. And if You seem to forget me, very well. You are free to, since I am no longer mine but Yours.... You will sooner weary of keeping me waiting than I of waiting for You" (cf. T.C.J. L, 32,73,144,121,81).

I ask only one thing, my God : in this aridity let my love increase, and grant that I may remain faithful to You at all cost. May I love You more by the reality of deeds as my love becomes less sensible. Grant that the less joy my love gives to me, the more glory it may give to You. And if, in order to increase in love, I need to suffer, blessed be this trial; since You strike me to teach me, You mortify me to cure me and to lead me to a higher life.

*LOVING ATTENTION TO GOD*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Lord, let Your presence be the light and strength of my soul, the aid and support of my prayer.

**MEDITATION**

i. If God invites the soul, by means of aridity, to a more simple and more profound form of prayer, it would be absurd to try to compel it to continue in meditation, which, moreover, it can no longer make. On the contrary, the soul ought to be encouraged to give up this form of prayer without scruple, and to apply itself to remaining calmly in the presence of God, attentive to Him by means of a simple glance of faith and love. It should stay there and keep Him company, glad to be with Him, even if it has no feeling of His presence. The soul will see that it is gradually becoming accustomed to this new way of prayer and will notice that it is in contact with God in a way which is substantially better than that which it formerly had.

The thought that it no longer knows how to love should not disturb the soul. Of course, it can no longer love as tenderly as before, when the mere thought of God's love for it could arouse its feelings; however, the soul must remember that the supernatural love of charity is not sensible love, but a love of the will, which does not have to be felt. It consists solely in a decision of the will by which the soul gives God preference over all creatures and wills to consecrate itself entirely to His service. This is the real love which leads to the "sense of God." Moreover, St. John of the Cross teaches that it is precisely in this period of obscure, initial contemplation, entered by way of the sufferings of purifying aridity, that there begins to develop in the soul what he calls *infused passive love*, that is, the love by which the soul goes to God, no longer merely by a decision of the will, but also by a secret drawing by God Himself. This explains why its love, although not felt at all, is in reality stronger than before; it urges the soul to give itself to God with increasingly strong resolve. It is God Himself who, drawing it secretly to Himself, awakens love in it. When during prayer the soul

suffers because of its powerlessness and aridity, and fears that it does not love God, let it gently examine itself on this point, that is, try to find out if, in spite of all the difficulties met with, it remains firmly resolved to give itself wholly to God. To make this decision more concrete, the soul should apply it to the different circumstances of its life, particularly those which cost it most. Because it no longer feels any love, it is impelled to give God concrete proofs of love, that is, good works and the virtues, which are practiced to please Him.

2. Treating here of initial contemplation, we note that the soul should not be completely passive. There is always the need for a certain application on the soul's part, which should consist in maintaining itself in the proper disposition for receiving the divine action. This is the teaching of St. John of the Cross : "Let the soul learn how to be still in God, fixing its *loving attention* upon Him, in the calm of the understanding, although it may think it is doing nothing" (*AS II*, 15,5). In fact, if the soul will content itself with keeping in the presence of God by a look of faith and love, its *loving attention* will go to meet the *loving knowledge* which God Himself communicates to it. In this way "knowledge may be united with knowledge and love with love" (*J.C. LF*, 3,34), and the soul will draw the greatest fruit from its prayer.

However, this loving knowledge which God infuses is tenuous and delicate. It never comes by way of clear, distinct concepts, but consists in a general, obscure "sense" of God, who secretly enamours the soul, without the assistance of feeling. This is why the soul, especially at first, cannot understand; and as it has been accustomed to proceed by way of reasoning and sensible affections, it has the impression that it is no longer doing anything. So strong is this sentiment, that the soul would often like to return to meditation, in which it felt that it did something. But St. John of the Cross puts it on guard; in spite of all its efforts it would gain nothing, and would only succeed in disturbing God's action within it. However, the Saint's words should not lead us to believe that the soul no longer needs to make use of some good thought or a little meditation. A delicate, attentive soul will know when it is in the presence of God, even in aridity; and that awareness will suffice for its prayer. On the contrary, it will see when it is rambling uselessly and needs some good thought to recollect itself in God.

## COLLOQUY

" O God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Far from my salvation are the words of my sins. O my God, I shall cry day by day, and Thou wilt not hear : and by night, and it shall not be reputed as folly in me. But Thou dwellest in the holy place, the praise of Israel. In Thee have our Fathers hoped : they have hoped, and Thou hast delivered them. They cried to Thee, and they were saved : they trusted in Thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm and no man.... I am poured out like water; and all my bones are scattered. My heart has become like wax melting.... My tongue hath cleaved to my jaws" (*Ps 21,2-16*). When I would sing Your praises, my voice stops in my throat. O Lord, I have scarcely enough courage to raise my eyes to You, and yet it is my great desire to love You. I should like to tell You that I love You, but I dare not, for my heart is like stone, cold and hard as marble. What shall I do, O Lord, in such aridity? I shall disclose my misery to You; I shall show You my nothingness, my weakness, my lack of power, and I shall say to You : Remember, O Lord, that I am wretchedness and You are Mercy, I, the patient and You, the Physician! O Lord, do not permit the sight of my nothingness to cast me down, but let it draw me to You in humility, confidence, reverence and abandonment! O Lord, let me know myself that I may know You! Let me know myself, that I may despise myself, and know You, that I may love and bless You eternally.

Although I am an arid and desolate land, and in my heart there is not one drop of devotion, yet I wish to remain here in Your presence, here, near You, to tell You that, in spite of everything, I desire and want nothing but You alone. " O Lord, when I feel nothing, when I am incapable of praying or practicing virtue, then is the moment to look for small occasions, nothings, to give You pleasure. For example, a smile, a friendly word, when I should much prefer to say nothing at all or look bored.... When I find no occasions, at least I want to keep telling You that I love You; it is not difficult and it keeps the fire of love going; even if that fire were to seem wholly out, I should throw little bits of straw on the ashes, little acts of virtue and of charity; and I am sure that, with Your help, the fire would be enkindled again" (*T.C.J. L, 122*).

*PRACTICAL CONDUCT*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, may Your light always be my guide, so that I shall not go astray.

**MEDITATION**

1. During this period of transition from meditation to contemplation, it is very important for the soul to have a clear understanding of that "general, loving attention to God" mentioned by St. John of the Cross, in order to know how to act, and how to obtain from it the best fruit possible. In the Saint's opinion this new form of prayer results from the exercise of the theological virtues, aided by the secret, delicate influence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In other words, on the part of the soul it is a question of an exercise of faith and love so intense and simplified that, without having recourse to the continual repetition of distinct acts, the soul finds itself in an attitude of loving attention to God. Far from being idle, the soul fixes its gaze on God precisely by means of this prolonged act of faith and love. But it is not alone in this exercise. The Holy Spirit comes to meet it, and by a secret actuation of His gifts, orientates and attracts it to God, infusing in it a loving knowledge of Him. In this way the soul can persevere for a long time in this truly contemplative attitude; and because it is helped by the Holy Spirit, it "will take pleasure in being alone and waiting with loving attentiveness upon God, in interior peace, quietness, and rest, without making any particular meditation" (*J.C. AS II*, 13,4).

However, the influence of the gifts will not always be strong and pleasant enough to keep the soul peacefully occupied with God; often, especially at first, it will be weak and therefore the soul more arid. Generally in this the soul will not make steady progress; hence, in order to remain recollected in God, it will often have to use its own efforts. At this point, it will be very useful for the soul to apply itself principally to the occasional renewing of its acts of faith and love, simply because its part, in this kind of prayer, consists in an intense exercise of faith and of love.

2. In speaking of the passage from meditation to contemplation, St. John of the Cross remarks that it does not take place in the same manner in every soul, not only in the sense that it is not accomplished in all at an equal rate, but also because God does not call everyone to the contemplative state. In the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (II, 13), he teaches that the soul should not give up meditation definitively until the habit of contemplation is formed; and referring to this, he remarks that many times the soul finds itself in contemplation from the very first moment of prayer, whereas at other times it needs to be helped in the beginning by meditation. He even expressly states : "As long as the soul can reason with pleasure in meditation, it should not stop doing so until it is in the peace and quiet...of loving attentiveness to God" (*AS II*, 13,2-4). Here we find a period of fluctuation more or less prolonged between meditation and contemplation. Thus, there are some souls whom God never completely takes away from meditative prayer.

This makes us understand that our arrival at initial contemplation does not dispense us from personal activity. First of all, we should make a very careful preparation for prayer, using a book, if necessary; if we cannot then fix our attention on what has been read, at least the reading will have helped to recollect the mind in God. Likewise, we must always begin our prayer by putting ourselves wholly in the presence of God, and then proceed according to the grace of the moment, being grateful to God if He recollects us quite simply in Himself, and diligent in helping ourselves by reflection or by means of a book when we feel that our thoughts are beginning to wander. We must also remember that even when the soul has entered into a state of loving attentiveness to God, the imagination may still roam here and there; for as St. John of the Cross says : "Even at times of great recollection, it can still be a wanderer" (*ibid.* 13,3). This activity of the imagination is not always a sign that the soul should return to meditation. Instead, it should try to become recollected above and beyond its thoughts, and if it sees that it remains in union with God, even in aridity, let it persevere thus, although the effort will be greater than when it had recourse to the reading of a pious book.

## COLLOQUY

"O God, my God, to Thee do I watch at break of day. For Thee my soul hath thirsted; for Thee my flesh, O how many ways! In a desert land, and where there is no way, and no water" (*Ps 62,2*).

"Who will give me to rest in You? Who will make You enter my heart and inebriate it, so that I shall forget my misfortunes and embrace You, my only Good? What are You to me? In Your goodness, permit me to speak. What am I to You, that You enjoin me to love You, and are disturbed if I do not love You, and threaten me with all kinds of ills? If I do not love You, does that mean that I am slighting You? Poor creature that I am, tell me, in Your mercy, Lord, my God, tell me what You are to me? Say to my soul : 'I am your salvation!' Say it so that I shall hear it. The ear of my heart is turned toward You. Open it, O Lord, and say to my soul : 'I am your salvation!' I shall follow Your voice and adhere to You. Do not hide Your face from me....

"O Father, I do not know the road that will bring me to You. Show it to me; teach me the way. Give me whatever I need. If those who take refuge in You find You by faith, then give me faith; if they find You by virtue, give me virtue, and increase my faith and charity" (St. Augustine).

Give me an immovable faith, O Lord, and an ardent charity! Faith and love are the guide-posts which will take me by unfamiliar paths to the place where You hide Yourself. Grant that I may walk in faith and love, and await in faith and love Your visit to my soul. O Holy Spirit, You pray within me "with unspeakable groanings" (*Rom 8,26*); help my misery, illumine my faith and awaken charity in me. You penetrate "the depths of divine mysteries" (cf. *1 Cor 2,10*); instruct me, be my teacher, help me to know my God. You who are the Spirit of Love, give me a loving knowledge of Him, so that I may always tend toward Him and be entirely captivated by love of Him.

*THE LIFE OF PRAYER*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, grant that I may seek You, not only at certain moments during the day, but also at every instant of my life.

**MEDITATION**

i. A soul who longs for a life of intimacy with God is not satisfied to limit its relations with Him to the time of prayer, but tries to extend them throughout the whole day. This is a rightful desire, for one who loves tries to prolong continuously his relations with the beloved. This is true, therefore, of a soul who loves God; and its desire is the more easily realized, since God Himself is always with us; He is always present and working in us. We are treating, it is true, of a presence which is spiritual and invisible; it is, however, *real* and not merely affective and moral, as is the presence of a loved one in the heart and mind of a lover.

If God is always with us, why can we not be always in continual contact with Him? This contact is realized by thought and love, but much more by the latter than by the former. In fact, it is impossible to be always thinking of God, partly because the mind becomes tired and partly because our many occupations demand all the application of our intellect, which cannot pay attention to two different things at the same time. The heart, on the other hand, can always love, even when the mind is busy elsewhere; and it never grows weary of tending toward the object of its love. Since supernatural love does not consist in sentiment, but in an intimate orientation of the will toward God, we know that this turning is possible, even during the performance of duties which absorb all our attention. The will can strengthen this orientation of itself toward God precisely by the desire to fulfill each duty for love of Him, to please Him and give glory to Him. St. Thomas says that the heart can always tend Godward by "the desire of charity," that is, by the desire to love Him, to serve Him, and to be united to Him in every action. "Prayer is nothing but a desire of the heart; if your desire is continuous, your prayer is continuous. Do

you wish never to cease praying? Then never cease desiring " (St. Augustine).

2. Since prayer does not consist in thinking much but in loving much, a life of continual prayer will consist much more in love than in thought. Nevertheless, a certain amount of mental activity is necessary, either to direct the heart toward God, or to maintain it in this direction.

The soul who applies itself well to mental prayer will easily be able to collect in itself some good thoughts which it can use during the day to keep its heart turned toward God. Therefore, it will be useful for the soul to try to recall these thoughts often in the midst of its occupations, and to apply them practically to its life.

Thus, for example, if during prayer, we have been considering God's infinite mercy toward us, we shall strive to preserve this thought even during our occupations, recognizing many signs of this mercy in the various circumstances in which we find ourselves. In fact, many happenings which, from a purely human point of view, are unpleasant and painful, hide, in reality, great mercies of the Lord who, by means of the sorrows, fatigues, and the trials of life, wants to detach us from creatures, make us practice virtue, and advance in goodness. Likewise, in our dealings with our neighbor, we shall try to imitate God's mercy. " Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful " (*Lk 6,36*). Although our prayer was spent in aridity, without leaving us any definite thought, but only a deeper realization of our nothingness and the infinite greatness of God, we shall make a treasure of it by attempting during the day to fulfill our duties in a spirit of humility and homage to God. We shall rejoice if some opportunity occurs for humbling ourselves, acknowledging our littleness—even before creatures—and exalting the grandeurs of the Lord.

In this way prayer will not be an isolated item in our day, but will permeate it, by conferring on each action and circumstance the tone of continual prayer.

#### COLLOQUY

" O Lord, grant that my life may be the continual prayer to which every rational creature is bound. This prayer has

its origin in love; it is fire and true desire based on charity, which forces the soul to perform all its acts for love of You. Awaken charity in me, O Lord, so that I may always desire You, and always desiring, continually pray. Let my soul pray always in Your presence—everywhere, at all times, in everything I do, by the affection of charity ” (cf. St. Catherine of Siena).

“ O my God, if I were inebriated with love for You, I should seek in all creatures only a means of serving You more diligently and more perfectly; and by renouncing my own will in everything and for everything, I should force myself, in an outburst of love, to do henceforth only what will be more pleasing to You.

“ Give me, O Lord, such great fervor and immense love that I shall see no difference between this or that life, this or that state, person, time, or place, but shall do what is most pleasing to You, whatever or wherever it may be, tending always to You by the affection of my soul. Grant that I may see all things in You, and nothing but You in them, ever eager and anxious to serve You in all things; and that, all on fire and burning with love, I may not take into consideration what is easiest and most agreeable for me, but only what is most pleasing to You.

“ Grant, O Lord, that I may imitate the angelic spirits who, although they are with us, never interrupt their divine contemplation. May I treat and serve my brethren by seeing and enjoying You in them, and may I always assist my neighbor, offering my heart to You. If I should ever depart from this noble exercise, help me to return to it at once by doing all that is within my power to succeed, so that, with Your divine help, I may always live with my heart centered on You ” (cf. St. Bonaventure).

*GOD'S PILGRIMS*

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - Grant, O Lord, that the things of earth may not take hold of my heart and impede it from aspiring to heaven.

**MEDITATION**

1. Today the liturgy begins to direct our thoughts toward the coming Ascension of Jesus : "A little while, and now you shall not see Me...because I go to the Father." The Gospel (*Jn* 16,16-22) which relates this passage is taken from the discourse that Our Lord made to the Apostles at the Last Supper. His purpose was to prepare them for His departure, before He went to His Passion; but the Church presents to us this farewell speech of Jesus today, before His Ascension. Having accomplished His mission, Jesus must return to the Father who sent Him. One day we shall have to do the same; earth is not our lasting dwelling, but the place of our pilgrimage. Jesus has said so : "A little while, and now you shall not see Me; and again a little while, and you shall see Me...." These words which were enigmatic for the Apostles, who did not understand them, are now clear to us : "a little while"—that is our short lifetime, and very soon we too must leave the earth and follow Jesus to heaven where we shall see Him in His glory. Then, as our Lord said, "your heart shall rejoice; and your joy no man shall take from you." However, before reaching this happy state, we have to endure the difficulties, struggles, and sufferings of life on earth. Although it is "short" compared with the "eternal weight of glory" (*2 Cor* 4,18) which awaits us, the Lord knows that for us, overcome as we are by the trials of life on earth, it is "much" and painful. He warns us, therefore, so that we shall not be scandalized :—"You shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice...." The world rejoices and wants to rejoice at any cost, because it is immersed in the pleasures of this life, with no thought of what awaits it beyond. If it cannot escape the inevitable sufferings of life, it tries to stifle its sorrow in pleasure, by contriving to extract from

every fleeting moment all the enjoyment possible. A Christian does not do this; he imposes on himself a life of sacrifice and renunciation, in view of heavenly happiness : " You shall be made sorrowful," said Jesus, " but your sorrow shall be turned into joy."

2. The Epistle (*1 Pt 2,11-19*) likewise exhorts us to live on earth with our eyes turned toward heaven. " Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, to refrain yourselves from carnal desires which war against the soul." The pilgrim cannot delay to enjoy the pleasures and joys which he meets on the road, or he will endanger the success of his journey and may even run the risk of not reaching the end. So the Christian, God's pilgrim, cannot allow himself to be detained by the things of earth; he can use them and even enjoy them, if Providence puts them in his way, but only with a detached heart which immediately leaves them behind. Nothing can delay him, for he is in a hurry to reach the goal. The life of a Christian is like that of a traveler in a foreign land, who never delays because he is anxious to get back to his own country. The Secret of the Mass very aptly puts on his lips the following prayer : " May these mysteries, O Lord, quench the ardor of our earthly desires, and teach us to love only the things of heaven!" We need this prayer very much, for present satisfactions and goods, with their tangible, concrete character, may always make an impression on our senses and heart, even to the point of detaining us in our progress toward heaven, and of making us forget the emptiness of all earthly things. Another characteristic of the pilgrim is that he is never satisfied until he reaches his native land; this unrest throws a veil of sadness over his life. Thus, the Christian, God's pilgrim, can never be wholly content until he reaches heaven and possesses God. Today, sighing, he runs toward Him; he quickens his step, sustained by the hope of meeting Him " face to face " some day. His hope, however, is accompanied by a feeling of sadness, because he hopes for what he does not yet possess. His is the holy sadness of those who are seeking God. Let us thank God if He has made us experience this; it is a good sign; it is a sign that our heart has been captivated by His love, and that earthly things can no longer satisfy it. Once again the words of Jesus comfort us : " Your sadness shall be changed into joy."

## COLLOQUY

"O my Delight, Lord of all creatures and my God! How long must I languish for Your presence? O tedious, O painful, O dying life! What lonely, hopeless solitude! When then, O Lord, when, when.... What shall I do, my sovereign Good. What shall I do? Must I desire not to desire You? Ah! my God and Creator, You wound and do not heal; You strike but leave no wound; You kill to give more life! In a word, O my Lord, You do what You wish, because You are almighty! Let it be so, my God, because it is Your will; I have no other will than to love You.

"O Lord, my Creator, my anguish draws this complaint from me, making me speak of that for which there is no remedy until You provide one. My soul is in a narrow prison : it longs for liberty, yet would not move one slightest degree from Your will. O my Glory, either increase my pain or cure it altogether.

"O death, in you is life, and I know not why men dread you! Yet who that has not always loved God would not fear you? Since I am such a one, what do I desire and ask? Will death be the punishment which my faults have deserved? Do not permit it, O my Sovereign Good, for it cost You much to redeem me!

"O my soul, submit to the will of your God; it is best for you. Serve Him and trust in His mercy; when by penance you have won some little claim to pardon for your sins, He will ease your pain. Do not try to rejoice until you have suffered. But, O my true King and Lord, I am incapable even of this, unless You sustain me by Your power and majesty. With Your help, I can do all things" (*T.J. Exc*, 6).

*PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Lord, grant that I may always live in Your presence with my interior gaze fixed on You.

**MEDITATION**

1. The life of continual prayer becomes easier as the soul succeeds in preserving within itself, throughout the day, the awareness of the presence of God. We already know that God is always present within us, that we live, move, and have our being in Him; but while we try during the time of prayer to become more and more aware of this great truth, our consciousness of it gradually fades away in the course of our daily occupations, and we are often surprised to find ourselves acting as if God were no longer present within us.

The practice of the presence of God really consists in making strong efforts to keep God always present in our mind and heart, even when we are engaged in our daily tasks. We can do this in various ways : we can use external objects, such as an image or a crucifix which we wear or put on our worktable, the sight of which will often remind us of God; we also can use our imagination to picture "interiorly" the Lord near us. For, if the humanity of Jesus is not physically present, it is nevertheless always exercising an influence over us—even a physical one—in the communication of grace; hence we can truly "represent to ourselves" this action of Jesus within us. We can also keep a very vivid remembrance of God by using some truth of faith. For example, I can cultivate the thought of the continual presence of the Trinity within me, and try to perform all my actions in honor of my divine Guests; or else I can consider my duties as so many manifestations of the will of God, and so unite myself to this divine will as I perform them. Further, I can make it a practice to view all the circumstances of my life in the light of faith, and therefore, arranged by divine Providence for my good. This will incline me to accept them and to repeat continually to my heavenly Father : "I am content with everything You do."

2. The practice of the presence of God, especially recommended by St. Teresa of Jesus to souls aspiring to divine intimacy, aims at keeping the soul in close contact with God, present within it. "We must retire within ourselves even during our ordinary occupations," says the Saint. "If I can recall the companionship I have within me for so much as a moment, that is of great utility" (*Way*, 29).

One might object that this method is more suitable for those who live in solitude than for those who are in constant contact with others; yet St. Teresa applies it, simply and practically, to the latter : "If one is speaking, he must try to remember that there is One within him to whom he can speak; if he is listening, let him remember that he can listen to One who is nearer to him than anyone else. Finally, let him realize that, if he likes, he need never withdraw from this good companionship, and let him grieve when he has left his Father alone for so long, though his need of Him is so sore" (*ibid.*, 29).

Anyone who works, either mentally or manually, can adopt this method in all his relations with his neighbor. Nothing can hinder him from using it even inversely, that is, by applying it to the presence of God in the souls of others. If, unfortunately, God is not present at all times in all men by grace, He is present in essence, as the creator and conserver of their being.

Thus a teacher can always consider God present in his pupils; a doctor or a nurse, in their patients; a merchant or a dressmaker, in their customers, and so on. This thought will inspire in us sentiments of kindness, charity, and respect for all those with whom we come in contact; it will lead us to be interested in them and to serve them, neither for an advantage which we may reap by so doing, nor solely from a sentiment of duty, but as homage to God whom we recognize as present in them. It means, in short, to seek, serve, and love God present in our brethren. This practice, together with the one suggested by St. Teresa, will be very effective in maintaining our contact with God, whether we think of Him as present in our own soul, or in that of our neighbor. "If you become accustomed to having Him at your side," says St. Teresa, "and if He sees that you love to have Him there and are always trying to please Him, you will never be able, as we put it, to send Him away" (*Way*, 26).

**COLLOQUY**

"Lord, may my motto be : Thou in me and I in Thee! How beautiful is Your presence within me, in the inmost sanctuary of my soul. May my continual occupation be to retire into myself, that I may lose myself in You, and live with You. I feel You so vividly in my soul, that I have only to become recollected to find You there within me, and in that I find all my happiness.

"O Lord, let me live with You as with a friend! Help me to live in the awareness of faith always, in order that I may be united to You no matter what happens. I bear heaven in my soul, since You, who satiate the blessed in the Beatific Vision, give Yourself to me in faith and mystery.

"Grant, O my God, that my soul may be a little heaven wherein You can rest with delight. In order that I may attain this end, help me to remove everything that might offend Your divine eyes, and then permit me to live always with You in this little heaven. Wherever I am or whatever I do, You never leave me alone; grant that I, too, may always remain with You. At every hour of the day and night, in joy or sorrow, in every work and action, may I always know how to find You within me!

"O my God, Blessed Trinity, be my dwelling, my rest, my Father's house which I shall never leave. Let me abide in You, not for a few fleeting minutes or hours, but permanently, habitually. May I pray in You, adore in You, love in You, suffer in You, work and act in You alone. Let me remain in You to offer myself to others through You, to attend to all my duties, while always penetrating further into Your divine depths. O Lord, grant that every day I may advance along the path of the abyss that leads me to You, that lets me slide down this slope with a confidence full of love" (cf. E.T. *L - I*, 1).

*THE SPIRIT OF FAITH*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - Give me, O Lord, that spirit of faith which will keep me in contact with You in every occupation and circumstance of my day.

**MEDITATION**

1. There are two chief obstacles which hinder us from keeping in contact with God while we are at our daily tasks. First, there is the almost entirely worldly, material point of view with which we frequently consider persons and events; second, there is the opacity of creatures, and the painful, disconcerting, and sometimes evil aspect of many occurrences. As long as we are at Our Lord's feet in prayer, it is easy for us to believe that we can see Him in every creature, in every situation; but when we are face to face with certain persons, or difficulties, this idea vanishes and we founder in human reasonings which make us lose sight of God and His activities in the world. The remedy for this is to cultivate a deep spirit of faith.

Faith is not limited to knowing God in Himself as the Trinity; it makes us see Him also in all creatures, in all circumstances of our life, since He is always present everywhere by His providential action. God knows creatures as they exist in relation to Himself; and faith, showing creatures to us as dependent upon God, makes us, in this way, see and judge them somewhat as God Himself sees and judges them. Faith teaches us that nothing, absolutely nothing, happens in the world which is not subject to divine control. It is true that God cannot will evil; and therefore He does not will sin or its consequences, such as injustice, litigation, war; but He does permit them, simply to safeguard the liberty of His creatures. However, He sometimes intervenes in situations, even in those caused by sin, so as to make everything enter into His divine plan, which is ordained for His own glory and for the salvation and sanctification of souls. My spirit of faith must be so real that it will convince me that no circumstance, either in my private life or in my relations

with others, escapes God's jurisdiction, which is so wise that it can draw good even out of evil. Consequently, I can see nothing apart from God; I can find Him in any person, in any situation.

2. A soul of faith meets God not only in prayer, but seeing Him in all things, in all things it finds Him; thus, it can keep itself in contact with Him, even in the midst of occupations. The spirit of faith makes it penetrate the opaqueness of creatures and occurrences so that it always finds God. Secondary causes become transparent to it, enabling it to discover at once the First Cause, God, who is present and operating everywhere. To be able to recognize and meet God in every creature, even in the ones that hurt us, offend us, or make us suffer, and in every happening, even the most disagreeable, painful, and disturbing ones—this is a great secret of the interior life. Then the world becomes an open book, on every page of which is written in large letters the one word : *God*. Before God, His will, His permission, His plans, everything else becomes secondary; we see how stupid it is to fix our gaze on creatures, which are, as it were, only a veil which hides the Creator. However, we need assiduous practice before we can reach such deep faith.

In my contacts with my neighbor—and how many people I do meet in the course of a day!—I can form the habit of greeting Our Lord, present in every creature. In the duties of my state in life and in the orders of my superiors, I can see the expression of God's will in all circumstances—great, small, or even minute—which cause me boredom, uneasiness, suffering, increase of labor, or change of plans. I must learn to see them as the many means which God is using to make me practice virtue—patience, generosity, charity. My hours of prayer must serve to show me all the details of my life in this supernatural light, so that I may always be able to find Our Lord in them.

#### COLLOQUY

"O my God, Your divine presence is everywhere; it sustains, surpasses, rules, and penetrates all things; it is sufficient for all, and arranges all, so that it governs everything

with infinite love and power. Before Your divine presence, all the rest is as nothing; for it is so great and powerful that, in reality, it absorbs everything else and makes it disappear.

"O Lord, grant that I may finally succeed in rising from creatures to You, without losing myself in vain reflections and idle thoughts about creatures; grant that I may do this with simplicity and in a spirit of faith, a living and unshakable faith. You penetrate everywhere with Your goodness, Your infinite personal love, and Your omnipotence. This truth simplifies everything; in it all becomes essentially and substantially one; this truth surpasses, penetrates, and absorbs all the rest, all that is created. O my God, You are in everything! What a treasure! Grant that I may live in this truth as in my center and my place of rest, where nothing can affect me or distract me from You, if I remain well hidden there" (cf. Blessed M. Thérèse Soubiran).

Give me, O Lord, such a clear, penetrating glance of faith, that beyond all human creatures and circumstances, I may always see Your hand guiding and directing everything, and continually inviting me to follow You and remain with You. Grant that I may see You more than creatures, You, the Creator, present and operating in everything; teach me to recognize You in each one of my neighbors, and to find You in every event of my life. Do not permit creatures to occupy my mind or my heart; but while my duties oblige me to occupy myself with them, may I tend more toward You than toward them and live more with You than with them.

O Lord, You are the first and great reality, the one, absolute reality in which everything lives and moves! Grant that no human contingencies, which derive their existence from You, may set themselves before my eyes in such a way as to prevent me from seeing You, finding You, and uniting myself to You through everything.

*LITURGICAL PRAYER*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, Head of the Mystical Body, grant that while praying with the Church, I may unite myself to Your prayer.

## MEDITATION

1. A Christian is not isolated. As man, he belongs to the great human family; as one baptized, he is grafted onto Christ and becomes a member of His Mystical Body, the Church. A Christian is, at the same time, a child of God and a child of the Church; it is precisely in the bosom of the Church that he becomes a child of God. Hence his whole spiritual life, even though it has a personal character which tends toward intimate contact with God, ought also to have a social, liturgical character, which shares in the life of the Church. In other words, the spiritual life of a Christian should be framed in that of the Church, his Mother; it should be associated to all that the Church does in union with Christ her Head to extend His sanctifying action in the world.

Just as our spiritual life is born, grows, and develops in the bosom of the Church, so our prayer, which is the highest expression of the spiritual life, should be inserted in the prayer of the Church, that is, in liturgical prayer. Liturgical prayer has a special excellence because it is not the prayer, however sublime and elevated, of individual souls, but is the prayer that the whole Church addresses to God, in union with Jesus, her Spouse and her Head. It is something like a prolongation of Jesus' prayer; indeed, it is a participation in those supplications which He Himself always offers to the Father. In the glory of heaven and in humble effacement on our altars, He praises Him in the name of all creatures and intercedes with Him for the needs of each one in particular. "The sacred liturgy is the public worship given to the Father by our Redeemer as Head of the Church; and it is the worship which the society of the faithful render to their Head and through Him, to the eternal Father" (Encyclical : *Mediator Dei*).

Whenever we feel the poverty of our own prayer, let us

offer to God the great prayer of Jesus and the Church, associating ourselves spiritually.

2. Because liturgical prayer is the public prayer of the Church, it necessarily gives a large place to acts of exterior worship, such as ceremonies, chants, collective prayers, all of which must be performed with great care. However, this would be insufficient unless accompanied by interior worship. "The sacred Liturgy requires that these two elements—exterior and interior worship—be closely united" (*ibid.*). Therefore, it is not enough to assist at sacred rites, to take part in ceremonies and collective prayers; this must all be *vivified* by personal interior prayer which raises the heart to God with the desire of knowing and of conversing with Him. Each soul in its own spiritual life is free to give a larger place to liturgical prayer or to private prayer, according to its own devotion; but these two kinds of prayer must never be opposed to one another. Rather, they must be united in such a way that the one penetrates and sustains the other. As liturgical prayer should be vivified by personal prayer, so personal prayer should be incorporated into liturgical prayer and nourished by it. In fact, as true children of the Church, we should try to sustain our personal prayer by the liturgy. Following the liturgical prayers—at least on feast days—by means of the texts in the Missal and Vesperral, we can attune our prayer life to the great mysteries of the life of Christ. The Church presents them to us at the various liturgical seasons, when she invites us not only to consider these mysteries, but also to associate ourselves with them. Thus, during Advent, our prayer will be centered on the mystery of the Incarnation; in Lent, it will be focused on the mysteries of the Passion and death of Jesus, and so on.

In this way, the liturgy becomes the central artery of our life of prayer and provides it with very substantial food. Our personal prayer, then, is submerged in liturgical prayer and vice-versa, since after we have contemplated in private prayer the mysteries presented to us by the liturgy, we return to liturgical prayer, better enabled to understand and relish it.

## COLLOQUY

"O my God, how discouraged should I be by reason of my weakness and nothingness, if to praise, reverence, and glorify You, I did not have Jesus Christ, my only Good, who does this so perfectly! To Him I entrust my weakness, and I rejoice that He is all and I am nothing.... Yes, O Jesus, in You I possess everything; You are my Head and I am really one of Your members. You pray, adore, humble Yourself, and give thanks in me and for me, and I do the same in You, for the member is all one with the Head. Your holy, magnanimous life absorbs mine, which is so vile and mean" (cf. Bl. M. Thérèse Soubiran).

O Jesus, seated at the right hand of the Father, and interceding continually for us, deign to absorb into Your great prayer my very poor one.

"O Jesus, grant that I may adore the Father 'in spirit and in truth,' and in order that I may do so, permit me to adore Him by You and in union with You; for You are the great Adorer in spirit and in truth" (cf. E.T. I, 9). You alone are the real adorer, whose prayer and adoration are perfectly worthy of the infinite Majesty. You alone are the perfect praise of the Most Holy Trinity; You wish to associate with this praise the Church, Your Spouse and my Mother. You wish to associate me with it also, Your member and a child of the Church. Grant that by participating in the prayer of the Church, I may likewise participate in Your prayer. Do not look upon the poverty of my personal prayer, but see it united with the sublime, unceasing prayer of Your Spouse; see it joined to the perpetual chorus of praise and petition which Your priests, the souls consecrated to You, and all Your elect, are continually sending up to Your throne. Grant that my voice may not be discordant in this magnificent chorus. Help me then to pray with a real spirit of piety and with an attentive, devout soul, so that my heart will always accompany the movement of my lips, and my interior sentiments vivify every action, every chant, and every word.

*HOLY MASS*

**PRESENCE OF GOD - Give me, O Lord, a better understanding of the value and meaning of Your Eucharistic Sacrifice.**

**MEDITATION**

1. The heart of liturgical worship is the Mass. Just as the redemptive work of Jesus reached its culminating point on Calvary by His death on the Cross, so too, the liturgical action, which continues His work in the world, has its climax in the Mass, which renews and perpetuates on our altars the Sacrifice of the Cross. Jesus has willed that the precious fruits of redemption, which He merited on Calvary for the whole human race, be applied and transmitted to each of the faithful in a particular way by their participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. This fountain of grace which Jesus opened on Calvary continues to pour over our altars; all the faithful are obliged to approach it at least once a week by attending Sunday Mass, but we may approach it even daily, each time we are present at the Holy Sacrifice. Holy Mass is truly the "fountain of life." By offering and immolating Himself continually on our altars, Jesus repeats to us, "If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink" (*Jn* 7,37).

"The august Sacrifice of the Altar," says the Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, "is not merely a commemoration of the Passion and death of Christ, but is a true and proper sacrifice, in which, by immolating Himself in an unbloody manner, the Great High Priest renews His previous act on the Cross." The Victim is the same, so is the Priest; nothing but the manner of offering is different—bloody on the Cross, unbloody on the altar. If we do not see in the Mass, as Mary did on Calvary, the torn Body of Christ and the Blood flowing from His wounds, we do have, by virtue of the Consecration, the real presence of this Body and Blood. Moreover, as this divine presence becomes actualized under two distinct species, the bloody death on Calvary is mystically renewed by the real separation of the Body and Blood of the Savior.

2. The best way of assisting at Holy Mass is the one which makes us participate most in the sublime action taking place on the altar. The liturgical method is especially recommended; by having us recite the same prayers as the priest, it makes us follow more closely the various parts of the Holy Sacrifice. However, instead of being preoccupied with the exact rendering of the words, which is obligatory only for the priest, we should penetrate the meaning of the different prayers, especially those said at the principal parts of the Mass, such as the Offertory, Consecration, and Communion. Although the liturgical method is very good, it is not the only one; the Encyclical *Mediator Dei* expressly says, "The needs and dispositions are not the same in all souls, and they do not continue to remain the same in each one." It is not uncommon, for example, that, after following the liturgical method for a long time with fruit, a particular soul might feel the need of closing the Missal in order to taste a little more profoundly the very substance of the Mass and to "penetrate" it further. This is not going backward but forward. Instead of focusing the attention in a special way on the various ceremonies and prayers, the soul feels the need of "getting into intimate contact with the High Priest" (*ibid.*), in order to unite itself interiorly with His action, His offering, and His immolation. By doing this, she follows the Mass in a manner which is more contemplative than liturgical; we have the simple "loving attention" which is the characteristic of contemplative prayer. Without necessarily following the development of the Sacred Rite in all its various parts, the soul fixes the mind and heart upon the Mass drama with a general glance, made keen by love. Thus we advance in an ever clearer understanding of the Holy Sacrifice, and acquires a more profound "sense" of it, which in turn awakens in us a more efficacious desire of uniting ourselves with the Sacrifice. However, it will be well to return to the Missal from time to time, especially to follow the liturgy on Sundays and feasts; each time our soul does this we will find new light, and a new sense, which will help us to penetrate the very substance of the Holy Sacrifice.

## COLLOQUY

"O eternal Father, permit me to offer You the heart of Jesus, Your beloved Son, as He offers Himself to You in the Holy Sacrifice of the altar. Accept, I beg You, this offering which I make You; accept all the desires, sentiments, affections, movements, and acts of His most sacred heart; they are all mine, because He sacrifices Himself for me, and I protest that I do not wish to have in the future any desires other than His. Accept them in satisfaction for my sins and in thanksgiving for all Your benefits; accept them, and grant me by Your merits all the graces necessary for me, especially the grace of final perseverance. Accept them as so many acts of love, adoration, and praise which I offer to Your divine Majesty, for they alone can worthily honor and glorify You.

"O my God, I offer You Your beloved Son, in thanksgiving for all Your goodness to me. I offer Him as my adoration, my petition, my oblation, my resolutions; I offer Him as my love and my all. Accept Him, O eternal Father, for all that You wish from me, for I have nothing worthy of You to offer, except Him whom You have given me with so much love" (St. Margaret Mary Alacoque).

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all that He has rendered unto me? I will take the chalice of salvation.' Yes, O my God, if I take this Chalice, crimsoned with the Blood of my Master, and in utterly joyous thanksgiving, mingle my blood with that of the sacred Victim, He will impart to it something of His own infinity, and it will give You, O Father, wonderful praise. Then my suffering will become a speech that proclaims Your glory. O Jesus, grant that I may become so identified with You that I may ceaselessly express You in the sight of Your Father. What were Your first words on entering the world? 'Behold I come to do Your will, O God!' May this prayer be like the beating of my heart. You made a complete offering of Yourself to accomplish the will of the Father; grant that will may be my food, and at the same time, the sword which immolates me. Thus, peaceful and joyous, I shall go to meet all sacrifices with You, my adored Master, rejoicing to be known by the Father, since He crucifies me with His Son" (cf. E.T. II, 7 - 14).

*PARTICIPATING IN HOLY MASS*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Jesus, immolated at every moment of the day on our altars, let me share in Your Sacrifice.

**MEDITATION**

1. The Encyclical *Mediator Dei* exhorts all the faithful to "participate in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, not passively, carelessly, and with distractions, but with such ardor and fervor that we shall be closely associated with the High Priest." It is not enough to be present at Mass; we must take part, "participate" in it. In Holy Mass, Jesus continues to sacrifice Himself for us, and to offer Himself to His Father, in order to obtain divine blessings for us. It is true that Jesus offers Himself through the ministry of the priest, but the priest makes the offering in the name of all the faithful, and they, in union with him—as the words of the Canon indicate : "for whom we offer, or who offer up to You this sacrifice of praise." This means that the faithful also are invited to offer the divine Victim with the priest. *Mediator Dei* states it thus : "to unite their intentions of praise, petition, expiation, and thanksgiving with those of the priest, or better, the Sovereign Priest Himself." On Calvary, Mary did not take a passive part in the Passion of her Son; she united herself with His intentions, and offered Him to the Father. In the same way, when we are present at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we, too, can offer the Father the divine Victim who is *ours*, because He offered and immolated Himself for all of us. Our praise, petitions, and expiations are only poor things; but if we give them to God united with those of Jesus and made valuable through His Sacrifice, we have the right to think that they will be acceptable to Him and will be heard because of the infinite dignity of the divine Victim Himself. Jesus, the Head of the Mystical Body, sacrificed Himself for us, His members; and being our Head, He belongs to us : *He is ours*. He is the Victim who, although He immolated Himself wholly on Calvary for our salvation, wills to perpetuate His immolation on our altars. Every day,

every hour, we have His offering at our disposal; daily we can offer it to the Father for our intentions.

2. "In order that the oblation by which the faithful offer the divine Victim to the heavenly Father may have its full effect, still one thing more is necessary; it is necessary that they immolate themselves as victims" (*Mediator Dei*). This teaching, authorized by the Church, exhorts us to take part in the Holy Sacrifice, so far as to become, "together with the Immaculate Host, a victim acceptable to God the Father" (*ibid.*). Jesus offered Himself as a Victim to the Father by accepting His will in everything, even to the point of willing to die on the Cross for His glory. We offer ourselves as victims to God when, renouncing everything that is contrary to His will, we study to conform ourselves to this divine will in everything, that is, in the exact fulfillment of our duties and in the generous acceptance of all that God permits in our regard. If a duty requires sacrifice, if our life includes suffering, we have the opportunity each morning in the Holy Mass to give the greatest possible value to our sacrifices by offering, as the *Mediator Dei* teaches, "ourselves as well as all our worries, troubles, sorrows, and misfortunes, together with our divine crucified Head."

Jesus sacrificed Himself alone on Calvary for our salvation, but on the altar He wishes to associate us with His immolation; for, if the Head is sacrificed, the members must be sacrificed also. Let a poor creature offer in expiation to God his sacrifice and even his life. What value could this have? None, because we are nothing. But if this offering is united to Jesus' offering, then it becomes, with Him, by Him, and in Him, an acceptable sacrifice to God the Father. Then, when we return to our duties, the remembrance of the offering we have made in the morning will help us to be generous in accepting our daily trials, great or small. The thought that at every moment of the day and night Jesus is immolating Himself on our altars will urge us to continually unite our sacrifices with His, and will stimulate us to live as real victims in union with the divine Victim. What strength and generosity the soul will draw from this living, constant participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass!

## COLLOQUY

"O Jesus, grant that Your Sacrifice, the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar, may be the source and model of my sacrifice, for my life must also be a holy sacrifice. It certainly is a sacrifice, for life is all interwoven with mortification, detachment, and suffering.... But that my sacrifice be 'holy,' like Yours on Calvary and in the Holy Mass, it must be vivified, offered, and consumed by love. O Jesus, give me a great love which will give value to my sacrifice and make it fruitful for the glory of the Father, the triumph of the Church, and the good of souls.

"O Jesus, divine Priest, what shall I offer You as matter for the sacrifice, as a victim of love who shares in Your Sacrifice? I offer You my heart, my will, my very love, to be entirely transformed into Yours. In fact, in Your Holy Sacrifice You give me an example of this perfect docility, this conformity to the divine will, and this abandonment. This is the offering which I too, make: a generous, total acceptance of every decree of divine Providence, of every divine wish" (cf. Sister Carmela of the Holy Spirit, O.C.D.).<sup>1</sup>

"O my Savior, in union with the offering and the sacrifice of Yourself which You made to the Father and in His honor, I offer myself to You to be a bloody victim of Your will, a victim immolated for Your glory and that of Your Father. Unite me to Yourself, O good Jesus, draw me into Your sacrifice, so that I may be sacrificed with You and by You. Since the victim must be sacrificed, slaughtered, and consumed by fire, make me die to myself, that is, to my vices and passions, to all that is displeasing to You. Consume me entirely in the sacred fire of Your divine love, and grant that hereafter my whole life may be a continual sacrifice of praise, glory, and love for Your Father and for You" (St. John Eudes).

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<sup>1</sup> Sister Carmela of the Holy Spirit, a Discalced Carmelite of the Carmelite Monastery of St. Joseph, Via della Nocetta, Rome, died July 23, 1949. She was formerly the National Directress of Italian Catholic Action in Italy, and a soul of extraordinary interior life. Some of her writings were published by Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen in 1950, in the *Revista di vita spirituale*. Her biography, together with some notes of direction from Fr. Gabriel, her spiritual director, was published by the Carmel in Rome in 1954. (Note of the translator of the French edition.)

*THE DIVINE OFFICE*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, vouchsafe to associate my poor prayer with the great Prayer of the Church.

**MEDITATION**

1. The liturgy accompanies Holy Mass with the recitation of the Divine Office which, as *Mediator Dei* teaches "is the prayer of the Mystical Body of Christ, addressed to God in the name of all Christians and for their benefit, by priests, other ministers of the Church, and religious, who are assigned this task." The great dignity of the Divine Office lies in the fact that it is not a private prayer, but the official public prayer of the Mystical Body of Christ, whose members do not pray alone, but with Christ their Head. "When the Word of God assumed human nature, He intoned in His earthly exile the hymn which is sung in heaven through all eternity. He joined to Himself the whole human community and united it with Himself in the chanting of this hymn of praise" (*ibid.*). In the Divine Office, "Jesus prays with us as our Priest; prays in us as our Head.... Let us recognize then," says St. Augustine, "our voice in His and His voice in us." What a wonderful gift! Jesus, the Son of God, associates our poor, miserable prayers with His great precious Prayer.

Although the Divine Office is of obligation only for priests and religious who are charged with it by the Church, it can be said that it is the prayer of the whole Christian people, in the sense that it is addressed to God "in their name and for their benefit." It is therefore highly praiseworthy for the laity to try to participate in it in some way; for example, the recitation of *Vespers* on feast days, as well as of *Prime* and *Compline*. Furthermore, they can offer to God at every hour of the day and night the great Prayer of the Church, for their own special intentions and individual needs. In this way they can make up for the deficiencies and the brevity of their own personal prayers. Even in the midst of daily occupations, each one can unite himself from time to

time by pious aspirations with the "perpetual praise" which the Church sends up to God in the name of all Christians.

2. The Divine Office is made up, for the most part, of inspired texts taken from Holy Scripture. This is why we cannot find vocal prayers that are more beautiful and more suitable for praising the Divine Majesty; in the inspired word, the Holy Spirit Himself "asketh for us with unspeakable groanings" (*Rom 8,26*). Then, too, these prayers are so rich in doctrine and unction that they help greatly to nourish our personal piety. All these reasons make us understand that "the interior devotion of our soul must correspond to the lofty dignity of this prayer" (*Mediator Dei*), in such a way that "our soul is in tune with our voice," as St. Augustine says. Because the Divine Office is the prayer which the Church, together with Jesus, her Head, sends up to God, and because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, it has great value in itself; but it will have no value for us, so as to increase our union with God and to draw divine blessings down upon us, if it does not become *our* prayer, if we do not accompany it with *our own personal* devotion. In the society of the faithful, the Church prays with the heart of her children, with *our* heart; and the more fervent and full of love this heart is, the more our prayer, the Prayer of the Church, will be pleasing to God.

Even if the obligation of reciting the Divine Office is not involved, and a few brief prayers only are taken from the Breviary, it is well for all interior souls to try to grasp the spirit of this liturgical prayer and to make it their own. It is a spirit of praise and adoration which desires to render to God perpetual worship in union with Christ and in the name of the whole Church, a spirit of solidarity with Jesus, our Head, and with all the faithful, our brethren; it is a universal spirit which embraces the needs of the entire world, and prays in the name of all Christianity. How the horizons broaden now with the intentions of our prayers! We no longer feel alone in prayer; we have become little orantes beside Jesus, the great Orante!

**COLLOQUY**

“ O Lord, Your ears are not turned toward our lips, but toward our heart; they are not open to the speech, but to the life of him who praises You.

“ I sing with my voice to awaken piety within me; I sing with my heart to please You.... Let not my voice be alone in praising You, but may my works also praise You. Grant that I may not cease to live a good life, so that I may praise You without interruption. If my tongue must be silent sometimes, let my life speak to You; Your ears will not be attracted by my voice, but may You attend to my heart.

“ I shall not confine my praise to my voice, but I wish my praise to come from my whole being! Let my voice sing, let my life sing, let all my works sing. And if I must sigh, suffer, and be tempted here on earth, I hope that it will all pass away and the day will come when my praises will not fail. My voice may fail, but not my heart.

“ It is better for me to use my strength in praising You, than to take breath to praise myself. It is impossible to faint in praising You. To give You praise is like taking food. The more I praise You, the stronger I become, because You are always giving me Your sweetness, You, the object of my praise.

“ Help me, then, to praise You, by my voice as well as by my mind and by my good works, so that, as You exhort me in the Scriptures, I may sing to You a new canticle. To the old man, the old canticle; to the new man, the new canticle. If I love the things of the world, my song is old; I must love the things of eternity. Your love is ever new and eternal, ever new because it never grows old. Sin is what has made me grow old; rejuvenate me by Your grace” (St. Augustine).

*THE GREAT PROMISE*

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, prepare my heart to receive the Holy Spirit whom You have promised and merited for me.

## MEDITATION

1. Since last Sunday, the Church has been preparing us for the Ascension of Our Lord. Today, taking up the subject again, she goes a step further. She mentions the coming of the Holy Spirit, and in so doing, makes use of a passage from Jesus' discourse after the Last Supper. Our Lord is speaking to the Apostles and preparing their souls for His departure. Sad and thoughtful, they listen to Him, without courage to question Him. Like a kind father, the Lord breaks the painful silence. "And now I go to Him that sent Me, and none of you asketh Me : 'Whither goest Thou?'" He hastens to console them : "It is expedient to you that I go, for if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you" (*Gosp : Jn 16,5-14*). Only Jesus' death could merit this great gift for us, and it was not until after His Ascension into heaven that the Holy Spirit, the Envoy of the Father and the Son, could descend upon the Church. The Apostles were about to lose the sensible, physical presence of their adored Master. However, He would not leave them orphans and would continue to help them invisibly by His Spirit, who would take up His work with them. Jesus did His work in a visible manner in their midst; the Holy Spirit would do His in a secret, hidden way, but in one no less efficacious and real. Furthermore, as Jesus Himself said, the action of the Holy Spirit would complete His. "I have yet many things to say to you : but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will teach you all truth.... He shall receive of mine and shall show it to you." The hearts of the Apostles, still dulled by sin, could not really comprehend these profound truths; it was necessary that Jesus, by dying

on the Cross, destroy sin—the great obstacle to the action of the Holy Spirit—and then, when He had ascended into heaven, He would send the divine Paraclete whom He merited for them and for us by His Passion.

The sending of the Holy Spirit to our souls is the principal fruit of the Passion of Jesus.

2. We can draw some practical applications from today's Gospel. First of all, we must fervently prepare ourselves for Pentecost, so that the coming of the Holy Spirit will be renewed in us in all its plenitude. Since sin is the obstacle to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, our preparation must consist in a very special purity of conscience. Sin must be destroyed in us, not only in its actual manifestations, even though they are slight, but also in its deepest and most hidden roots.

We must be convinced, furthermore, that a certain action of the Holy Spirit is never interrupted in a soul in the state of grace; this is even more true of a soul who tries to correspond faithfully to the divine motions. This action does not necessarily have to be perceived and consoling. In aridity and despondency the Holy Spirit also works in the faithful soul; His action is secret and hidden, but also real and effective. Its chief purpose is to purify the soul and dispose it for union with God. If the soul is convinced of this, it will remain confident, even in difficulties, and, if it neither understands nor sees its path, it will trust in the Holy Spirit, who sees and knows well the goal to which He is leading it.

Finally, today's Gospel invites us to invoke the action of the Holy Spirit on the Church and on the whole world : on the Church, to govern and direct her in the accomplishment of her mission; on the world, to convince it of the truth which it rejects. "And when He is come," said Jesus, "He will convince the world of sin, and of justice, and of judgment," that is, He will make it see that it is the slave of sin because it has not believed in Christ. He will make it understand that justice and sanctity are found only in Him, the Redeemer, and He will show it that the devil, the "prince of this world," is henceforth overcome and condemned.

**COLLOQUY**

" Ah! eternal Word, tell me, I beg You, what prevents the Holy Spirit from accomplishing all His work in the soul? You tell me that the first impediment is malice; another impediment is the self-will of those who want to serve You, but in their own way. We want Your Spirit, but we want Him in the way that pleases us, and as much as pleases us; in this way we make ourselves incapable of receiving Him. At other times, lukewarmness is the hindrance; we think we are serving You and do not realize we are serving ourselves. But You, O Lord, want to be served with humility and sincerity, without self-love. Thus Your Spirit takes no rest but in a soul which He finds plunged in humility. Alas! O loving Word, I should like to know what I ought to do about these hindrances, for what good will it do me to understand them, if I do not know the cure for them? Now, I see plainly that the remedy for malice is a simple right intention; the remedy for self-will is a will so dead to self that it wills only what You will. The cure for lukewarmness is the ardor of charity, which like fire, comes into our hearts and burns up all tepidity " (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

" Come, O Holy Spirit, sanctify me! Come, O Spirit of Truth, fill me! Your divine Wisdom will establish me in the truth. I am thirsting for truth, and wish it to rule over my mind, my words, my affections, and my actions, avoiding everything that is opposed to it, not only lies, but also dissimulation, duplicity, and lack of sincerity with myself.

" Come, O Spirit of Peace, bring me Your peace! That profound peace which dilates the soul and prepares it for Your operations, that peace which calms and dominates all the sensible part of the soul and even the superior part.

" Come, O Spirit of Charity, inflame me and inspire me with Your love, so that I can pour it out over the souls whom I would bring to You! Oh! transform me into love; only thus shall I be able to fully respond to Your call, and be of use to the Church " (Sr. Carmela of the Holy Spirit, O.C.D.).

*MARY OUR GUIDE AND MODEL<sup>1</sup>*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - Under your protection I take refuge, O Mary; be the guide and model of my interior life.

**MEDITATION**

i. Month of May, month of Mary! The heart of every Christian turns spontaneously toward his heavenly Mother, with a desire to live in closer intimacy with her and to strengthen the sweet ties which bind him to her. It is a great comfort on our spiritual way, which is often fatiguing and bristling with difficulties, to meet the gentle presence of a mother. One is so at ease near one's mother. With her, everything becomes easier; the weary, discouraged heart, disturbed by storms, finds new hope and strength, and continues the journey with fresh courage.

"If the winds of temptation arise," sings St. Bernard, "if you run into the reefs of trials, look to the star, call upon Mary. In danger, sorrow, or perplexity, think of Mary, call upon Mary." There are times when the hard road of the "nothing" frightens us, miserable as we are; and then, more than ever, we need her help, the help of our Mother. The Blessed Virgin Mary has, before us, trodden the straight and narrow path which leads to sanctity; before us she has carried the cross, before us she has known the ascents of the spirit through suffering. Sometimes, perhaps, we do not dare to look at Jesus the God-Man, who because of His divinity seems too far above us; but near Him is Mary, His Mother and our Mother, a privileged creature surely, yet a creature like ourselves, and therefore a model more accessible for our weakness.

Mary comes to meet us during this month, to take us by the hand, to initiate us into the secret of her interior life, which must become the model and norm of our own.

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<sup>1</sup> The meditations on Our Blessed Lady should be transferred according to the calendar of the year, so that they coincide with the month of May.

2. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, referring to certain discourses on the Blessed Virgin, said, "She is spoken of as unapproachable, whereas she should be represented as imitable" (*NV*). Mary is inaccessible, it is true, in the sublime privileges which flow from her divine maternity, and it is right to consider these prerogatives in order to admire and contemplate them, to praise our Mother's greatness and hence always to love her more and more; but, at the same time, we must consider Mary in the concrete picture of her earthly life. It is a simple, humble picture, which never leaves the framework of the ordinary life common to all mothers; under this aspect, Mary is truly imitable. Our program for the month of May, then, will be to contemplate the grandeurs of Mary, that we may be stimulated to imitate her virtues.

We shall consider Mary especially as the ideal and the model of our interior life. No one has understood, as she did, the depth of meaning in the words of Jesus : "But one thing is necessary" (*Lk 10,42*), and no one has lived by these words better than she. From the very first moment of her life, Mary was entirely God's and lived only for Him. Consider the years spent in the Temple in silence and prayer, the months passed at Nazareth in recollection, and in adoration of the eternal Word incarnate within her, the thirty years lived in sweet intimacy with Jesus, her Son and her God; then the sharing of His apostolic life, the union with Him in His Passion, and finally, her last years with St. John, during which, by her prayers, she was the support of the infant Church. Although the scenes in which she moved changed in appearance, although the external circumstances varied, her life remained unchanged in its substance, in her interior search for the "one thing necessary," and in her adherence to God alone.

The succession of events and her exterior activity did not hinder her from persevering in that attitude of continual prayer in which St. Luke presents her to us : "Mary kept all these words [the divine mysteries], pondering them in her heart" (*2,19*).

If, in imitation of Mary, our heart is firmly anchored in God, nothing can distract us from our interior occupation : to seek and love the Lord and live in intimacy with Him.

## COLLOQUY

"O my soul, do you fear to approach God? He has given you Jesus as Mediator. Is there anything that such a Son could not obtain from His Father? The Father who loves Him will answer Him, because of the love He bears Him. But do you yet hesitate to approach Him? He made Himself your brother, your companion, and in everything, sin excepted, He willed to undergo all the humiliations of human nature, just to compassionate your miseries. Mary has given you this brother. But His divine Majesty still awes you, perhaps; for, although He is man, He does not cease to be God. Do you want an advocate with Him? Have recourse to Mary. Mary is a pure creature, pure not only because she is free from sin, but also because of her unique human nature. I am sure, O Mary, that your prayers will be heard because of the respect you deserve; your Son will certainly hear you because you are His Mother, and the Father will hear His Son. This is why my confidence is unshakable; this is the reason for all my hope! O Blessed Virgin, the Angel declared that 'you have found grace before God.' You will always find grace, and I need only grace; I ask for nothing else" (St. Bernard).

"Draw me after you, O Virgin Mary, that I may run in the odor of your ointments. Draw me, for I am held back by the weight of my sins and the malice of your enemies. Since no one comes to your Son unless he is drawn by the Father, I dare to say that no one, so to speak, comes to Him if you do not draw him by your prayers. You teach true wisdom, you beg grace for sinners, you are their advocate, you promise glory to those who honor you, because you are the treasury of grace. You have found grace with God, O most sweet Virgin, you who have been preserved from original sin, filled with the Holy Spirit, and have conceived the Son of God. You have been given all these graces, O most humble Mary, not only for yourself, but also for us, so that you may be able to help us in all our necessities" (Ven. R. Jourdain).

*THE HANDMAID OF THE LORD*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Mary, you who called yourself the handmaid of the Lord, teach me how to consecrate all my strength and life to His service.

**MEDITATION**

1. All the splendors—divine filiation, participation in divine life, intimate relations with the Trinity—which grace produces in our souls are realized in Mary with a prominence, a force, a realism, wholly singular. If, for example, every soul in the state of grace is an adopted child of God and a temple of the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Virgin is so par excellence and in the most complete manner, because the Triune God communicated Himself to her in the highest degree possible for a simple creature, to such a degree that Mary's dignity, according to St. Thomas, touches “the threshold of the infinite” (cf. I<sup>a</sup>, q. 25, a. 6, ad 4). This can easily be understood when we think that, from all eternity, Mary was chosen by God to be the Mother of His Son. As the Incarnation of the Word was the first work of the mind of God, in view of which everything was created, so also Mary, who was to have such a great part in this work, was foreseen and chosen by God before all other creatures. It is fitting that the words of Sacred Scripture are applied to her : “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning” (*Prv* 8,22).

When Adam, deprived of the state of grace, was driven out of Paradise, only one ray of hope illumined the darkness of fallen humanity : “I will put enmities between thee and the woman,” God said to the serpent, “and...she shall crush thy head” (*Gn* 3,15). Here Mary appears on the horizon as the beloved Daughter of God, as she who will never be, for a single moment, a slave of the devil; as she who will always be spotless and immaculate, belonging wholly to God : as the Daughter whom the Most High will always look upon with sovereign complacency, and whom He will

introduce into the circle of His divine Family by bonds of the closest intimacy with each of the three divine Persons : Daughter of the Father, Mother of the Incarnate Word, and Spouse of the Holy Spirit.

2. Mary lived her divine filiation in a profound sentiment of humble dependence and loving adherence to God's every will. We have the best example of this in her reply to the Angel's message : "Behold the handmaid of the Lord" (*Lk* 1,38). Mary was aware of her position as a creature in relation to the Creator, and although she had been raised to such high dignity that, "after God's, it is the greatest that can be imagined" (Pius XI), she could find no better way to express her relations with God than to declare herself His "handmaid." This word describes the interior attitude of the Virgin toward God; it was not a passing attitude, but one that was permanent and constant throughout her whole life. Like Jesus, who, when He came into the world, announced, "I have come to do Thy will" (*Heb* 10,9), so Mary, who was to be the most faithful likeness of Jesus, offered herself to the will of her heavenly Father when she said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to Thy word." Faithful to her word, she would accept without reserve not only every manifest will of God, but also every circumstance permitted by Him : the long, inconvenient journey which would bring her far from home, just when she was about to bring into the world the Son of God; the poor, humble shelter of a stable; the flight into Egypt by night, the privations and inconveniences of exile, the labor and weariness of a life of poverty, the separation from her Son when He would leave her to begin His apostolate, the persecutions and insults He would endure and of which her maternal heart would be well aware, and finally, the disgrace of the Passion and death of her beloved Son on Calvary. We have good reason to believe that in each of these events, her interior dispositions were the same as on the day of the Annunciation : "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." What an example for us of humble dependence on God, of absolute fidelity to His will, and of perseverance in our vocation, in spite of the difficulties and sacrifices we shall have to encounter.

## COLLOQUY

O Mary, all pure and all holy, Paradise of God, His beloved Daughter, chosen by Him from all eternity to be the Mother of His only Son, preserved by Him from every shadow of sin, enriched by Him with all graces...how great and how beautiful you are, O Mary! "You are all beautiful, O Mary, and there is no stain of sin in you. You are the glory of Jerusalem, the joy of Israel, the honor of our people" (*Tota Pulchra*).

The Most High has always looked upon you with complacency and He willed to give Himself to you in a unique way. "The Lord is with you, O Mary! God the Father is with you, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, the Triune and One God. God the Father, whose noble Daughter you are; God the Son, whose most worthy Mother you are; God the Holy Spirit, whose gracious Spouse you are. You are truly the Daughter of the sovereign, eternal God, the Mother of sovereign Truth, the Spouse of sovereign Goodness, the handmaid of the sovereign Trinity" (cf. Conrad of Saxony). But from all these titles, you choose the last, the humblest, and the lowest, and call yourself the handmaid of the Lord.

"Oh! how sublime is your humility, which never yields to the seductions of glory, and in glory knows no pride. You were chosen to become the Mother of God, and you call yourself servant! O Blessed Lady, how were you able to unite in your heart such a humble idea of yourself, with so much purity and innocence, and especially such plenitude of grace? O Blessed Lady, whence comes such humility? Truly, because of this virtue, you have merited to be looked upon by God with extraordinary love; and you have merited to charm the King with your beauty, and to draw the eternal Son from the bosom of the Father" (cf. St. Bernard).

O Mary, you proclaimed yourself to be the handmaid of the Lord, and you have truly lived as such, always humbly submissive to His will, always ready to respond to His call and invitation. Who more than you could say with Jesus : "My meat is to do the will of My Father" (cf. *Jn* 4,34)? O Mary, sweet Daughter of the heavenly Father, impress upon my heart a little of your docility, a little of your love for God's holy will, in order that I may serve Him less unworthily.

*SPOUSE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Mary, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, make me docile to His divine motions.

**MEDITATION**

I. "The Blessed Virgin Mary," says St. Augustine, "was the only one who merited to be called the Mother and Spouse" of God. She became the Mother of God because she was the Spouse of the Holy Spirit : "the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee" (*Lk 1,35*), said the Angel, explaining the mysterious, divine manner in which she would become a mother, the Mother of the Son of God. At that moment the Holy Spirit, who had already possessed Mary's soul from the first moment of her Immaculate Conception, came upon her with such exceptional plenitude that He formed within her the sacred Body of Jesus. Justly, therefore, does Mary deserve the name of Spouse of the Holy Spirit : she is His possession, His sanctuary, His temple.

The divine Paraclete may well say to her in the words of the Canticle : "My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up" (*4,12*). Mary is a garden enclosed, because she was never defiled—even for an instant—by the shadow of sin, was never subject to the winds of unruly passions, never taken up with any affection for creatures. "The most glorious Virgin, our Lady," says St. John of the Cross, "never had the form of any creature imprinted on her soul, and was never moved by any creature, but her actions were always inspired by the Holy Spirit" (*AS III, 2,10*). Filled with grace from her conception, Mary is always the faithful Spouse of the Holy Spirit, attentive and docile to all His impulses and inspirations.

If Mary's sublime privileges are reserved for her alone, we can, nevertheless, imitate her interior dispositions by keeping our heart, in imitation of hers, always attentive and docile to the action of the Holy Spirit.

2. Complete docility to the motion of the Holy Spirit is precisely the characteristic of the state of union with God. Mary was "raised to this lofty state from the beginning," according to the teaching of St. John of the Cross (*ibid.*); and this is evident if we consider that Mary was not only created in grace but that she had, from the very beginning, a degree of grace far superior to that attained by the greatest saints at the end of their lives. Therefore, this state of perfect union with God, which is our ideal and the goal of all our efforts, was Mary's portion from the dawn of life. Furthermore, by her free, faithful correspondence to grace, she advanced to towering heights in this lofty state.

Considering these truths, therefore, we can easily see that after Jesus the Virgin Mary is the surest model and guide for those who aspire to union with God; her very creaturehood makes her more accessible to us, and more easily imitable. Mary teaches us that the great secret of quickly reaching union with God is entire detachment from creatures, especially from that creature we love so much, ourselves. Mary lived only for God. Studying her life in the Gospels, we never see her influenced by selfish motives or by reasons of personal interest; only one thing moves her: the glory of God and the interests of Jesus and of souls. In her humble, hidden life, in her work, in her poverty, in all the privations and sufferings she had to undergo, there was never a thought of self, never a complaint; rather, she was always ready to advance, totally oblivious of her suffering, wholly given to the fulfilling of the divine will. It was the Holy Spirit who guided her, who urged her, who sustained her, and her secret was to let herself be ruled and moved by Him in everything. Just as the Blessed Virgin conceived the Son of God by the operation of the Holy Spirit, so all her actions were begun by His inspiration. This is exactly how we should imitate Mary: eliminate from our life everything that is the fruit of our egoism, self-love, or pride, and do only the things that are inspired by grace, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit.

**COLLOQUY**

"O Mary, you are holy in body and mind. You can say in a special way : 'My conversation is in heaven' (cf. *Phil* 3,20). You are the garden enclosed, the sealed fountain, the temple of the Lord, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit; you are the wise Virgin who not only provided herself with oil, but filled her lamp with it. O Mary, how were you able to reach the inaccessible majesty of God, if you did not knock, ask, and seek? Yes, you found what you were looking for, and the Angel said to you, 'You have found grace before God.' Yet, how could you, who were already full of grace, find more grace? Oh! you were truly worthy to find grace, because you were not satisfied with the fullness which you had, but asked for a superabundance of grace for the salvation of the world! 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you,' said the Angel, and this precious balm was poured over you in such abundance that it flowed from you over the whole earth.... If heretofore the Holy Spirit was in you in the fulness of grace, now He *comes upon you*, as if to call attention to the superabundant plenitude of grace which He pours upon you. If in the past grace was present only in your soul, it now invades your breast also...the divine power makes you fruitful and you conceive of the Holy Spirit" (St. Bernard).

O Mary, faithful Spouse of the Holy Spirit, look upon my wretchedness and my weakness. God has placed in you the fullness of all His gifts so that I may understand that all hope, all grace, all salvation come from you! You see how hard my heart is, how dull my mind; help me, therefore, O faithful Virgin, to overcome the resistance of my pride, my selfishness and my cowardice, so that my soul may open itself fully to the invasion of grace, abandoning itself with docility to the action of the Holy Spirit, promptly following His impulses, inspirations and invitations.

*THE MOTHER OF GOD*

PRESENCE OF GOD - Holy Mother of God, make my heart one with yours, which was ever one with the Heart of God!

## MEDITATION

1. The divine maternity is the source of all Mary's privileges. Mary, the Immaculate One, the beloved Daughter of the Father, is also the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, whose power overshadowed her because she had been chosen to be the Mother of the Incarnate Word. All Mary's greatness and glory are explained in the light of her divine maternity; furthermore, her very existence is explained by her predestination to this high office. If God had not decreed that the Incarnation of His Son should take place in the womb of a virgin, we should never have had that masterpiece of grace and loveliness, the Most Blessed Virgin; we should never have had her smile or her maternal caresses. Therefore, we love and honor Mary because she is the Mother of God, the Mother of Jesus; and loving her in her relation to God, our devotion to her only makes our love for God, for Jesus, deeper and more tender. "*Mater Dei, Mater Creatoris,*" Mother of God, Mother of our Creator, we invoke her in the litany. These two titles which seem to be contradictory, actually express a unique synthesis because Mary, although a creature, is really the Mother of her Creator, the Mother of God's Son to whom she has given a human body: the fruit of her flesh and blood is the Son of God in whom and by whom all things were created. Here we understand more than ever how Mary's dignity reaches the threshold of the infinite. "God could make a bigger world or a wider sky, but He could not raise a pure creature higher than Mary, for the dignity of Mother of God is the highest dignity that can be conferred on a creature" (St. Bonaventure).

To anyone who wonders why so little is said about Mary in the Gospel, St. Thomas of Villanova replies: "What more do you want? Is it not enough for you to know that she is the Mother of God? It would have been sufficient

to say, ‘*De qua natus est Jesus*,’ Jesus was born of her.” In fact, O Mary, all I need to know, in order to love you, is that you are the Mother of my God.

2. Although God, from all eternity, had predestined Mary to be the Mother of His Son, He would not have her unaware of this, and so, when the time came for carrying out His plan, He asked the humble Virgin’s consent. The Angel’s message revealed to Mary the sublime vocation which God had reserved for her: “Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus” (*Lk 1,31*). Mary asked and the Angel explained the mystery of the divine maternity which would take place in her, without prejudice to her virginity. What could God have asked that Mary would have refused? It was not the first time that she gave up her own will for God’s: from the beginning of her existence, she had lived in the state of perfect union with God, and her chief characteristic was simply this full conformity of her human will with the divine will. That is why Mary gave her consent with all the love of her soul, said her *fiat*, accepted voluntarily, and voluntarily abandoned herself to God’s action. From this moment the mystery was accomplished, and the Virgin Mary bore God present within her, not only spiritually—like all souls who are in the state of grace—but also physically. St. Peter Damien says that the Word of God was present in her “by identity,” since He was one with her, as the child is one with its mother: identity of nature by flesh and blood, and by the life of the body which Mary communicated to her Son; identity of grace by the abundance of supernatural life which the Son communicated to His Mother; identity of affections, desires, and sentiments which the Heart of Christ implanted in the Heart of Mary. No one could ever say more truly than Mary: “I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me” (*Gal 2,20*).

Immense, marvelous mystery! And in the depths of this mystery we find the *yes* of a humble, human creature. God has created man free, and that is why, although He wants to work great things in him, He will not do so without his consent. God wants to transform us by His grace and to sanctify us, but before He does so, He waits for our assent. When this *yes* is complete and total, as Mary’s was, God will accomplish His work in us.

## COLLOQUY

"I give You thanks, O Lord God, from the depths of my heart, because You condescended, for love of us unworthy creatures, to take upon Yourself our human nature. Born of a Virgin, You were nourished by her milk, cradled in her bosom; You were submissive to her, You who preserve and direct everything that exists. And You have deigned to enlighten me, a miserable creature, so that I might know that You have a Mother; You permit me, unworthy as I am, to be able and to dare to address her.... Oh! with what devotion should I not give my heart to you, O Virgin Mary! My mouth should be filled with wonderful sweetness when I speak to you, sweet and gentle Lady, and when I bless the fruit of your womb. Oh! when I address you, how is it that I am not so filled with delight that I forget everything but you and the fruit of your womb? What greeting is more welcome than the one which recognizes you as the Mother of God? You wish men to rejoice in you, so that their love will always reach your divine Son; therefore, you wish to be called and recognized as the Mother of God. Hail, then, O Mary, and truly hail! O wonderful *Ave*, that drives the demons away, frees sinners, and makes your children rejoice.... The Angel congratulates you, O Virgin; the Word took flesh in your womb, and you became the Mother of God. Every creature sings an endless *Ave* to you! With how great reverence, honor, and devotion should we salute you, O Blessed Virgin, because you seek those who approach you reverently and devoutly. You love them, you nourish them, and adopt them as your children. Oh! blessed is he who has the joy of having you for Mother, who embraces you lovingly and imitates you in his works! Oh! blessed is he who does all he can to conform himself to you, O Mother of God! Certainly he is one who, despising every creature, attaches himself to God alone, his only love, and, crucified with Christ, sighs for the salvation of souls" (cf. St. Bonaventure).

*OUR MOTHER*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Mary, since you are really my Mother, make me your true and worthy child.

**MEDITATION**

1. When she consented to become the Mother of the Son of God, Mary bound herself by very close bonds not only to the person of Jesus, but also to His work. She knew that the Savior was coming into the world to redeem the human race; hence, when she agreed to become His Mother, she also agreed to become the closest collaborator of His mission. In fact, by giving us Jesus, the source of all grace, Mary collaborated most effectively and even directly in the diffusion of grace in our souls. "If Jesus is the Father of our souls," St. Alphonsus says, "Mary is their Mother, for, in giving us Jesus, she gave us true life; and later, by offering on Calvary the life of her Son for our salvation, she brought us forth to the life of divine grace."

As one woman, Eve, had cooperated in the losing of grace, so by a harmonious disposition of divine Providence, another woman, Mary, would cooperate in the restoration of grace. It is true that all grace comes from Jesus, who is the *only source* of grace and the *one and only Savior*; but, inasmuch as Mary gave Him to the world, and was intimately associated with His whole life and work, we can truly say that grace also comes from Mary. If Jesus is its source, Mary, according to St. Bernard, is its channel, the aqueduct which carries it to us. Since Jesus willed to come to us through Mary, so all grace and all supernatural life come to us through her. "This is the will of Him who decreed that we should have *everything* through Mary" (St. Bernard). *All* that Jesus merited for us by strictest right, *condignly*, Mary has merited for us fittingly, *congruously*. The Blessed Virgin is then truly our Mother. When she brought forth Jesus, she brought us forth at the same time to the life of grace; we can address her in all truth : "Hail, holy Queen, *Mother of mercy; our life, our sweetness, and our hope!*"

2. "From the moment that the Blessed Virgin Mary became the Mother of the Savior, she loved us so much, and she devoted herself so completely to obtaining our salvation that," St. Bernardine of Siena tells us, "from that moment she carried us in her bosom like a most loving mother." Even as the redemptive mission of Jesus, begun at the moment of His Incarnation, was consummated on Calvary, where His death merited supremely for us, so too, Mary's maternity found its fullest expression at the foot of His Cross. While Jesus was dying in the midst of the most atrocious torments, His loving Heart was preparing a truly exquisite gift for us. On earth, His dearest possession had been His Mother; now He would leave her to us as a most precious inheritance. "Behold thy Mother" (*Jn* 19,27), He said to St. John, thus giving her to the Apostle who, at that moment, represented the whole human race. These words of Jesus expressed the great truth which had had its beginning at the first moment of His Incarnation in the Virgin's womb and which now was fulfilled at the foot of the Cross : this is the truth of Mary's spiritual motherhood of all mankind. Mary saved our souls together with Jesus, for as He was offering Himself in sacrifice for us, Mary was offering Him, her Son, as the divine Victim for our redemption. As co-redemptrix, she procured the life of grace for us; therefore, she is the woman who in the supernatural order gives us life : she is our Mother.

"God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son for our salvation," says the Evangelist (cf. *Jn* 3,16), and similarly, St. Bonaventure declares, "it can be said that Mary so loved the world that she gave her only Son, in order that, through Him, all might have eternal life." See at what price Mary has become our Mother and we have become her children. Because it has cost her so much to give us birth, she very rightly desires us to live as her true children, worthy of the life of grace, which flows from the pierced side of her Jesus and from her maternal heart, pierced by the sword of sorrow.

#### COLLOQUY

"Oh blessed confidence, O sure refuge, you, the Mother of God, are my Mother! How can I fail to hope, since my

salvation and my sanctity are in the hands of Jesus, my Brother, and Mary, my Mother?" (Cf. St. Anselm).

"O Mary, Mary, bearer of the fire of love, and dispenser of mercy! Mary, co-redemptrix of the human race, when you clothed the Word with your flesh, the world was redeemed. Christ paid its ransom with His Passion, and you paid it with the sorrows of your body and soul" (St. Catherine of Siena).

"O Mary, you are that garden enclosed, which contains the Giver of Life; God Himself is within you, with heaven and all creatures. The whole world is saved by the Blood received from you. Without you, O Mary, there would be no paradise for me; without you, there would be no God for me....

"O Mary, how countless are the gifts and graces which you wish to bestow on creatures! And who would not want to receive them? It is perseverance in desiring them which is lacking; you, most loving Mother, do not offer gifts to your children when you see that they would not appreciate them and would throw them away; for you know that the guilt thus incurred would have to be punished later. O Mary, you want to grant me your gifts, but I deprive myself of them, because I want to mingle my gifts with yours. I should like to have your graces, but I want my own will at the same time, and so I cannot have them. I should like to have your good will, but also the love and kindness of creatures. I cannot have both. I want your love and my self-love, but this combination is impossible. I want to live under your mantle, but also under the mantle of my own comfort. Yet, it is not fitting to be delicate members of a thorn-crowned head; neither is it fitting for your children to seek their comfort under your mantle, O sweet Mother, when you had so little regard for your own comfort.

"O Mary, what can I offer and give you that will please you? If I offer you my will, I fear that you will not accept it, because it is not conformed to God's will. If I offer you my intellect, it is not enlightened; if I give you my affection, it is not pure. I offer you the Heart of your only Son! and a greater gift I cannot offer" (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

*THE MARIAN LIFE*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Mary, I wish to live with you as a child with its mother.

**MEDITATION**

1. The high place which Mary, as the Mother of God, occupies in the work of our sanctification fully justifies our desire to live intimately with her. As children love to be near their mother, so we as Christians want to live with Mary, and in order to do this, we resort to little means of keeping her in our thoughts. For instance, we may have her picture before us and greet her affectionately every time we look at it. Then, with a glance of faith, we can go beyond the picture, and reach Mary *living* in glory, Mary who, by means of the Beatific Vision, sees us, follows us, knows all our needs, and helps us with her maternal aid. By means of this our faith, our soul remains in continual contact with Mary. Spontaneously throughout the day, we increase our little pious practices in her honor, our prayers and ejaculations; all these combine to intensify our relations with Mary. Saturdays, the month of May, the several feasts of Mary are for us so many occasions of remembering her especially, of meditating on her prerogatives, contemplating her beauty, and continually increasing our love for her. In fact, it is impossible to bear the sweet picture of Mary in our mind and heart without feeling moved to love her, without feeling the need of showing her the reality of our love by trying to please her, that is, by living like true children of hers. In this way the "Marian" life, or the life of intimacy with Mary, can penetrate the whole of our "Christian" life and make us more faithful in the fulfillment of all our duties, for nothing can please Mary more than to see us accomplishing with love her Son's will. Furthermore, Christian life lived under Mary's maternal eye acquires that special gentleness and sweetness which arise spontaneously from the constant companionship of a most loving Mother who lavishes attention on us.

2. Another aspect of the Marian life is the imitation of Mary. Jesus alone is the "Way" that leads to the Father, He is the only *model*; but who is more like Jesus than Mary? Of whom more than of Mary can it be said that she has the same thoughts as Christ? "O Lady," exclaims St. Bernard, "God lives in you and you live in Him. You clothe Him with the substance of your flesh, and He clothes you with the glory of His Majesty." While Jesus dwelt in the Virgin's pure womb, He clothed her with Himself, communicated His infinite perfections to her, filled her with His sentiments, desires, affections, and divine wishes; and Mary, who gave herself up entirely to His action, was completely transformed into Him, so that she became a faithful copy of Him. The liturgy says that "Mary is the most perfect image of Christ, formed truly by the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, took full possession of Mary's pure, gentle soul, and traced in it, very delicately and perfectly, all the features and characteristics of the soul of Jesus. Therefore we can well say that to imitate Mary is to imitate Jesus. This is why we choose her for our model. We do not love Mary for herself alone, but because she is the Mother of Christ; likewise, we do not imitate Mary for herself, but for Christ, whose most faithful image she is. Jesus is the one Way which leads us to the Father, and Mary is the surest and easiest way to reach Jesus. By incarnating in Himself the perfections of the Father, Jesus made it possible for us to imitate them; by retracing Jesus' perfections in herself, Mary has made them more accessible to us, has brought them within our very reach. None can say as well as she: "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ" (*1 Cor 4,16*). Since Jesus came to us through Mary, it is wholly appropriate that we should go to Jesus through her.

#### COLLOQUY

"O my most sweet Mother, you call me and say to me: 'If anyone is a little one, let him come to me.' Children always have their mother's name on their lips, and they call her whenever they are in danger, fright, or difficulty. O sweet Mother, O loving Mother, you want me, like a little child, to call upon you always and to have unceasing recourse to you.... Permit me then to invoke constantly

and to say : 'O Mother, loving Mother!' Your name consoles me, moves me tenderly, and reminds me of my obligation to love you. Your name encourages me to confide myself to you. ' My Mother,' thus I call you, and thus I want to call you always. After God, you are my hope, my refuge, and my love in this vale of tears. O my sweet Lady and Mother! by the love you show your children you ravish their hearts. Ravish also, I beg you, my poor heart which so greatly desires to love you. You, O Mother, charmed God with your beauty, and drew Him from heaven into your womb; and I, shall I live and not love you? No, I shall have no rest without the assurance that I have a true love for you, my Mother, a constant, tender love. Yes, I want to love you, O sweet Mother, but I fear, at the same time, that I do not love you, for I have heard it said that love makes a lover resemble the loved one.... I know how different I am from you! Could this be a sign that I do not love you? You are so pure, and I so impure! You are so humble, and I am so proud! You are so holy, and I so wicked! But this is what you ought to do, O Mary, since you love me : make me like you. You have the power to change hearts; then take mine and transform it. Show all the world how great is your power in favor of those you love! Sanctify me and make me worthy of being your child " (cf. St. Alphonsus).

*EFFICACIOUS PRAYER*

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Jesus, make me understand that my prayer is of no avail unless it is made in Your Name; that my faith is vain unless I convert it into works.

## MEDITATION

1. In today's Gospel, taken again from the discourse of Jesus after the Last Supper (*Jn* 16,23-30), the Church

continues to prepare us for the Ascension and Pentecost. "I came forth from the Father and am come into the world," Jesus said, "again I leave the world, and I go to the Father." Thus He announces His approaching Ascension. Having reached the end of His ministry on earth, Jesus presents it in synthesis as a long journey from the Father to the world and from the world to the Father. These words repeat the idea of "pilgrimage," which every Christian should apply to his own life, considering it as "a night spent in a bad inn" (*T.J. Way*, 40), a "night" during which his heart is turned toward the radiant tomorrow of eternal life.

"The hour cometh when I will no more speak to you in proverbs, but will show you plainly of the Father." Jesus is now referring to Pentecost, to the intervention of the Holy Spirit by whom Jesus will enlighten His Apostles, giving them a clear understanding of the divine mysteries, so that the Father will no longer be unknown to them. All that we can study and learn about the things of God is a dead letter if the Holy Spirit does not enlighten us concerning them. Our need for Him is absolute; our desire for His coming should be unbounded.

Yet another subject is brought to our attention in today's Gospel. Jesus had spoken to the Apostles many times about prayer and the way they should pray; today He reveals the secret of efficacious prayer: "If you ask the Father anything in My Name, He will give it you." Jesus is going, but He leaves the Apostles an unfailing means of approach to the Father: to present themselves in His own Name, the Name of the God-Man who, because He sacrificed Himself for the glory of His Father and for our salvation, deserves to be "heard for His reverence" (*Heb* 5,7).

2. To pray "in the Name of Jesus" establishes the conviction that our prayers, as well as all our good works, have no value unless they are founded on the infinite merits of Jesus. We must be persuaded that, however much we do or pray, we are always "unprofitable servants" (*Lk* 17,10); we have no sufficiency in ourselves, but all our sufficiency comes from the Crucified. Consequently, the first condition of prayer made "in the Name of Jesus" is humility, an ever deeper and more realistic sense of our nothingness. It must be complemented by the second condition, a boundless confidence in the merits of Jesus, which surpass all our

poverty, misery, necessities, needs. In view of Jesus' infinite merits, we can never ask too much in His Name; we can never be too bold in imploring the plenitude of divine grace for our souls, in aspiring to that sanctity which is hidden, perhaps, but genuine. There is no fault, no want of fidelity, no evil tendency, no sin, which, if sincerely detested, cannot be cleansed, purified, and pardoned by the Blood of Jesus; there is no weakness which He cannot cure, strengthen, and transform. Moreover, there is no creature of good will, no matter how weak and insignificant, who, in the Name of Jesus, cannot aspire to sanctity.

However, in order to make our prayer effective, a third condition is required : our life must correspond to our prayer, our faith must be translated into good works. "Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if a man be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he shall be compared to a man beholding his own countenance in a glass. For he beheld himself, and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was." This strong exhortation of St. James, which is found in today's Epistle (1,22-27), is an urgent reminder of the practical character of the Christian life. Vain is our prayer, vain our confidence in God, if we do not add our generous efforts to perform all our duties, to live up to our high vocation. We can, and we should, hope for everything in the Name of Jesus, but He expects a constant effort on our part to be entirely faithful to Him.

#### COLLOQUY

"Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You who are so merciful, be merciful to me, for whatever I can find that is most precious, I devoutly offer You; I present in humble supplication all that is dear to me. I have nothing that I have not offered to Your Majesty; I have nothing more to add, since I have sent You my Hope, my Advocate : Your beloved Son. I have sent Your glorious Son as a Mediator between You and me; I have sent Him as an Intercessor, by whom I hope to obtain pardon. I have sent that Word whom You sent to atone for my guilt, and I show You the Passion which Your Son suffered for me. He is the Sacred Victim whom I offer to appease You,

so that You will look favorably upon me. Great, indeed, is my wrong-doing, but my Savior's justice is much greater. Even as God is superior to man, so is my wickedness inferior to His goodness, in quality as well as in quantity.

"What fault committed by man has not been expiated by the Son of God made man? What pride can be so immeasurably inflated, that it could not be brought down by such humility? Truly, O my God, if we were to weigh both the offenses committed by sinners, and the grace of God the Redeemer, we would find that the difference equaled not only the distance between east and west, but the distance between hell and the highest heaven. O wonderful Creator of light, by the terrible sorrows of Your Son, pardon my sins! Grant, O God, that His goodness may overcome my wickedness, that His meekness may atone for my perversity, that His mildness may dominate my irascibility. May His humility make amends for my pride; His patience, for my impatience; His benignity, for my harshness; His obedience, for my disobedience; His tranquillity, for my anxiety, His sweetness, for my bitterness; may His charity blot out my cruelty!" (St. Augustine).

176

*MARY'S HUMILITY*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Mary, humblest of all creatures, make me humble of heart.

**MEDITATION**

1. St. Bernard says : "It is not hard to be humble in a hidden life, but to remain so in the midst of honors is a truly rare and beautiful virtue." The Blessed Virgin was certainly the woman whom God honored most highly, whom He raised above all other creatures; yet no creature was so humble and lowly as she. A holy rivalry seemed to exist between Mary and God; the higher God elevated her, the lowlier she became in her humility. The Angel called her

"full of grace," and Mary "was troubled" (*Lk* 1,28.29). According to St. Alphonsus' explanation, "Mary was troubled because she was filled with humility, disliked praise, and desired that God only be praised." The Angel revealed to her the sublime mission which was to be entrusted to her by the Most High, and Mary declared herself "the handmaid of the Lord" (*ibid.*, 38). Her thoughts did not linger over the immense honor that would be hers as the woman chosen from all women to be the Mother of the Son of God; but she contemplated in wonder the great mystery of a God who willed to become incarnate in the womb of a poor creature. If God wished to descend so far as to give Himself to her as a Son, to what depths should not His little handmaid abase herself? The more she understood the grandeur of the mystery, the immensity of the divine gift, the more she humbled herself, submerging herself in her nothingness. Her attitude was the same when Elizabeth greeted her, "Blessed art thou among women" (*ibid.*, 42). Those words did not astonish her, for she was already the Mother of God; yet she remained steadfast in her profound humility. She attributed everything to God whose mercies she sang, acknowledging the condescension with which He had "regarded the humility of His handmaid" (*ibid.*, 48). That God had performed great works in her she knew and acknowledged, but instead of boasting about them, she directed everything to His glory. With reason St. Bernardine exclaims: "As no other creature, after the Son of God, has been raised in dignity and grace equal to Mary, so neither has anyone descended so deep into the abyss of humility." Behold the effect that graces and divine favors should produce in us: an increase of humility, a greater awareness of our nothingness.

2. "If you cannot equal Mary's absolute purity," says St. Bernard, "at least imitate her humility. The virtue of chastity is admirable, but humility is essential. A simple invitation calls to the first: 'He that can take, let him take it'; for the second, we have an absolute command: 'Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.' Chastity, therefore, will be rewarded; humility will be demanded. We can be saved without virginity, but not without humility. Even Mary's virginity would not have been pleasing to God without humility."

Mary certainly pleased God by her virginity, but she became His Mother because of her humility."

The greatest qualities and gifts, such as the spirit of penance or of poverty, virginity, the call to the apostolate, a life consecrated to God, even the priesthood, are sterile if they are not accompanied by sincere humility. Furthermore, without humility, they might be a source of danger for the soul. Lucifer was pure but not humble and pride was his downfall. The higher the place we occupy in the Savior's vineyard, the higher the life of perfection we profess, and the more important the mission which God has entrusted to us, the deeper we need to plant the roots of humility. Mary's maternity was the fruit of her humility : *humilitate concepit*, she conceived in humility. Even so, the fruitfulness of our interior life, of our apostolate, will depend on our humility and will always be proportioned to it. Only God can accomplish great things in us and by us, but He will not do so unless He finds us completely humble. Humility alone is the fertile ground in which God's gifts fructify, while it is always humility which draws down upon us divine graces and favors. "No queen," says St. Teresa of Jesus, "forces the King of heaven to give Himself, as does humility. It was humility that drew Him down from heaven into the Virgin's womb" (*Way*, 16).

#### COLLOQUY

"O Virgin! glorious stem, to what sublime height do you raise your corolla? Straight to Him who is seated on the throne, to the God of Majesty. I do not wonder, since you are so deeply rooted in humility. Hail, Mary, full of grace! You are truly full of grace, for you are pleasing to God, to the angels, and to men : to men, by your maternity; to the angels, by your virginity; to God, by your humility. It is by your humility that you attract the glance of God, of Him who regards the humble, but looks at the proud from afar. As Satan's eyes are fixed on the proud, so God's eyes are on the lowly" (St. Bernard).

O Mother most humble, make me humble, so that God will deign to turn His eyes toward me. There is nothing in my soul to attract Him, nothing sublime, nothing worthy of His complacency, nothing truly good or virtuous; whatever

good there is, is so mixed with wretchedness, so weak and deficient that it is not even worthy to be called good. What, then, can attract Your grace to my poor soul, O Lord? "Where will you look, but on him who is poor and humble, and contrite of heart?" (cf. *Is* 66,2). O Lord, grant that I may be humble; make me humble, through the merits of Your most humble Mother.

"O Mary, had you not been humble, the Holy Spirit would not have come upon you, and you would not have become the Mother of God . . ." (cf. St. Bernard). Similarly, if I am not humble, God will not give me His grace, the Holy Spirit will not come to me, and my life will be sterile, unfruitful. Grant, then, O Holy Virgin, that your humility, which is so pleasing to God; may obtain pardon for my pride, and a truly humble heart.

## 177

*MARY'S FAITH*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O my Mother, show me how to have firm faith in God and how to entrust myself entirely to Him.

**MEDITATION**

1. Using St. Elizabeth's words, the Church says in praise of Mary : "Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord" (*Lk* 1,45). Great things indeed were to be accomplished in Mary; and she had the great merit of believing in them. On the word of God as announced by the Angel, she believed that she would become a mother without losing her virginity; she, who was so humble, believed that she would be truly the Mother of God, and that the fruit of her womb would really be the Son of the Most High. She adhered with entire faith to all that had been revealed to her, accepting, without the least hesitation, a plan that would upset the whole natural order of things : a virgin mother; a creature, Mother of the Creator. She

believed when the Angel spoke to her; she continued to believe even when the Angel left her alone and she found herself in the condition of an ordinary woman who knows that she is about to become a mother. "The Virgin," St. Bernard says, "so little in her own eyes, was magnanimous in her faith in God's promise! She, who considered herself nothing but a poor handmaid, never had the least doubt concerning her vocation to this incomprehensible mystery, to this marvelous change, to this inscrutable sacrament; she firmly believed that she would become the true Mother of the God-Man."

The Blessed Virgin teaches us to believe in our vocation to sanctity, to divine intimacy. We did believe in it when God revealed it to us in the brightness of interior light, and the words of His minister confirmed it; but we should also believe in it when we find ourselves alone, in darkness, amid difficulties that tend to disturb and discourage us. God is faithful, and He does not do things by halves: He will finish His work in us, provided we have complete confidence in Him.

2. It would be very far from the truth to think that the divine mysteries were so revealed to Mary, and the divinity of Jesus was so evident to her that she had no need of faith. Excepting the Annunciation and the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, we do not find any extraordinary manifestations of the supernatural in her life. Mary lived by pure faith, trusting in God's word even as we must. The divine mysteries which took place in her and around her remained habitually hidden under the veil of faith, assuming an outward appearance common to the various circumstances of ordinary daily life. Hence, they were often concealed under obscure, disconcerting aspects such as, the extreme poverty in which Jesus was born, the necessity of fleeing into exile in order to save Him, the King of heaven, from the wrath of an earthly king, the toil undergone to procure for Him the strict necessities, and the lack of even these, perhaps. Yet Mary never doubted that this weak, helpless Child, who needed her maternal care and protection just like any other child, was the Son of God. She always believed, even when she did not understand. Witness for example, the unexpected disappearance of the twelve-year-old Boy who had remained in the Temple without His parents'

knowledge. St. Luke relates that when Jesus explained His action, giving as a reason that He was carrying out the mission entrusted to Him by His heavenly Father, Mary and Joseph "did not understand His words" (cf. 2,50). Although Mary knew that Jesus was the Messiah, she did not know how He was to accomplish His mission; at this time, therefore, she did not see the connection between the divine will and His remaining behind in the Temple. Nevertheless, she questioned Him no further. She believed that Jesus was her God, and that was enough for her; she was certain, absolutely certain of Him.

Sometimes in our spiritual life, we come to a halt because we insist on understanding and searching into God's plans for our soul. A faithful soul, on the other hand, does not linger to inquire about God's actions; even though not fully understanding them, it believes, following blindly, if necessary, the manifestations of the divine will. This is pleasing to God who does not ask us to understand, but only to believe with all our strength.

#### COLLOQUY

"O Mary, overshadow me and I shall be calm and confident. Accompany me on my way and lead me by secret paths. I shall not be spared suffering, but you will arouse in me a real hunger for it, as for an indispensable food. Mary! Your name is sweet as honey and balm to my lips. Hail, Mary! who can resist you? Who can be lost if he says, 'Hail, Mary?' You are the Mother of the little ones, the health of the sick, the star in storms.... Oh! Mary! If I am helpless, without courage, without consolation, I run to you and cry: Ave Maria! You are the comfort of slaves, the courage of little ones, the strength of the weak, Ave Maria! When I say your name, my whole heart is inflamed, Ave Maria! Joy of angels, food of souls, Ave Maria!" (cf. E. Poppe).

Yes, O Mary, lead me by the short route of complete confidence in God. You who are blessed because you have believed, increase my faith; give me a strong, unshakable, invincible faith. We are indebted to your faith for the accomplishment of God's promises; therefore, help me to share your faith, making me believe in Him, in His words,

promises, and invitations, without any shadow of doubt, hesitation, or uncertainty. Doubt delays me, hesitation paralyzes me, uncertainty clips my wings.... O Mary, help me to have complete faith, so that I can give myself wholly to God, adhere to all His plans, accept with my eyes closed every disposition of divine Providence. Make me believe so that I shall be able to face storms with courage, abandon myself entirely to God's action, and advance with confidence along the road to sanctity. If you are with me, O Mary, I shall have no fear. The strength of your faith will be the support and refuge of mine, so weak and languid.

## 178

## MARY'S HOPE

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Mary, Mother of Good Hope, teach me the way of complete confidence in God.

## MEDITATION

1. In the *Magnificat*, the canticle which burst forth from Mary's heart when she visited her cousin Elizabeth, we find an expression which specially reveals Mary's interior attitude. " My soul doth magnify the Lord...because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid " (*Lk* 1,46-48). When Mary spoke these words, they revealed the "great things" which God had done in her; but, considered in the framework of her life, they expressed the continual movement of her heart, which, in the full awareness of her nothingness, would turn always to God with the most absolute hope and trust in His aid. No one had a more concrete, practical knowledge of her nothingness than Mary; she understood well that her whole being, natural as well as supernatural, would be annihilated if God did not sustain her at every moment. She knew that whatever she was and had, in no way belonged to her, but came from God, and was the pure gift of His liberality. Her great mission and the marvelous privileges which she had received from the Most High did not prevent

her from seeing and feeling her "lowness." But far from disconcerting or discouraging her in any way—as the realization of our nothingness and wretchedness often does to us—her humility served as a starting point from which she darted to God with stronger hope. The greater the knowledge of her nothingness and weakness became, the higher her soul mounted in hope. That is why, being really poor in spirit, she did not trust in her own resources, ability, or merits, but put all her confidence in God alone. And God, who "sends the rich away empty, and fills the hungry with good things" (cf. *Lk* 1,53), satisfied her "hunger" and fulfilled her hopes, not only by showering His gifts on her, but by giving Himself to her in all His plenitude.

2. Mary's hope was truly *absolute*. We have a typical example of it in her attitude toward Joseph at the time when he, aware of her approaching maternity (of whose origin he knew nothing), "was minded to put her away privately" (*Mt* 1,19). Mary certainly perceived something of the state of mind of her pure spouse and of the doubts he was experiencing. She knew, likewise, the risk she was incurring of being "put away," because the Angel had said nothing which could have reassured her on this delicate point. However, completely confident in God's help, she did not reveal her secret in any way. "In silence and in hope shall your strength be" (*Is* 30,15), said the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of His prophet. These words were to have their most beautiful realization in Mary's attitude. She remained silent, and did not try to justify herself in Joseph's eyes; she was silent because she was filled with hope in God and absolutely certain of His help. Silence and hope permitted her to rely entirely upon God; strong with His strength, she remained serene and tranquil in an extremely difficult and delicate situation.

We also hope in God, but our hope is not absolute like Mary's. Lacking her complete reliance on the divine assistance, we always feel the need of resorting to many little personal expedients to obtain some security, some human support. However, everything human is uncertain; if we base our hopes on these things, it is quite natural that we shall be constantly disturbed and anxious. By her silent hope, the Virgin Mary shows us the only way to real security, serenity, and inner peace, even in the most difficult circum-

stances : the way of total confidence in God. “ *In te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in aeternum,* ” In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me not be confounded forever (*Te Deum*). No, God will never disappoint us if we hope in Him; just as He sent an Angel to Joseph to reveal the mystery of Mary’s maternity, He will always find a way to help and sustain a soul who entrusts itself wholly to Him.

#### COLLOQUY

“ O Mother of holy love, our life, our refuge, and our hope, you well know that your Son Jesus, not satisfied with being our perpetual advocate with the eternal Father, has willed that you also, should implore divine mercy for us. I turn to you, then, hope of the unfortunate, hoping by the merits of Jesus and by your intercession, to obtain eternal salvation. My confidence is so great, that, if I had my salvation in my own hands, I should yet place it in yours, for I trust in your merciful protection more than I do in my own works. O my Mother and my hope, do not abandon me! The pity you have for sinners and your power with God are greater than the number and the malice of my faults. If all should forget me, do not you forget me, Mother of the omnipotent God. Say to God that I am your child and that you protect me, and I shall be saved

“ Do not look for any virtue or merit in me, my Mother; look only at the confidence I place in you and my desire to improve. Look at all that Jesus has done and suffered for me and then abandon me, if you have the heart to do so. I offer you all the sufferings of His life : the cold He endured in the stable, His journey to Egypt, the Blood He shed, His poverty, His sweat, His sadness and the death He endured for love of me in your presence, and do you, for the love of Jesus, pledge yourself to help me. O my Mother, do not refuse your pity to one for whom Jesus did not refuse His Blood!

“ O Mary, I put my trust in you; in this hope I live and in this hope I long to die, saying over and over : ‘ *Unica spes mea Jesus, et post Jesum virgo Maria,* ’ My only hope is Jesus, and after Jesus, Mary ” (St. Alphonsus).

*THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD*

FORTY DAYS AFTER EASTER

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, who ascended into heaven, grant that I, too, may live there in spirit.

## MEDITATION

1. The central idea in the liturgy today is the raising of our hearts toward heaven, so that we may begin to dwell in spirit where Jesus has gone before us. "Christ's Ascension" says St. Leo, "is our own ascension; our body has the hope of one day being where its glorious Head has preceded it" (*RB*). In fact, Our Lord had already said in His discourse after the Last Supper, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I shall go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself; that where I am, you also may be" (*Jn* 14,2,3). The Ascension is, then, a feast of joyful hope, a sweet foretaste of heaven. By going before us, Jesus our Head has given us the right to follow Him there some day, and we can even say with St. Leo, "In the person of Christ, we have penetrated the heights of heaven" (*RB*). As in Christ Crucified we die to sin, as in the risen Christ we rise to the life of grace, so too, we are raised up to heaven in the Ascension of Christ. This vital participation in Christ's mysteries is the essential consequence of our incorporation in Him. He is our Head; we, as His members, are totally dependent upon Him and intimately bound to His destiny. "God, who is rich in mercy," says St. Paul, "for His exceeding charity wherewith He loved us... hath quickened us together in Christ... and hath raised us up... and hath made us sit together in the heavenly places through Christ Jesus" (*Eph* 2,4-6). Our right to heaven has been given us, our place is ready; it is for us to live in such a way that we may occupy it some day. Meanwhile, we must actualize the beautiful prayer which the liturgy puts on our lips: "Grant, O almighty God, that we, too, may dwell in spirit in the heavenly mansions" (*Collect*). "Where thy

treasure is, there is thy heart also" (*Mt* 6,21), Jesus said one day. If Jesus is really our *treasure*, our heart cannot be anywhere but near Him in heaven. This is the great hope of the Christian soul, so beautifully expressed in the hymn for Vespers : "O Jesus, be the hope of our hearts, our joy in sorrow, the sweet fruit of our life" (*RB*).

2. Besides the hope and the joyful expectancy of heaven so characteristic of the Ascension feast there is a note of melancholy. Before the final departure of Jesus, the Apostles must have been very much disturbed : each felt the distress of one who sees his dearest friend and companion going away forever, and finds himself alone to face all the difficulties of life. The Lord realized their state of mind and consoled them once more, promising the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter : "He commanded them," we read in the Epistle (*Acts* 1,1-11), "that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but should wait for the promise of the Father... you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence." But even this time the Apostles did not understand! How much they needed to be enlightened and transformed by the Holy Spirit, in order to accomplish the great mission which was to be entrusted to them! Jesus continued : "You shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you and you shall be witnesses unto Me...even to the uttermost part of the earth." For the moment, however, they were there, around the Master, weak, timid, frightened, like little children watching their mother leave for a distant, unknown land. In fact, "while they looked on, He was raised up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight." Two angels came to distract them from their great amazement and to make them realize what had happened. Then, placing their trust in the word of Jesus, which would henceforth be their only support, they returned to Jerusalem where, in the Cenacle, they awaited in prayer the fulfillment of the promise. It was the first novena in preparation for Pentecost : "All these were persevering with one mind in prayer with...Mary, the Mother of Jesus" (*ibid.* 1,14).

Silence, recollection, prayer, peace with our brethren, and union with Mary : these are the characteristics of the novena we too should make in preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

## COLLOQUY

"O my God, O my Jesus, You are going away and leaving us! Oh! what joy there will be in heaven! But we have to remain here on earth. O eternal Word, what has Your creature done for You, that You should do so much for him and then ascend into heaven to glorify him even more? Tell me, what has he done for You, that You should love him so much? What has he given You? What do You look for in him? You love him so much that You give Yourself to him, You who are all things, and besides whom there is nothing. You want from him his entire will and intellect, because when he gives them to You, he gives You all that he has. O infinite Wisdom, O supreme Good, O Love, O Love so little known, little loved, and possessed by so few! Oh! our ingratitude, cause of every evil! O Purity, so little known and so little desired! O my Spouse, now that You are in heaven, seated at the right hand of the eternal Father, create in me a pure heart and renew a right spirit within me" (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

"Alas! how long this exile is, O Lord, and how the desire to see You makes it seem longer still! O Lord, what can an imprisoned soul do?... I want to please You. Behold me, Lord! If I have to live longer in order to serve You further, I refuse none of the crosses which may await me on earth. But alas, Lord, alas! These are but words; I am capable of nothing else. Permit my desires, at least, to have some value in Your sight, O my God, and do not regard my lack of merit!

"Ah! my works are poor, my God, even if I could perform many! Then why should I remain in this life, so full of misery? Only to do Your will. Could I do anything better than that? Hope, therefore, my soul, hope. Watch carefully, for you know not the day nor the hour. Everything passes quickly, even though your desire makes a short time seem very long. Remember that the more you struggle, the greater the proofs of love you will be giving to your God, and afterwards the more you will enjoy your Beloved in happiness and felicity without end" (T.J. *Exc*, 15).

*THE GROWTH OF CHARITY IN MARY*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Mary, Mother of fair love, teach me the secret of steady growth in charity.

## MEDITATION

1. We must not think that the Blessed Virgin Mary was excused from all personal activity and progress because she had been established from the beginning in a higher degree of sanctity than that which even the greatest saint could ever hope to attain. Quite the contrary! For her, as for us, life on earth was a "way" where progress in charity was always necessary, where personal correspondence with grace was expected. The excellence of our Lady's merit consisted in her heroic fidelity to the immense gifts she had received. The privileges of her Immaculate Conception, of the state of sanctity in which she was born, and of her divine maternity were, unquestionably, pure gifts from God; still, far from accepting them passively, as a coffer receives the precious things put into it, she received them freely, as one capable of willingly adhering to the divine favors by means of a complete correspondence with grace. St. Thomas teaches that although Mary could not merit the Incarnation of the Word, by the grace she received she did merit that degree of sanctity which made her the worthy Mother of God (cf. III<sup>a</sup>, q. 2, a. 11, ad. 3), and she merited this precisely because of her correspondence with grace. Hence, even in Mary, we can consider progress in sanctity, a progress which did not depend solely on the new abundance of graces which God gave her at certain special times in her life—at the moment of the Incarnation for example—but also on her personal activity, wholly informed by grace and charity, by means of which she brought to fruition the treasure entrusted to her by God. Mary, in the truest sense of the word, is the "faithful Virgin," who knew how to increase a hundredfold the talents she received from God. Yes, the greatest amount of grace ever given to a creature was freely bestowed on her by the divine liberality, in view

of the sublime mission for which she was destined, but she corresponded to it with the greatest fidelity possible to a creature. Thus there was plenitude of grace on God's part, and complete fidelity on Mary's, so that, as St. Alphonsus says, "Without ever stopping, her beautiful soul soared toward God, continually growing in love of Him."

2. Theology teaches that the increase of grace and charity in us is the result of meritorious works, that is, good works performed under the influence of charity. When one does good works "with his whole heart," the merit acquired—always an increase of grace and of charity—is immediately given to him, and as a result, his spiritual life immediately grows in intensity. With this doctrine in mind, we can readily see at what rate the capital of charity and grace which God had placed in Mary's soul at the very first moment of her existence must have developed. When we think, as St. John of the Cross points out, that Mary's soul was never moved, and therefore never retarded, by any attachment to creatures, and that consequently, she never had any secondary motives, or any pettiness caused by selfishness, but always acted under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, we must conclude that she was ever growing in grace, and that charity in her became a veritable abyss. This explains how Mary, although sanctified and established in union with God from the first moment of her life, was able to advance continually in sanctity, the constituent elements of which are grace and charity. It was the generous, faithful ardor with which she replied to the divine invitations, entered into every manifestation of God's will, accepted all the dispositions of divine Providence, and fulfilled all her daily duties, which put her in that magnificent state of incessant and most rapid progress in love. May Mary's shining example encourage us to apply ourselves with all our heart to God's service, so that we, too, may grow rapidly in charity.

#### COLLOQUY

"O Mary, you understood the gift of God; you never lost a particle of it. You were so pure, so luminous, that you seemed to be light itself: *Speculum justitiae*, mirror of

justice. Your life was so simple, so lost in God, that there is scarcely anything to say about it. *Virgo fidelis*: the faithful Virgin, ‘ who kept all things in her heart ’” (E.T. I, 10).

O Mary, how marvelous to see your soul continually growing in love, to watch it scale the heights of sanctity without ever halting! Nothing retarded the divine action in you; no obstacle hindered the growth of charity. “ Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her Beloved? ” (Ct 8,5). It is you, O Mother, you who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and sustained by Him, ever rose from grace to grace, from virtue to virtue. O Mother of fair love, full of grace, O faithful Virgin, help me to correspond with fidelity to the gifts of God! Do not permit that my misery render sterile the grace within me. Help me, O Mother, to overcome the innumerable resistances of my weak, cowardly nature; draw me by the sweet charm of your example, so that I may follow you with ardor in the way of perfect charity.

“ O my Mother, you who were ever on fire with love for God, give me at least a spark of that love. You appealed to your Son on behalf of the bride and bridegroom whose wine gave out, saying : ‘ *vinum non habent*, ’ they have no wine; and will you not pray for me, lacking as I am in love for God, and yet owing Him so much? Say to Him : ‘ *amorem non habet*, ’ he has no love. And ask this love for me. No other grace do I ask of you but this one. O Mother, by your love for Jesus, hear me. Show me what great favor you have with Him by obtaining for me a divine light and a divine flame so powerful that it will transform me from a sinner into a saint, and, detaching me from every earthly affection, will inflame me wholly with divine love. O Mary, you have the power to do this. Do it for love of the God who made you so great, so powerful, and so merciful ” (St. Alphonsus).

*MARY AND FRATERNAL CHARITY*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Mother, whose love for man was so great, teach me how to fulfill, in all its perfection, the precept of fraternal charity.

## MEDITATION

1. Charity is *one* in its essence, because of the oneness of its object : God loved in Himself, God loved in the neighbor. Hence, the more a soul loves God, so much the more does it love its neighbor. Now if charity toward God reached its peak in Mary, we must also say that her charity toward her neighbor was boundless. This is the peculiar quality of true love of God; far from narrowing the soul of one who possesses it, charity dilates the soul, that it may pour out on others the wealth it has accumulated. Such was the characteristic of Mary's charity. Although she was completely filled with the love of God, wholly recollected in the contemplation of the divine mysteries which were taking place in and around her, her recollection did not hinder her from giving attention to her neighbor; on the contrary, we see her always gracious and attentive to the needs of others. Furthermore, her own interior wealth urged her to desire to share with others the great treasures which she possessed. This is the attitude described in the Gospel, when, immediately after the Annunciation, she undertook a journey "in haste," as St. Luke says, to visit Elizabeth. It would have been very pleasant for her to remain at Nazareth, adoring in solitude and silence the divine Word incarnate in her womb, but the Angel had told her of the imminent maternity of her aged cousin; this was enough for her to feel obliged to go to Elizabeth and offer her humble services. We can say, therefore, that Mary's first act after becoming the Mother of God was an act of charity toward her neighbor. God gave Himself to her as a Son, and Mary, who gave herself to Him as His "handmaid," wished also to give herself as the "handmaid" of others. The close union which exists between charity toward God and charity

toward the neighbor is singularly evident here. Her act of charity toward Elizabeth is in perfect accord with the act of sublime love in which Mary gave herself wholly to God when she pronounced her "*fiat*."

2. At the birth of Jesus, it was the same. Mary, in ecstasy, contemplated Him, her divine Son, but this did not prevent her from offering Him to the adoration of the shepherds. Here is Mary's supreme charity to men : giving Jesus to them almost as soon as He gives Himself to her. She does not wish to be the only one to enjoy Him, but would with all men share her joy. And just as she offered Him to the shepherds and to the Magi who came to adore Him, she would later offer Him to the executioners who would crucify Him. Jesus was everything to Mary; yet, because of her great charity, she did not hesitate to immolate Him for the salvation of men. Can we imagine any more exalted, or more generous charity? Next to Jesus, surely no one loved mankind more than Mary.

Another aspect of her charity toward others is evidenced in her tactfulness. When Mary found Jesus in the Temple —after three days of anxious searching and keenest suffering—she concealed her own sorrow behind that of Joseph's : "Behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing" (*Lk 2,48*). Delicate charity toward her spouse made her profoundly sensitive to his grief and she put it before her own deeper grief. The marriage in Cana gives us another example of Mary's delicacy. While all were occupied with the feast, she alone, although so recollect ed, noticed the embarrassment of the bridal couple when the wine gave out, and handled the matter so delicately that it passed unobserved, even by the chief steward.

Mary teaches us that when our love of God is really perfect, it flows at once into generous love of our neighbor, because, as St. Thomas says, one who loves God, loves all that God loves. If then, we have to recognize that in dealing with our neighbor we are not very charitable, nor very kind to him, nor attentive to his needs, we must conclude that our love for God is still very weak.

**COLLOQUY**

"O Mary, with what sweetness and humility of heart you went to Elizabeth! You, the Queen, go to the servant; You, the Mother of God, visit the mother of the precursor.... And at Cana how graciously you went to the aid of the bridal couple! You took pity on their embarrassment, because you are merciful and kind. Can anything but tenderness come forth from the fountain of tenderness? Is it strange that a heart so full of kindness should produce kindness? If we hold in our hand a fragrant fruit for half a day, does not our hand retain the fragrance for the rest of the day? With how much virtue, O Mary, did not infinite Goodness fill your heart during the nine months He reposed within you! I know infinite Goodness filled your heart before entering your womb, and even when He left it, He did not leave your soul" (St. Bernard).

O holy Virgin, it is just this charity, the fruit of your intimate union with God, which you pour out upon all mankind, condescending to receive them in the wide embrace of your immense love. This same charity, which fires you with love for the Eternal, also inflames you with love for men, for you see them, not in themselves, but in God, considering them as His creatures and His children. This charity which has consecrated you to the service of the Most High, has also vowed you to the service of humanity, and so you have loved every creature, even me, despite my wretchedness.

It is true, O Mary, that on the day of my baptism the Holy Spirit diffused His charity in me; but my self-love has halted its growth, and I, who have so little love for my God, have likewise very little love for my neighbor. O most loving Mother, see how I need to have my heart dilated with charity! Stir up, then, and nourish that virtue in me and grant that, having given myself to the service of God, I may also give myself to that of my neighbor, with kindness and humility, promptness and generosity.

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*WAITING*

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - Grant Lord, that my heart may ever be turned toward heaven where You await me.

**MEDITATION**

1. This Sunday is like a prolongation of the Feast of the Ascension. The Introit reflects the feelings which the Apostles must have experienced during the time between the departure of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit : "Hear, O Lord, my voice calling to You.... I seek Your face, O Lord, do not hide Your face from me." As on the day of the Ascension, the eyes of the Apostles are turned toward heaven, where they saw their Master disappear, and their hearts sigh after Him. As long as we are on our earthly pilgrimage, far from God, He must be the constant yearning of our souls. But we should not remain idle while we are waiting to go to our fatherland. In the Epistle of the day (*1 Pt 4,7-11*), Peter teaches us what we must do to make our life on earth a real preparation for our meeting with God : "Watch in prayers. But before all things, have a constant mutual charity among yourselves." This is exactly what the Apostles did as they waited for the Holy Spirit : together in the Cenacle they were persevering in prayer in the unity of fraternal love. God does not look with favor on the prayers and sacrifices of one who does not love his neighbor—no matter who he may be—with sincere benevolence. Jesus has expressly said : "If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee; leave there thy offering...and go first to be reconciled to thy brother" (*Mt 5,23.24*). Prayer alone will not suffice to draw down divine graces, nor will it acquire eternal life for us. Fraternal charity, the surest pledge of the sincerity of our love for God, is an absolute requisite. The Holy Spirit, who is the spirit of charity, who is substantial love, cannot enter a heart

which is narrow and mean in its relations with its neighbor; lack of charity is one of the greatest obstacles to His action, because it is directly opposed to His essence. Just as water paralyzes the action of fire, so does lack of charity paralyze the action of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, as long as we live on earth, we are all liable to fall; all of us, therefore, need pardon; "charity," says the Epistle, "covers a multitude of sins."

2. In today's Gospel (*Jn* 15,26.27 – 16,1-4) Jesus reiterates His promise concerning the descent of the Holy Spirit: "When the Paraclete cometh, whom I will send you from the Father...you shall give testimony [of Me]." As on the day of His Ascension, He connects the coming of the Holy Spirit with the mission of the Apostles, that mission which will consist essentially in giving testimony of Christ. "You shall receive the power of the Holy Spirit...and you shall be witnesses unto Me...even to the uttermost part of the earth" (*Ep* : Feast of the Ascension). Today's Gospel explains the scope of this testimony which the Apostles, as well as all future Christians, will be called upon to give. "They will put you out of the synagogues: yea, the hour cometh that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doth a service to God." Jesus died on the Cross to give testimony to the Father; His disciples will have to suffer, undergo persecution, and even death itself, to give testimony to Him. We cannot follow a road different from the one which Jesus has trodden: "If any man will come after Me, let him...take up his cross and follow Me" (*Mt* 16,24), He repeats to us. A calm, tranquil testimony, which is made without facing danger—still less of risking life—will always have only relative value and ordinarily gives no guarantee of its genuineness or its strength; on the contrary, the more it costs, the greater its value in proving the fidelity of him who renders it. To witness to Christ, without regarding the difficulties, sufferings or struggles that may be encountered, is the program of the true Christian. But who will give us courage? To us as to the Apostles, courage will come from the Holy Spirit, from His gift of fortitude; it will come from assiduous meditation on the example which Christ has given us; it will also come from His own words, spoken of coming persecutions: "I have told you these things, that you may not be scandalized in Me."

**COLLOQUY**

O Lord, make me worthy to give testimony of You, not only in words, but especially in deeds, in spite of the difficulties and sufferings I may encounter. The Apostles gave testimony of You to the extent of facing death for love of You; grant that I may give testimony of You at least by a life worthy of You.

To give testimony of You, O Lord, "I would travel the world over to preach Your name, O my Beloved, and raise on heathen soil the glorious standard of the Cross! One mission alone would not satisfy my longings. I would spread the Gospel in all parts of the world, even in the farthest isles. I would be a missionary, but not for a few years only. Were it possible, I should wish to have been one from the world's creation and to remain one till the end of time. But the greatest of all my desires is to win the martyr's palm....

"When I think of the fearful torments awaiting Christians at the time of Antichrist, my heart thrills within me and I wish that these torments could be reserved for me. Open, O Jesus, the book of life in which are written the deeds of all Your saints; each one of those deeds I long to accomplish for You.... Great deeds are forbidden me; I can neither preach the Gospel nor shed my blood...but what does it matter? My brothers labor in my stead while...I remain close to the throne and love You for all those who are in the strife" (cf. T.C.J. St, 13).

Yes, O Lord, grant me a true love, so that I may always be faithful to You in little things, since it is not given me to perform great ones. Grant especially that I may always give You the testimony of a sincere profession of faith, of behavior which is wholly conformed to Your law, no matter where or in what circumstance I may be, never letting myself deviate through human respect.

*MARY'S PRAYER*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Mary, faithful adorer of God, show me how to make my life a continual prayer.

**MEDITATION**

1. In order to have even a slight understanding of Mary's prayer, we must try to penetrate the sanctuary of her intimate union with God. No one has ever lived in closer intimacy with Him. Let us reverently observe this intimacy from the viewpoint of the divine maternity. Who can imagine the secret communications between Mary and the Incarnate Word while she carried Him in her virginal womb? Although there was nothing to distinguish her exteriorly from other women in the same condition, yet, in the secrecy of her heart she led a life of the closest possible union between God and a mere creature. "*Omnis gloria ejus ab intus*"; all her glory is from within (cf. *Ps 44,14*). All Mary's glory and grandeur were interior. In this true sanctuary which concealed the Holy of Holies, Mary, living ciborium of the Incarnate Word, was aflame with love, absorbed in adoration. Carrying within her the "burning furnace of charity," how could Mary not remain all inflamed by it! The more she was inflamed with love, the more she understood the mystery of love which was taking place within her. No one ever penetrated the secrets of Christ's heart as Mary did, or had a greater knowledge of the divinity of Christ and of His infinite grandeur. No one ever felt, as Mary did, the consuming need to give herself to Him, to lose herself in Him like a little drop in the immensity of the ocean. This was Mary's unceasing prayer : to adore perpetually the Word made Flesh within her; to unite herself closely with Christ; to be immersed in Him and completely transformed in Him by love; to join the infinite homage and praise which ascended continually from the heart of Christ to the Trinity, and to offer this praise unceasingly as the only homage worthy of the divine Majesty. Mary lived in adoration of her Jesus and, in union with Him, in adoration of the Trinity.

There is one moment in the day when we, too, can share in this prayer of Mary in a most excellent way : the moment of Holy Communion, when we receive Jesus, real and living, into our heart. How we need Mary to help us profit from this ineffable gift! She teaches us to submerge ourselves with her, in her and our Jesus, that we may be transformed in Him; she teaches us to unite ourselves to that adoration which ascends from the heart of Jesus to the Trinity, and she offers it with us to the Father, thus supplying for the deficiencies in our adoration.

2. Mary spent thirty years in Bethlehem and Nazareth in sweet family intimacy with Jesus. He was her center of attraction, the object of her affections, her thoughts and solicitude. The life of Mary was centered on Him; she took care of Him, always seeking new ways of pleasing, serving, and loving Him with the greatest devotion. Her will vibrated in unison with His; her heart beat in perfect harmony with His. She "shared the thoughts of Christ and His secret wishes, in such a way that it can be said that she lived the very life of her Son" (*Pius X : Ad Diem Illum*). Like Mary's life, her prayer was ever *Christocentric*, and Christ bore it to the Blessed Trinity. It was really the mystery of the Incarnation which brought Mary into the fullness of the Trinitarian life. Her unique relations with the three divine Persons began when the Angel told her that she was to be the Mother of the *Son of the Most High* and would be so by the power of the *Holy Spirit*. She was, from that moment, the beloved Daughter of the Father, the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, and the Mother of the Word. These relations were not limited to the time when Mary carried within her the Incarnate Word, but were to continue throughout her whole life, throughout eternity. Thus Mary is the temple of the Trinity. "Nearer than all to Jesus Christ, although at a distance that is infinite," Mary is, "the great 'praise of glory' of the Blessed Trinity" (*E.T. II*, 15).

In Mary, we find the most perfect model for the souls aspiring to intimacy with God; at the same time, she is the surest guide for them. She leads us to Jesus and teaches us to concentrate all our affections on Him, to give ourselves entirely to Him, until we are completely lost and transformed in Him. Then, through Jesus, she guides us to the life of union with the Trinity. By reason of sanctifying grace,

our soul is also a temple of the Trinity, and Mary teaches us how to abide in this temple as a perpetual adorer of the three divine Persons who dwell therein. "I do not need to make any effort," said Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, "to enter into the mystery of the divine indwelling in the soul of our Lady; my soul seems to abide there habitually, in the same attitude that was hers : adoring the God hidden within me" (*L*). May it also be given to us to live, under Mary's direction, in this attitude of continual adoration of the Trinity dwelling within our soul.

#### COLLOQUY

"O Mary, I can imagine how you must have felt when, after the Incarnation, you had within you the Word made flesh, the Gift of God! In what silence, what adoring recollection, must you have withdrawn into the depths of your soul to embrace the God whose Mother you were! Your attitude, O Blessed Virgin, during the months preceding the Nativity of Jesus, seems to be the model for interior souls, for those whom God has chosen to live *within*, deep in the unfathomable abyss. What peace and recollection accompanied your every action! You made ordinary things divine, because through them all, you remained the adorer of the Gift of God" (cf. E.T. *L - I*, 10).

"O Mary, you are the throne of God, the ostensorium of His love. You are the living monstrance of Jesus, and when I adore Jesus within you, it is as if I am really adoring the Blessed Sacrament exposed, *adoratio in ostensorio*, adoration in the monstrance. O Mary, all theology confirms your beautiful title : Ostensorium of Christ! Ostensorium of Christ at Bethlehem, at the Presentation, at Cana, on the Cross, in the Eucharist, in heaven. Yes, even in heaven. Do we not say : 'After this our exile show us (*ostende*) Jesus, the blessed Fruit of your womb?'... O Mary, teach me to see and love Jesus as you see and love Him. Teach me to long for Him with your love, to give myself to Him, to be wholly His as you are, and to adore Him with your own sentiments. O sweet Mother, teach me how to find Jesus and to pray to Him; fill me with Jesus, transform me into Him. O Mary, show me how to contemplate the life, the work and the divinity of your Son. Be the way which

leads me to Jesus, the bond which unites me to Him, and which, with Him and in Him, unites me to the Most Blessed Trinity " (cf. E. Poppe).

## 184

*MARY'S APOSTOLATE*

**PRESENCE OF GOD -** O Mary, Queen of Apostles, obtain for me the heart of an apostle.

**MEDITATION**

i. Mary is, at the same time, the model of both contemplative and apostolic souls. Furthermore, by combining in herself the highest contemplative life with the highest apostolic life, she teaches us that contemplation and the apostolate, far from being opposed to each other, complement, support, and maintain each other. When the contemplative life—considered as an assiduous seeking after union with God—is really fervent, it cannot fail to enkindle in the soul the burning fire of the apostolate. One who has experienced, in an intimate contact with God, the ineffable reality of His love for men, cannot fail to burn with the desire to win all to that love. So it was with the Blessed Virgin, but in the most sublime way. Having enjoyed and penetrated God's love, and being more on fire with it than any other creature, Mary desired more than anyone else to bring all mankind to God. Indeed, no one has collaborated more with Christ in saving the human race. Hers was an intimate and profound collaboration, for by her blood, she supplied the Son of God with the humanity which made it possible for Him, the eternal Word, to become one of us, and to suffer and die for us on the Cross. Mary's collaboration was of the highest value, since she was willingly, knowingly the Mother of the Savior. She gave her consent, knowing well from the Sacred Scriptures that the Messiah was to be the Man of Sorrows, immolated for the redemption of the world. By consenting to become His Mother, she thereby

consented to link her fate with His and share in all His sufferings. To give a Redeemer to the world, to be willing to see her beloved Son die in torment, was Mary's sublime apostolate, born of her immense love of God.

The greater the love for God, the greater and more effective the apostolate which is derived from it. The reverse is equally true. Every apostolic work which is not animated by charity is *nothing*. "If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor," says St. Paul, "and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (*1 Cor 13,3*).

2. Intimately associated with the redemptive work of Jesus, Mary accomplished a universal, apostolic mission for the benefit of all mankind. Her apostolate, however, was a quiet one, free from ostentation; it was accomplished in the most humble, hidden and silent way. Mary gave the Redeemer to the world, but in the dark of night, in a poor stable. She shared the whole life of Jesus, but in the obscurity of the little house at Nazareth where she performed the lowly household tasks, amidst the difficulties and sacrifices of a life abounding in unusually toilsome and trying conditions. Even when Jesus, during the three years of His apostolic life, appeared publicly to accomplish the mission entrusted to Him by His Father, Mary remained in obscurity, although she followed Him and took part in all that happened. She never appeared when her Son was teaching the multitude, nor did she take advantage of her maternal authority to approach Him. On one occasion, when she sought to speak to Him while He was teaching the people in a house, she humbly waited outside (cf. *Mt 12,46*). Mary's apostolate was wholly interior, an apostolate of prayer and, above all, of hidden sacrifice, by means of which she adhered with great love to the will of God. He would ask her to separate herself from her Son after thirty years spent in sweet intimacy with Him, to withdraw apart, as if to leave to the Apostles and the crowd the place near Jesus which belonged to her as His Mother. Thus in obscurity and silence, Mary shared in the apostolate and sufferings of her Son : Jesus had no sorrow which Mary did not feel and live over again within herself. Her greatest sacrifice consisted in seeing Him, her beloved Son, persecuted, hated, condemned to death, and finally crucified on Calvary.

Her mother's heart felt the profound bitterness of all this, but at the same time she accepted everything for love, and offered it all for the salvation of souls. It was precisely through her hidden immolation, animated by *pure love*, that Mary reached the uttermost heights of the apostolate. "A little pure love," says Saint John of the Cross, "is more precious in the eyes of God...and of more value to the Church...than all other works put together (*SC*, 29,2).

Mary shows us how far we are from the truth when, pressed by the urgency of our works, we make our apostolate consist solely in exterior activity, underestimating the interior apostolate of love, prayer, and sacrifice, on which the fruitfulness of our exterior acts depends.

#### COLLOQUY

"O Mary, you are our life, our sweetness, and our hope! You alone have taken away the world's universal guilt, for you alone gave birth to the Savior. You are the Mother of mercy, the Mother who washes away the stains of our sins. You pacified us when we cried in our cradle, you fed us and carried us in your arms. You are not only our Mother, but you also want to be the remedy for all our ills....

"In addition, O Mary, you became for us a sea of bitterness because of the pity you felt for your crucified Son and for all men.... Why, O Mary, have you loved us so much? Why do you overwhelm us with your love? Why do you overwhelm us with our God? Why, I ask, do you inebriate us with love for your Son, while we are unable to repay you in any way? What benefit is it to you, O lover of souls, if we love you, as well as your Son, with great love? Are not the things of heaven enough for you? Why do you seek earthly hearts, which are soiled and fetid? Take us, huntress of souls, take us and gather us into the bosom of your grace. Who can escape the rays of your goodness? No one can avoid the fire of your love, for heaven and earth are full of your favors...always and everywhere you lay the snares of your kindness. We cannot flee very far from you, O most sweet Mother, but we rest always in the bosom of your kindness" (cf. Saint Bonaventure).

"O Mary, you are more mother than queen! When I meditate upon your life, as the Gospel presents it to me, so humble and simple, I do not fear to approach you. I see you living in poverty and obscurity, with no transports or ecstasies, no splendid miracles or brilliant deeds. You show me that I, too, can follow your steps and climb the rough road of sanctity by practicing the hidden virtues. Close to you, O Mary, I like to remain little, and I get a better view there of the vanity of human greatness" (cf. T.C.J. *NV — Poems*).

O Mary, you gave Jesus to the world in silence and retirement; unnoticed, you shared His whole life, His works, His Passion. Teach me the secret of the interior apostolate of prayer and hidden sacrifices, known to God alone.

## 185

*MARY OUR MEDIATRIX*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Mary, since Jesus willed to come to us through you, grant that I may go to Him through you.

**MEDITATION**

1. The Church teaches us to invoke Mary as *Mediatrix of all graces*. This title summarizes what the Blessed Virgin is for us, in our relations with her beloved Son : the Mediatrix of grace, of mercy, the treasurer of all the graces which Jesus merited for us. "By the communion of sorrows and of will between Christ and Mary," says St. Pius X, "she merited to become the dispenser of all the benefits which Jesus acquired for us by shedding His Blood" (Encyclical : *Ad Diem Illum*). Mary, who was associated in the closest and most intimate way with the life, the work, and the Passion of her Son, cooperated with Him in our redemption to such an extent that the grace, which Jesus alone could merit for us *condignly*, was merited also by Mary, although in a secondary way and by *congruity* only. Thus Mary obtained real power over all the supernatural treasures acquired by her Son; and since she obtained them together

with Him, she also distributes them to us with Him. Leo XIII says, "It may be affirmed that, according to God's will, nothing comes to us without going through Mary's hands. Just as no one can approach the Almighty Father except through the Son, so no one can approach Christ except through His Mother" (*Encyclical : Octobri Mense*). After Jesus, who is the *only Mediator*, Mary is the Mediatrix : as Jesus continually intercedes with the Father in heaven on our behalf, so Mary intercedes with Jesus for us; she obtains and dispenses to us all the graces we need. The Introit of the Mass for the Feast of Mary Mediatrix of All Graces very fittingly applies to Mary the words spoken by St. Paul about Jesus : "Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, to obtain mercy and pardon." Next to Jesus, Mary is really the "throne of grace," and she can obtain *everything* for us from her Son. She is the *omnipotentia supplex*, the all-powerful intercessor : all-powerful in her prayer as Mother.

2. Mary is the Mediatrix between her Son and us for a twofold reason : she *gives* Jesus to us and she *brings us* to Him. The Gospel tells us this several times, showing us the typically maternal attitude of Mary as she brought Jesus to mankind. Our Lady offered the Infant Jesus to the adoration of the shepherds and the Wise Men; she took Him to the Temple and presented Him to Simeon; by her intercession at Cana, she obtained the first miracle from her Son. On Calvary, Mary received into her arms the martyred, lifeless Body of her beloved Son, whom she offered to mankind as the price of its redemption. In the Cenacle, she begged the plenitude of the Holy Spirit for the Apostles and, from that day to the day of her Assumption, she sustained the infant Church by her prayers and maternal encouragement. To find Mary is to find Jesus. This is the whole reason for her existence and her mission : to give Jesus to the world and to souls, and with Jesus, to give His grace and blessings. As St. Bernard says, Mary is truly the channel which carries the living water of grace to mankind; furthermore, she brings Jesus, the very source of grace.

As Mediatrix, Mary also leads men to Jesus by teaching them the way to her Son and by showing them how to please Him. We are always poor little children incapable of making presentable gifts to God, but Mary our Mother, with maternal

delicacy, arranges and embellishes our gifts, our acts, our prayers and sacrifices, and offers them with her own hands to her divine Son. She, like a true mother, gives particular attention to our hearts, which she desires to make pleasing to Jesus : Mary wants to form in each one of us a heart which is pure, full of love and goodness, a heart which can beat in unison with the heart of her Son. Let us then, place our hearts in Mary's hands, that she may fill them "with grace and truth, life and virtue" (*RM*).

#### COLLOQUY

"O Blessed Lady, most holy Mother of God, full of grace, inexhaustible ocean of the intimate divine liberality and gifts of God, after the Lord of all, the Blessed Trinity, you are Lady of all; after the Paraclete, you are the new Consoler of all; and after the Mediator, you are the Mediatrix for the entire world. Behold my faith and my desire inspired by heaven; do not despise me although unworthy, neither let the ugliness of my sins suspend the immensity of your mercy, O Mother of God, O name which surpasses all my desire!" (St. Ephraem of Syria).

"O Mary, God has given you the plenitude of all His benefits, to show us that all hope, all grace, all salvation come from your superabundance. Grant, therefore, O Mary, you who have found grace and have given us life, that through you we may approach your divine Son, O Blessed Mother of Salvation! Grant that through you we may receive Him who was given to us through you. Let your spotless purity excuse before His eyes the faults of our malice. May your humility, so pleasing to God, obtain pardon for our pride! May your immense charity cover the multitude of our sins, and may your glorious fruitfulness make our good works fruitful!

"O Lady, our Mediatrix and our advocate, reconcile us with your Son, recommend us to your Son, present us to your Son! You are blessed by the grace you have found, by the privileges you have merited, by the mercy you have brought to the world. Obtain for us that Jesus, who through you deigned to share our infirmity and our wretchedness, may grant us also through you a share in His glory and in His beatitude" (St. Bernard).

*THE HOLY SPIRIT*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Holy Spirit, teach me to know You, to want You, to love You, and to prepare myself to second Your action in my soul.

**MEDITATION**

i. The approach of Pentecost reminds us to turn our mind and heart to the Holy Spirit; with His help, we want to know Him better so as to love Him more ardently, invoke Him more fervently, and dispose ourselves in the best manner possible for the furtherance of His action in our soul.

The catechism teaches us that there are three Persons, equal and distinct, in God : the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Ab aeterno* the Father, knowing Himself, generates His *Word*, the perfect, substantial Idea in whom the Father is expressed and to whom He communicates all His goodness, loveliness, divine nature and essence. The Father and the Word, mutually beholding Their infinite goodness and beauty, love each other from all eternity, and the expression of this unitive love is a third Person, the Holy Spirit. As the Word is generated by the Father by way of knowledge, so the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son by way of love. The Holy Spirit is, therefore, the terminus, and the effusion of the reciprocal love of the Father and the Son, an *effusion* so substantial and perfect that it is a Person, the third Person of the Most Holy Trinity, to whom the Father and the Son, by the sublime fruitfulness of their love, communicate their very own nature and essence, without losing any of it Themselves. Because the Holy Spirit is the effusion of divine love, He is called "Spirit," according to the Latin sense of the word which means *air, respiration, the vital breath*. In us, respiration is a sign of life; in God, the Holy Spirit is the expression, the effusion of the life and love of the Father and the Son, but a substantial personal effusion, which is a *Person*. It is in this sense that the third Person of the Blessed Trinity is called the "Spirit of the Father and the Son," and also "the Spirit of love in God," that is, the

"breath" of love of the Father and the Son, the "breath" of divine love. It was in this sense that the Fathers of the Church called the Holy Spirit "*osculum Patris et Filii*," the kiss of the Father and the Son, a "sweet, but secret kiss," according to the tender expression of St. Bernard.

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love, so that He may come to enkindle in our hearts the flame of charity.

2. According to our human concept, a person is a being who is *complete* and *distinct* from other beings; a *subsistent* being, existing by itself; an *intelligent* being, free and capable of willing; and an *affectionate* being, capable of loving. All this is verified in the Holy Spirit in the most perfect manner: He, the breath of love of the Father and the Son, is a Person, and a divine Person. He is a *complete* being. He is God, and wholly God, not a part of God; although absolutely equal to the other two divine Persons, He is *distinct* from them; He is *subsistent* in Himself, *knowing* and *loving*. Because the Holy Spirit is a divine Person, we can have relations with Him just as we do with the Father and the Son. The Church invites us to do so proposing to us many beautiful invocations to the Holy Spirit, especially in the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*, in which she mentions all the titles by which the divine Paraclete can be addressed with confidence. The hymn begins by calling the Holy Spirit "Creator Spirit," reminding us that He, together with the Father and the Son, is one only God, our Creator. Then, she invokes Him as our Sanctifier, that is, as the One who diffuses grace in our souls: *Imple superna gratia, quae tu creasti pectora*, fill with heavenly grace the souls which You have created. Although all the external acts of God—such as creation, sanctification of souls, redemptions—are common to the three divine Persons, "by a certain relation and, as it were, an affinity which exists between the exterior works and the character proper to each Person, these works are attributed to one Person rather than to another" (*Divinum Illud*). Thus the work of sanctification, which is a work of love, is especially attributed to the Holy Spirit, who is the breath of divine love. Leo XIII teaches: "The Holy Spirit gives a sweet, strong impulse, and puts, so to speak, the final touch to the noble work of our eternal predestination" (*ibid.*). Under this special aspect of Sanctifier, then, the Church urges us to invoke the Holy Spirit. *Altissimi donum Dei, fons vivus, ignis, caritas et spiritalis*

*unctio*, gift of the Most High God, gift given to our souls to lead them to sanctity; living fount of grace, fire, divine love, spiritual sweetness. And again : *Septiformis munere, digitus paternae dexteræ*, dispenser of the seven gifts by which He makes our spiritual life perfect, finger of the right hand of the Father which indicates to us the road to sanctity. With what joy, love, and desire we should invoke the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier!

#### COLLOQUY

“ O marvelous union in heaven, marvelous on earth, marvelous and most secret, perfect bond of the divine nature, by which the Holy Spirit, the bond of love, in an ineffable manner, unites the divine Persons! Oh, how He unites in perfect unity the Holy Trinity : unity of essence, of substance, and of love! You, O Holy Spirit, are its sweet bond! O divine Spirit, with the same bond by which You join and bind eternally the Father and Son in perfect union, You also unite the soul with God, in a way similar to that divine union. You do so by freeing its faculties so perfectly that because of its close union with God, it neither wishes nor is able to wish, to recall, know, or desire anything but divine charity. Oh! how happy would the soul be, if, like the blessed in heaven, it could nevermore be freed from such a close and blessed bond!

“ O Holy Spirit, You come to us by a loving operation of grace...like an overflowing fountain in the soul, wherein the soul is submerged. As two rivers join and unite their waters so that the smaller one loses its name and takes that of the larger, so do You, O divine Spirit, come into the soul to unite Yourself to it. But it is necessary that the soul, which is the lesser, lose its name and leave it to You, O Holy Spirit, that it may be transformed in You, so as to become one spirit with You.

“ Holy Spirit, I see You coming down into the soul like the sun which, finding no obstacle, no impediment, illumines everything; I see You descending like a fiery thunderbolt which, in falling, goes to the lowest place it finds and there it reposes, never stopping on the way nor resting on the mountainous or high places but rather in the center of the earth. Thus You, O Holy Spirit, when You come down

from heaven with the fiery dart of Your divine love, You do not repose in proud hearts or in arrogant spirits, but You make Your abode in souls that are humble and contemptible in their own eyes" (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

## 187

## THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Holy Spirit, You who had complete dominion over the holy soul of Jesus, deign to direct my poor soul.

## MEDITATION

1. In Sacred Scripture, the Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of Christ" (*Rom 8,9*), an expression that is pregnant with meaning. Christ is the Incarnate Word. Although He became Man, He remains the Word, the Son of God. From Him, as from the Father, the Holy Spirit proceeds; therefore, the Holy Spirit is properly termed the Spirit of Christ, because the Person of Christ is none other than that of the Word. When we speak of Christ, however, we do not speak of Him as God only, but also, and especially, as Man, that is, as the *Incarnate* Word. In this sense too, it can be said that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. We know, in fact, that the divine Paraclete, with the Father and the Son, dwells in every soul that is in the state of grace, and not only does He dwell there, but He delights to abide there. The higher the degree of grace He finds in a soul, the greater is His delight, for wherever grace is more abundant, there is a more intense and luminous reflection of God's nature and goodness. This is why the Holy Spirit took such great complacency in the soul of the Blessed Virgin, who, although she was full of grace, continually grew from plenitude to plenitude. Yet the grace possessed by Mary was but a pale reflection of the grace which filled the soul of Jesus, grace which theologians call "infinite."

If, then, Jesus possessed grace in an infinite manner, it can be said that the Holy Spirit took complacency in the

soul of Christ in an infinite manner and dwelt there as in His temple of predilection. This idea is expressed in the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, when it says that the divine Paraclete "finds His delight in dwelling in the soul of the Redeemer as in His favorite temple." And if we can say that the Holy Spirit is *ours* because He dwells in our souls sanctified by grace, with infinitely greater reason can we say that He is "Christ's," whose sacred soul possesses grace in an immeasurable degree.

2. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and dwells in Him as in His chosen temple. The Holy Spirit is in the soul of Christ to bear it continually to God, to direct it in the accomplishment of its redemptive mission and to the fulfillment of the will of the heavenly Father. We see this in the Gospel where St. Luke, after describing Jesus' baptism, when the Holy Spirit "descended in a bodily shape, as a dove, upon Him" (3,22), adds: "Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the desert" (4,1). This is an explicit statement of the immeasurable plenitude with which the Holy Spirit dwelt in the soul of Jesus; without doubt, this plenitude existed from the first moment of the Savior's life, but God wished to make it sensibly manifest at the time of His baptism. It is also a striking example of the unceasing operation of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' soul, inspiring all His actions and guiding Him to the accomplishment of His redemptive mission. According to St. Paul: "By the Holy Ghost, [Christ] offered Himself unspotted unto God" (*Heb* 9,14). If we wish a more profound understanding of this mysterious action of the divine Paraclete in the sacred soul of Jesus, it will suffice to think of what He accomplishes in a soul who has reached the transformation of love. St. John of the Cross teaches that, in this very exalted state, the Holy Spirit invades the soul, henceforth totally docile to His motions; He directs it and moves it in all its acts, impelling it unceasingly toward God by a perfect adherence to His divine will. The Holy Spirit accomplished immeasurably more in the soul of Christ which was supremely capable of docility and correspondence to His inspirations. The divine Spirit encountered the sublime creature, the soul of Jesus; He invaded it, directed it, guided it in the accomplishment of its mission and brought it to God with

unparalleled transports, because it was completely under His sway.

#### COLLOQUY

“ O Holy Spirit, only Your clemency and ineffable love could have held the Son of God nailed to the wood of the Cross, for neither nails nor cords would have been able to hold Him there without the bonds of love. And then, when Christ returned to His Father at His Ascension, You, O Holy Spirit, were sent into the world with the power of the Father, the wisdom of the Son, and Your own mercy, to strengthen the way of the doctrine which Christ left in the world.... O Holy Spirit, come into my heart; by Your power, draw it to You, true God; grant me charity with fear, guard me from every evil thought, warm me, inflame me with Your most sweet love, so that every pain will seem slight to me. O Holy Father and my sweet Lord, help me now in all my actions ” (St. Catherine of Siena).

“ O Jesus, I offer You my poor love, placing it in the arms of Your ardent Spirit, in the furnace enkindled by Your love. O my Beloved, by Your divine power prepare me for spiritual warfare with the weapons of Your Spirit, since I do not rely upon myself, but on Your goodness alone. By Your unfathomable charity, root out of me anything that is not wholly Yours, so that, by the grace of Your love, invited and restored by Your loving sweetness, I may love You alone. The sweet outpourings of Your Spirit make the burden of life seem brief and light. Deign to cooperate with my works, so that my soul may magnify You eternally. May my life be consecrated to You, and may my spirit rejoice in You, my Savior; then every thought and act will be praise and thanksgiving to You ” (St. Gertrude).

O Holy Spirit, You who worked with such plenitude in the most holy soul of Jesus, deign to operate also in my poor soul and take it entirely under Your direction, so that every act, interior as well as exterior, may be according to Your inspirations, Your choice, Your good pleasure.

*SWEET GUEST OF THE SOUL*

**PRESENCE OF GOD - O** Holy Spirit, You who deign to dwell in me, help me to open my soul completely to Your action.

**MEDITATION**

1. The Encyclical *Mystici Corporis* states that "the Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church." Because soul means "principle of life," this statement equivalently says that the divine Paraclete is the One who gives life to the Church. As the soul is the principle of life in the body, so the Holy Spirit is the principle of life in the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ (cf. *Divinum Illud*).

We have seen that the Holy Spirit was in Christ's soul to direct Him in the accomplishment of His redemptive mission. Jesus could have carried out this mission alone, but He wished the Church to participate in it. Since the Church continues Christ's work, she needs the same impetus which guided His soul; she needs the Holy Spirit. Jesus merited His Spirit for us on the Cross; by His death, He atoned for all sin, the chief obstacle to the action of the Holy Spirit, and when He had ascended into heaven, He sent Him to the Apostles, who represented the whole Church. Now, seated in glory at the right hand of the Father, He intercedes continually for us, He is always sending the Holy Spirit to the Church, as He promised. The Holy Spirit operates in the Church now, just as He once did in the blessed soul of Christ. He gives her impulse, moves her, and drives her to accomplish God's will, thus enabling her to fulfill His mission, the continuation down through the ages of the redemptive work of Christ. With reason, then, did the early Fathers call the Holy Spirit the Soul of the Church; the Church herself invokes Him in the *Credo*: "*Dominum et vivificantem!*" Lord and life-giver. As the soul vivifies the body, the Holy Spirit vivifies the Church. He is the impulse of love who kindles in her zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls; He gives light and strength to her shepherds, fervor and energy to her apostles, courage and invincible faith to her martyrs.

2. The Church, because she is the "society" of the faithful, is constituted by their union : it is the faithful, it is we ourselves, who form the Church. Hence, to say that Jesus merited the Holy Spirit for His Church is equivalent to saying that He merited Him for us; to say that Jesus, together with the Father, has sent and continues to send His Spirit to the Church, is equivalent to affirming that He has sent and continues to send Him to us. The Encyclical *Mystici Corporis* asserts that the Holy Spirit "is communicated to the Church abundantly, so that she herself and *each one of her members* may become, day by day, more like our Redeemer." Thus the Holy Spirit exercises His influence not only in the Body of the Church, but also in each soul in which He dwells as the "sweet Guest." He is in us : to take possession of our souls, to sanctify them, to form them in the likeness of Christ, and to urge us to continue His redemptive mission; He is that impulse of love which urges us to do God's will, guides us towards the glorification of the Most Holy Trinity, and brings us to God.

But if the Holy Spirit is an impulse of love that comes into us to sanctify us and bring us to God, why do we not all become saints? The mystery of human responsibility enters here. The Holy Spirit, with the Father and the Son, has created us free beings and He wishes us so; therefore, in coming to us, He respects our liberty and does no violence to it. Although He is eager to enter our souls and to possess it, He will not act thus unless we give Him free access. It is an example of the great principle on which St. Teresa of Jesus liked to insist : "God does not force anyone, He takes what we give Him; but He does not give Himself wholly to us, until we give ourselves wholly to Him" (*Way*, 28). If we do not become saints, it is not because the Holy Spirit does not will it—He was sent to us and comes to us for this very purpose—but it is because we do not give full liberty to His action. This is the point in which we fail : we do not use our liberty to wholly yield our soul to His powerful, loving invasion. If our will would open the doors wide, the Holy Spirit would take us under His direction, and, with His help, we would become saints.

## COLLOQUY

“ O Holy Spirit, You formed our Redeemer in the pure womb of the Virgin Mary; You gave life to Jesus, and directed Him in all He thought, said, did, and suffered during His earthly life, and in the sacrifice He Himself offered to the Father for us on the Cross. When Jesus ascended into heaven, You came upon earth to establish the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, and to apply to this Body the fruits of the life, Blood, Passion, and death of Christ. Otherwise, Jesus would have suffered and died in vain. Furthermore, O Holy Spirit, You descended to us at holy baptism to form Jesus Christ in our souls, to incorporate us into Him, to give us birth and life in Him, to apply to us the effects and merits of His Blood and of His death, to animate and inspire us, and to guide and direct us in all that we should think, say, do, and suffer for God. What, then, should our life be? Oh! it should be completely holy, divine, and spiritual, according to the words of Jesus : ‘ that which is born of the Spirit is spirit! ’

“ O Divine Spirit, I give myself entirely to You. Take possession of my soul, direct me in everything, and grant that I may live as a true child of God, as a true member of Jesus Christ; grant that, born of You, I may totally belong to You, be totally possessed, animated, and directed by You ” (St. John Eudes).

“ O Holy Spirit, Soul of my soul, I adore You. Enlighten me, guide me, fortify me, console me. Tell me what I should do, give me Your orders. I promise to be submissive to all that You ask of me and to accept everything that You permit to happen to me ” (Cardinal Mercier).

*THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT*

PENTECOST SUNDAY

PRESENCE OF GOD - Come, Holy Spirit, fill my heart and enkindle in it the fire of Your Love.

## MEDITATION

i. Pentecost is the plenitude of God's gift to men. On Christmas Day, God gives us His only-begotten Son, Christ Jesus, the Mediator, the Bridge connecting humanity and divinity. During Holy Week, Jesus, by His Passion, gives Himself entirely for us, even to death on the Cross. He bathes us, purifying and sanctifying us in His Blood. At Easter, Christ rises, and His Resurrection, as well as His Ascension, is the pledge of our own glorification. He goes before us to His Father's house to prepare a place for us, for in Him and with Him, we have become a part of the divine Family; we have become children of God, destined for eternal beatitude. But the gift of God to men does not end there; having ascended into heaven, Jesus, in union with the Father, sends us His Spirit, the Holy Spirit. The Father and the Holy Spirit loved us to the point of giving us the Word in the Incarnation; the Father and the Word so loved us as to give us the Holy Spirit. Thus the three Persons of the Trinity give Themselves to man, stooping to this poor nothing to redeem him from sin, to sanctify him, and to bring him into Their own intimacy. Such is the excessive charity with which God has loved us; and the divine gift to our souls reaches its culminating point in the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is the Gift par excellence : *Altissimi Donum Dei*, Gift of the Most High God. The Holy Spirit, the bond and pledge of the mutual love of the Father and the Son, He who accepts, seals, and crowns their reciprocal gift, is given to our souls through the infinite merits of Jesus, so that He will be able to complete the work of our sanctification. By His descent upon the Apostles under the form of tongues of fire, the Holy Spirit shows us how He, the Spirit of love, is given to us in order to transform us by His charity, and having transformed us, to lead us back to God.

2. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not a temporary gift, but a permanent one; in fact, for a soul who lives in charity, He is the sweet Guest who dwells within it. "If anyone love Me," says Jesus in the words of today's Gospel (*Jn* 14,23-31), "...We will come to him and will make Our abode with him." However, this indwelling of the Trinity—and hence of the Holy Spirit—in the soul which is in the state of grace, is a gift which can and should increase; it is a continual giving. The first donation was made when we were baptized; it was renewed later, *confirmed*, in a special way, by the Sacrament of *Confirmation*, the Sacrament that is, so to speak, the Pentecost of every Christian soul. Progressive renewals of this gift were made with every increase in charity. And what of the present? The Holy Spirit, in union with the Father and the Son, continues to give Himself to the soul more completely, more profoundly and possessively. Today's Gospel speaks very forcefully about charity, which is at the same time both the condition for and the result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our souls. It is the condition, because, according to Jesus Himself, the three divine Persons dwell only in a soul who loves; it is the result, because "the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us" (*Rom* 5,5). Divine love completely preceded us at baptism; without merit on our part and solely through the merits of Jesus, the Holy Spirit was given to us, and His charity was gratuitously diffused in us. Thereafter, each time we corresponded to the divine invitations, by making generous acts of charity, He renewed His invisible visit to our soul, giving us always new grace and charity. Thus our supernatural life has developed under the action of the Holy Spirit; it is caught up in the life-giving transforming current of His love. In this way we understand how the Feast of Pentecost can and should represent a new out-pouring of the Holy Spirit in our souls, a new visit in which He fills us with His gifts :

*Veni, Creator Spiritus — mentes tuorum visita,  
Imple superna gratia — quae tu creasti pectora.*

Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest,  
And in our hearts take up Thy rest,  
Come with Thy grace and heavenly aid,  
To fill the hearts which Thou hast made.

## COLLOQUY

"O Holy Spirit, substantial Love of the Father and the Son, uncreated Love dwelling in the souls of the just, come down upon me like a new Pentecost and bring me an abundance of Your gifts, of Your fruits, and of Your grace; unite Yourself to me as the most sweet Spouse of my soul.

"I consecrate myself entirely to You; invade me, take me, possess me wholly. Be the penetrating light which illumines my intellect, the gentle motion which attracts and directs my will, the supernatural energy which gives energy to my body. Complete in me Your work of sanctification and love. Make me pure, transparent, simple, true, free, peaceful, gentle, calm, serene even in suffering, and burning with charity toward God and my neighbor.

"*Accendat in nobis ignem sui amoris et flammam aeternae caritatis*, kindle in me the fire of Your love and the flame of eternal charity. Multiply in me these holy transports of love which will bring me rapidly to transforming union.

"Make not only my will, but all my senses and faculties completely submissive to Your divine will, so that I shall no longer be ruled by my pride, but solely by Your divine impulse. Then everything in me will be moved by love, in love, in such a way that when I work, I shall work through love, and when I suffer, I shall bear everything through love. Grant that the supernatural may become the 'natural' atmosphere in which my soul moves.

"Make me docile and prompt to follow Your inspirations. Grant that I may never neglect even one, but may always be Your faithful little spouse. Make me ever more recollected, more silent, and more submissive to Your divine action, more alert to receive Your delicate touches. Draw me into the inmost depths of my heart where You dwell, O sweet, divine Guest, and teach me to 'watch continually in prayer.'

"Come, O life-giving Spirit, to this poor world and renew the face of the earth; preside over new organizations and give us Your peace, that peace which the world cannot give. Help Your Church, give her holy priests and fervent apostles. Fill with holy inspirations the souls of the good; give calm compunction to sinful souls, consoling refreshment to the suffering, strength and help to those who are tempted, and light to those in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Sr. Carmela of the Holy Spirit, O.C.D.).

*THE ACTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Holy Spirit, make me realize Your action in my soul; teach me to recognize it and correspond with it.

**MEDITATION**

1. Just as the Holy Spirit dwelt in the most holy soul of Christ in order to bring it to God, so He abides in our souls for the same purpose. In Jesus He found a completely docile will, one that He could control perfectly, whereas in us He often meets resistance, the fruit of human weakness; therefore, He desists from the work of our sanctification because He will not do violence to our liberty. He, the Spirit of *love*, waits for us to cooperate *lovingly* in His work, yielding our soul to His sanctifying action freely and ardently. In order to become saints, we must concur in the work of the Holy Spirit; but since effective concurrence is impossible without an understanding of the promoter's actions, it is necessary for us to learn how the divine Paraclete, the promoter of our sanctification, works in us.

We must realize that the Holy Spirit is ever active in our souls, from the earliest stages of the spiritual life and even from its very beginning, although at that time in a more hidden and imperceptible way. However, His very precious action was there, and it consisted especially in the preparing and encouraging of our first attempts to acquire perfection. By giving us grace, without which we could have done nothing to attain sanctity, the Holy Spirit inaugurated His work in us : He elevated us to the supernatural state. Grace comes from God; it is a gift from all three Persons of the Blessed Trinity : a gift created by the Father, merited by the Son in consequence of His Incarnation, Passion, and death, and diffused in our souls by the Holy Spirit. But it is to the latter, to the Spirit of love, that the work of our sanctification is attributed in a very special manner. When we were baptized, we were justified "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"; nevertheless, Sacred Scripture particularly attributes this work of regeneration and divine

filiation to the Holy Spirit. Jesus Himself pointed out to us that Baptism is a rebirth "of...the Holy Spirit" (*Jn* 3,5), and St. Paul stated : "For in one Spirit were we all baptized" and "the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God" (*1 Cor* 12,13 – *Rom* 8,16). Therefore, it is the Holy Spirit who has prepared and disposed our souls for the supernatural life by pouring forth grace in us.

2. Besides this, in order to enable us to perform supernatural acts, the Holy Spirit comes to strengthen our powers—the intellect and the will—by the infused virtues : charity, together with the other theological virtues of faith and hope, and the moral virtues. Thus, through His intervention, we become capable of performing supernatural acts. But the Holy Spirit does not stop there; like a good teacher, He continues to help us in our work, urging us to do good and sustaining our efforts. He invites us by His interior inspirations, as well as by exterior means, especially Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church. Sacred Scripture is the word of God, written by men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is the divine Paraclete who speaks to us therein, enlightening our intellects with His light and spurring our wills by His motions; hence, meditation on the sacred texts is somewhat like "attending the school" of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit continually teaches us and stimulates us to do good by the living word of the Church, since all those in the Church who have the mission to teach are under His influence when they expound sacred doctrine to the faithful. If we listen to the inspirations of the divine Paraclete, and accept His invitations, He unites Himself to us, aiding us by actual graces, so that we are able to perform virtuous acts. It is clear, therefore, that even when the spiritual life is in its first stages, and is concentrated on the correcting of faults and acquiring of virtues, the activity of the soul is entirely permeated and sustained by the action of the Holy Spirit. We give too little attention to this truth and therefore, in practice, we tend to ignore the constant work of the divine Spirit in our souls. Let us give thought to this, lest His inspirations and impulses go unheeded. "By the grace of God, I am what I am," said St. Paul, and he could add : "His grace in me hath not been void" (*1 Cor* 15,10).

## COLLOQUY

"O Holy Spirit, divine Guest of our souls, You are the noblest and most worthy of all guests! With the agility of Your goodness and love for us, You fly rapidly to all souls who are disposed to receive You. And who can tell the wonderful effects produced by You when You are welcomed? You speak, but without noise of words, and Your sublime silence is heard everywhere. You are always motionless, yet always in movement, and in Your mobile immobility, You communicate Yourself to all. You are always at rest, yet ever working; and in Your rest You perform the greatest, worthiest, and most admirable works. You are always moving, but You never change Your place. You penetrate, strengthen, and preserve all. Your immense, penetrating omniscience knows all, understands all, penetrates all. Without listening to anything, You hear the least word spoken in the most secret recesses of hearts.

"O Holy Spirit, You stay everywhere unless You are driven out, because You communicate Yourself to everyone, except to sinners who do not want to rise from the mire of their sins; in them You can find no place to rest, nor can You endure the evil emanating from a heart which obstinately persists in wrong-doing. But You remain in the creatures who, by their purity, make themselves receptive to Your gifts. And You rest in me by communication, operation, wisdom, power, liberality, benignity, charity, love, purity; in short, by Your very goodness. Diffusing these graces in Your creature, You Yourself prepare him suitably to receive You" (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

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*THE INITIATIVES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Holy Spirit, come and direct my soul in the way of sanctity.

**MEDITATION**

1. Although our soul is supernaturalized by sanctifying grace, our powers strengthened by the infused virtues, and our actions preceded and accompanied by actual grace, still the manner of our acting always remains human, and is therefore incapable of uniting us perfectly with God, of bringing us to sanctity. In fact, our intellects, although invested with the virtue of faith, are always inadequate in regard to infinite Being, and are always incapable of knowing God as He really is. Even following the truths of revelation, which tell us that God is One and Three, the ideas which we form about the Most Holy Trinity, the three divine Persons, and the perfections of God, always remain far short of the reality. As long as we are on earth, we shall know God "through a glass in a dark manner"; only in heaven shall we see Him "face to face" (*1 Cor 13,12*). The inadequacy of our knowledge of God extends equally to our ideas of sanctity; the same short-sightedness that characterizes our view of divine things affects our notions of the way of perfection. In many cases we cannot even discern what is more perfect, and despite our good will, we often make mistakes, believing some things to be good and holy which really are not.

However, complete union with God, which is sanctity, requires a perfect orientation toward Him, according to the first and greatest commandment of Jesus: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind" (*Mt 22,37*); we have seen that this perfect orientation exceeds our powers, precisely because our knowledge of God and of the way which leads to Him is far too imperfect. Must we then renounce sanctity? Not at all! God, who wants our sanctification, has provided us with the means of attaining it: He has given us the Holy

Spirit. Jesus said : " You shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you " (*Acts 1,8*).

2. The Holy Spirit, who " searcheth...the deep things of God " (*1 Cor 2,10*), has a perfect knowledge of the divine nature and mysteries; He who penetrates all things and knows perfectly the delicacy and secrets of the highest virtue, as well as the needs and deficiencies of our souls, comes to take us by the hand and lead us to sanctity. As long as we advance by our own initiative, our orientation toward God will always be imperfect and incomplete, because we shall be acting in a *human manner*, but when the divine Spirit intervenes, He operates as God, in a *divine manner*; that is why He draws us and directs us completely toward Himself. In human actions, thought precedes the determination of the will, and since our capacity for thought is so limited, our actions are, of necessity, limited too. This is especially true in regard to divine things. But when the Holy Spirit intervenes, He acts directly on the will by drawing it to Himself. He inflames our heart and enlightens our mind. This is the genesis of that " sense of God " which is impossible for us to express, but which makes us know God and taste Him; it directs us toward Him, more than any reasoning on our part could ever do. Then we feel that God is " the only One," that all creatures are infinitely distant from Him, that He is worthy of all our love—which is nothing compared with His infinite, divine loveliness; we feel that any sacrifice, even the greatest, is but a trifle when made for such a God. This is how the Holy Spirit guides us on the road to sanctity. At the same time, He helps us to overcome actual difficulties. For example, we very often find ourselves struggling against a fault which we seem unable to overcome, or trying unsuccessfully to acquire a certain virtue, or endeavoring to solve some problem; but at a certain point, without our knowing how, things change : our former doubt is resolved and we are able to accomplish with ease what at first seemed impossible. This, too, is the result of the action of the Holy Spirit in our soul; it explains why His initiatives are so precious for us, and why we should desire Him and invoke Him with so much confidence.

## COLLOQUY

"O Love of the eternal God, sacred communication between the omnipotent Father and His blessed Son, all-powerful Paraclete, most merciful Consoler of the afflicted, penetrate the innermost depths of my heart with Your powerful virtue; brighten with Your shining light any dark corners of that neglected dwelling of my soul. Visit it, fructifying with the abundance of Your dew, all that a long period of drought has dried up and choked. Pierce with the dart of Your love, the depths of my soul; penetrate the very center of my enervated heart and inflame it with Your salutary fire; strengthen Your creature by illumining, with the light of Your holy fervor, the inmost depths of my mind and heart.

"I believe that each time You come into a soul, You prepare there a dwelling for the Father and the Son. Blessed is he who is worthy to have You as Guest! Through You, the Father and the Son establish their dwelling in him. Come then, most benign Consoler of suffering souls, Protector in all circumstances and Support in tribulations. Come, Purifier of faults, Healer of the wounded. Come, Strength of the weak, Restorer of those who fall! Come, Master of the humble, rejecter of the proud! Come, O charitable Father of orphans, merciful Judge of widows! Come, hope of the poor, strength of the weak! Come, guiding star of sailors, harbor of the shipwrecked! Come, O unique beauty of all the living, and only salvation of the dying!

"Come, O Holy Spirit, come and take pity on me! Clothe me with Yourself, and graciously hear my prayers, that, according to the multitude of Your mercies, my littleness may be pleasing to Your greatness, and my weakness to Your strength, through Jesus Christ, my Savior, who, with the Father, lives and reigns in unity with You, forever and ever. Amen" (St. Augustine).

*OUR COOPERATION*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Holy Spirit, make me docile to Your action and always willing to be guided and directed by You.

**MEDITATION**

i. In what concerns sanctity, we are always like school children, apprentices who, having only a rudimentary knowledge of the art they are learning, are always in need of direction and suggestions from their teacher. Our Teacher of sanctity is none other than the Holy Spirit; Jesus, speaking of Him, said, "He will teach you all things, and bring...to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you" (*Jn* 14,26). He teaches us what we must do in order to love God with all our strength; He teaches us all that we do not know, whether about God, or about the spiritual life; and to perfect His teaching, He guides us in the accomplishment of it. Actually, by directly influencing our wills, He strengthens them, attracts them, impels them forcefully to God, orientating them perfectly toward Him. In this way the Holy Spirit "helpeth our infirmity" (*Rom* 8,26), which being *constitutional*—inherent in our human nature—causes us to be continually in need of Him. In truth, He never leaves us: our whole spiritual life is enveloped in His action. We have seen how, from the very beginning, He comes to help us by preparing and encouraging our own personal initiatives; but then, if He finds us docile to His invitations, He Himself takes the initiative. That is why the whole work of our sanctification may be reduced to a question of docility to the divine Paraclete. Before all else, we must be very attentive and docile to His invitations: "*Utinam hodie vocem ejus audiatis; nolite obdurare corda vestra,*" Oh, today, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts! (*Ps* 94,8). The promptings of the Holy Spirit can come to us in the words of Sacred Scripture, preaching, the teachings of the Church, the various circumstances of life, good thoughts and holy inspirations. Let us cooperate with them at once, proving our good will by our ready acceptance of and obedience to them.

2. But very often, alas! our will still remains hard, stubborn, and intractable because it is so attached to creatures, especially to that one creature, the "ego," which we blindly cherish. Hence, to cooperate with the action of the Holy Spirit, the first requirement is the painstaking effort to detach ourselves from everything, especially from ourselves. Detachment will free us from numerous bonds which, like cords, tie us to creatures, making our docility and submissiveness to the Holy Spirit an impossibility. Let us be mindful of the fact that a fine thread, that is, any little attachment, is sufficient to bind our souls to creatures. "It comes to the same thing whether a bird be held by a slender cord or a stout one; since, even if it be slender, the bird will be as well held as though it were stout, for so long as it breaks it not it cannot fly away" (*J.C. AS I*, 11,4). Detachment breaks the thread which fastens us to earth, and our soul, thus freed, can follow every slightest impulse of the Holy Spirit, who will then take possession of it and direct it according to His good pleasure.

We have said that the Paraclete is not content simply to invite us to what is good, but He wishes to take the initiative, impelling us more effectually toward God. However, He respects our liberty, and will not make Himself Master of our will unless we are disposed to give it to Him freely. And here we can set up another obstacle to His action : the Holy Spirit would like to elevate us and bring us to God, but we do not accept His initiative and our lack of generosity retards the divine work. Perhaps we cooperate partially, giving Him something of what He asks, but we do not give Him "all." We must, therefore, cultivate the spirit of "totality" which puts no limits to our giving. We must have a magnanimous heart and not retard the work of the Holy Spirit, who wills to bring us, not only, to good actions but to generous, heroic, saintly ones.

#### COLLOQUY

"O merciful God, my sweetness and my love, send Your Holy Spirit from paradise and create in me a new heart and spirit. Your unction teaches me everything, because I have chosen You among thousands and I love You above all else, more than my own soul. O Holy Spirit, God of love, receive

me into Your sweet, merciful charity, so that, during the whole course of my life, I may have You as Master, Teacher, and sweet Lover of my heart" (St. Gertrude).

"O Holy Spirit, teach me to value even Your slightest inspiration. The smallest, were it only to refrain from a word or a glance, is more precious in fact than the entire world, for it is a call, an invitation to enter more deeply into divine intimacy. By faithfully corresponding to it, I grow in grace and love. O Holy Spirit, make me understand well that perfection consists in saying "Amen" every time You ask anything of me through the voice of obedience or by Your inspirations. Help me to avoid every slight infidelity or hesitation, to refuse You nothing; then Your light will grow in me continually and love will become an unfathomable abyss. But, O Holy Spirit, I know very well that I shall often fall, and that I shall commit faults; O my God, let them not be voluntary! However, You teach me that, even in this event, I must rise at once and, by an act of love, place myself under Your influence again. You do not want me to be troubled or discouraged by my infidelities, for Your Spirit is all sweetness. 'Oh! how sweet is Your Spirit, O Lord!' and 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there also is liberty, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit' (cf. Sr. Carmela of the Holy Spirit, O.C.D.).

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### *CONFORMITY WITH CHRIST THROUGH THE ACTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Holy Spirit, make me conformable to Jesus, make me an "*alter Christus*," another Christ.

#### MEDITATION

1. The Holy Spirit is given to us to sanctify us, but how will He accomplish His mission? The Encyclical *Mystici Corporis* tells us that the divine Paraclete "is communicated to the Church...so that she and each of her members may

become daily more and more like to our Savior." The Holy Spirit comes into our souls to make us conformable, and even assimilated to Christ : this is the immediate end of His action in us, this is the way by which He will lead us to sanctity.

All the elect are predestined by God "to be made conformable to the image of His Son" (*Rom 8,29*) : we shall be saints according to the degree of our resemblance to Christ. The Holy Spirit has been given to us that He may imprint in us the traits of this divine resemblance, and make us "daily more and more like to our Savior." Oh! how necessary it is that no day should ever pass without some increase in this likeness! Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, profoundly impressed by this truth, used to pray to the Holy Spirit to make of her "an added humanity wherein He may renew all His mystery" (*E.T. III*). If Jesus is the model to whom we should all be conformed, there is no presumption in aspiring to become so like Him that our life may be a "prolongation" of His, and that He may continue in us His work of unceasing adoration and glorification of the Father, as well as that of the redemption of mankind.

Of ourselves, we are unable to reach such perfect conformity with Christ, but the divine Spirit is in us to bring it about. Christ is the *Holy One* par excellence. In order to make us like Him, the Holy Spirit initially communicates to us Christ's sanctity by pouring grace into us; this grace penetrates our being, our activity, and our life in such a way that it makes of each one of us an *alter Christus*, another Christ. Let it be noted that the grace given to us by the Holy Spirit is identical in its nature with the grace that sanctifies the soul of Jesus : although it is given us in an infinitely lesser degree—Christ possessing it "without limit"—it is the same seed, the same principle of sanctity. This is why the full development of grace can really bring us to identification with Christ, to becoming other images of Him. To the degree of our transformation in Him corresponds the degree of our participation in His sanctity and also in His work. Christ will renew His mystery in us : in us He will continue to glorify the Most Holy Trinity and to save souls.

2. The norm of life for Jesus was His Father's will, and we have seen how the Holy Spirit guided Him continually in the accomplishment of that will. In the same way, the Holy Spirit wishes always to guide us further along the way

traced out by the will of God. Practically speaking, "sanctity consists in conformity to the divine will" (Benedict XV), in a conformity so complete that, as St. John of the Cross teaches : "there may be naught in the soul that is contrary to the will of God, but that, in all and through all, its movement may be that of the will of God alone" (*AS I*, 11,2). It is not easy to reach this point, and we shall never be able to do so without the help of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, we must not forget that conformity to the divine will finds its expression in a "continual, exact fulfillment of the duties of one's state in life" (Benedict XV). Now, to be always faithful to duty, in all things and everywhere, is no small matter. It requires continual sacrifice, generosity, and constancy. Let us look at Jesus on the Cross, and we shall understand what the perfect accomplishment of our duty and God's will can exact. This is the way we must follow, constantly renewing our efforts and realizing, at the same time, that however much good will we may have, we are so weak, so inconstant, so deeply attached to ourselves, and so limited in our strength, that we will not always succeed in keeping ourselves to the perfect fulfillment of our duties; we often fall, and do not even know how to rise. Let us humble ourselves then, and make use of these falls to realize better our impotence and frailty : humility, yes; discouragement, never! Instead of weeping over ourselves, let us turn our eyes toward the Holy Spirit, call upon Him to come to our aid, and begin again humbly and confidently. When the Holy Spirit sees us renewing our efforts, He will come to meet us, take us by the hand, and in an instant will lead us to a degree of perfection which we have not been able to reach even after years of effort. We can be sure of this, for Jesus merited it for us, and sends us His Spirit "in a most copious outpouring."

#### COLLOQUY

" My beloved Jesus, I desire to follow with You the rule of love, the rule of the will of God, by which I can renew and spend my whole life in You. Place it in the care of Your Holy Spirit, so that at all times I shall be most prompt to keep Your commandments and fulfill all my duties. I am only a poor twig, planted by You. Of myself, I am nothing,

and less than nothing, but You can make me flourish in the abundance of Your Spirit. What am I, O my God, life of my soul? Ah! how far away from You I am! I am like a speck of dust, raised and blown away by the wind. Oh! by virtue of Your charity, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, and at the pleasure of Your Providence, may the violent wind of Your omnipotent love cast me into You with such force that I may really begin to die to myself in order to live solely in You, my sweet love. Make me lose myself in You, abandoning myself so completely that no trace of self will remain in me, just as an invisible speck of dust disappears without being noticed. Transform me wholly in the tenderness of Your love, that, in You, all my imperfection will be reduced to nothingness and I shall have no life outside of You" (St. Gertrude).

"O consuming Fire, Spirit of Love! Come down into me and reproduce in me, as it were, an incarnation of the Word; that I may be to Him an added humanity, wherein He may renew all His mystery!" (E.T. III).

## 194

*THE WAY OF THE CROSS*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Holy Spirit, teach me the value of suffering, so that I may esteem it and love it as a means of sanctification.

**MEDITATION**

1. We must be thoroughly convinced that if the Holy Spirit works in our souls to assimilate us to Christ, He can do so only by opening to us the way of the Cross. Jesus is Jesus Crucified; therefore, there can be no conformity to Him except by the Cross, and we shall never enter into the depths of the spiritual life except by entering into the mystery of the Cross. St. Teresa of Jesus teaches that even the highest contemplative graces are given to souls only in order to

enable them to carry the Cross. "His Majesty," says the Saint, "can do nothing greater for us than to grant us a life which is an imitation of that lived by His beloved Son. I feel certain, therefore, that these favors are given to us to strengthen our weakness, so that *we may be able to imitate Him in His great sufferings*" (*Int C VII*, 4). Yes, conformity to Jesus Crucified has more value and importance than all mystical graces! The whole spiritual life is dominated by the Cross and, as the Cross is the central point in the history of the world, so it is the central point in the history of every soul. The Cross gave us life; it will imprint upon our souls the traits of the most perfect resemblance to Jesus; the more we share in His Cross, the more shall we resemble Him and cooperate in the work of Redemption.

In order to attain sanctity, it is evident that we need the Cross. To accept God's will always and in every circumstance implies the renouncement of one's own will; it is impossible to be conformed to Jesus in everything, "who in this life had no other pleasure, nor desired any, than to do the will of His Father" (*J.C. AS I*, 13,4), without renouncing one's own selfish pleasures. And all this means: detachment, crosses, sacrifice, self-denial. It means setting out steadfastly on the way indicated by Jesus Himself: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (*Mt 16,24*). This is the path which the Holy Spirit urges and invites us to follow. Whenever we find ourselves looking for things that are easier, more commodious, or more honorable; whenever we notice that we are satisfying our self-love, our pride, or see that we are attached to our own will, let us remind ourselves that all this is far removed from the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and, what is worse, it is an obstacle to His action in us.

2. By courageously practicing self-denial, we begin the way of conformity to Jesus Crucified; but here, too, our initiatives are disproportionate to the end to be attained; the acts of mortification and self-denial which we make are wholly insufficient to strip us of the old man and clothe us with Christ, with Christ Crucified. That is why the Holy Spirit, after setting us on the road of the Cross by His inspirations—which tend to make us accept, for the love of God, all that is hard and painful to nature—takes it upon Himself to complete our purification. He does this by

sending us trials, both exterior and interior. "We must know," says St. John of the Cross, "that this divine fire of love...is wounding the soul, and destroying and consuming in it the imperfections of its bad habits; this is the operation of the Holy Spirit wherein He prepares it for divine union and the transformation of love in God" (*LF*, 1,19). Therefore, we must not imagine that the Holy Spirit's action will always be consoling—quite the contrary! Suffering is necessary for our purification and, flowing from this, our participation in the redemptive work of Jesus. The farther we advance along the road of the Cross, the more we shall be sanctified and the more fruitful the apostolate we shall exercise in the Church. It is evident then, that in order to sanctify us the Holy Spirit cannot lead us by any way other than that of the Cross. It is for us to second His action, primarily by willingly accepting everything hard and painful that comes to us in our daily life. Often we neglect the Cross of daily trials and prefer one that is far away, and which perhaps, may never be sent to us. We must not seek the Cross in these extraordinary sufferings, seldom, if ever, encountered; we must look for it in the duties, the life, the difficulties, and the sacrifices of each day and each moment. Here we shall find unfathomable treasures, recognizing them by the light of faith, by the aid of the Holy Spirit who urges us to embrace these daily crosses, not merely endure them—to *accept them and offer them* willingly, saying with all our heart: "Yes, I want this, even though it seems to crush me!"

#### COLLOQUY

"O Spirit of truth, make me know Your Word; teach me to remember all He has said; enlighten me, guide me, make me conformable to Jesus as an '*alter Christus*,' another Christ, by giving me His virtues, especially His patience, humility, and obedience; let me take part in His redemptive work by making me understand and love the Cross.

"O Holy Spirit, I come before You like a little green fruit which will ripen in the sun, like a bit of straw which is to be burned, like a drop of dew to be absorbed by the sun, like an ignorant child who must be taught. O Holy Spirit, giving Yourself to little souls, poor and humble, I present myself to You as one of these, and in this disposition I invoke

You : ‘ *Veni, Sancte Spiritus, sanctifica me!* ’ Come, Holy Spirit, sanctify me! My desire for holiness is so great! Sanctify me Yourself; make haste to make me holy and a great saint, without my knowing it, in the self-effacement of my daily life.

“ I wish to cast myself into You, O Holy Spirit, divine Fire, so that You will complete my purification, destroy my miserable self-love and transform me wholly into love. It is for this that I beseech You to *come upon me* and direct me according to Your good pleasure. ‘ *Dirige actos nostros in beneplacito tuo.* ’ Direct our actions according to Your good pleasure.

“ O consuming Fire, divine Love in person, inflame me, burn me, consume me, destroy all self-love in me, transform me entirely into love, bring me to the ‘ nothing ’ that I may possess the ‘ All ’; bring me to the summit of the ‘ mountain ’ where dwells only the honor and glory of God, where all is ‘ peace and joy ’ in You, O Holy Spirit! Grant that here below—through suffering and loving contemplation—I may arrive at the most intimate union with the Blessed Three, until I go to contemplate Them in the face-to-face vision of heaven, in the peace, joy, and security of the ‘ perpetual banquet ’ ” (Sr. Carmela of the Holy Spirit, O.C.D.).

## 195

### *THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Holy Spirit, develop Your gifts in me, so that I may respond generously to Your divine motions.

#### **MEDITATION**

1. We have already seen that it is impossible to arrive at perfect union with God, at sanctity, without the help of the Holy Spirit. This help is not reserved for privileged souls; it is offered to every Christian. In fact, each soul receives at Baptism, together with sanctifying grace, the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The infused

virtues are supernatural principles of activity, whereby we are enabled to act virtuously, from a supernatural, rather than from a human point of view; thus we can perform meritorious acts and apply ourselves actively to the acquisition of holiness. The gifts, on the other hand, are supernatural principles, permanent dispositions with which God has enriched our faculties; they prepare and enable us to receive the help of the Holy Spirit, to recognize His inspirations, and follow them. St. Thomas compares them to the sails of a boat : just as the ship, by means of its sails, can be driven by the wind, so our souls, by means of the gifts, have the capacity to be moved and directed by the Holy Spirit. If a mariner sets the sails on his boat, he intends to move it not only by rowing, but also by the force of the wind. In like manner, when God infuses the gifts of the Holy Spirit into our souls, He wishes them to advance, not alone by an active practice of the virtues, but also by the intervention of the Holy Spirit. And while the sailor can hoist the sails on his ship but cannot stir up a breath of wind, God, on the contrary, has not only bestowed on us the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but He also has the power to put them into action when and as He wills. The very fact that God has willed to put the gifts into our spiritual organism, is the most evident proof that He wishes to intervene in the work of our sanctification, and to grant us the help of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Encyclical *Divinum Illud* teaches : "The just man, who is already living the life of grace and acting with the aid of the virtues, needs these seven gifts which are rightly attributed to the Holy Spirit. By means of them, man becomes both more docile and stronger in following with greater readiness and promptness the divine impulse." This "divine impulse" is nothing but the inspiration and motion of the Holy Spirit. Now man, though by his very nature endowed with the keenest intellect and possessing good will, is incapable of understanding and following this impulse. "The sensual man" says St. Paul "perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand" (*1 Cor 2,14*). See then, how the gifts of the Holy Spirit have been given us precisely to make us aware of this "divine impulse"; without them we could not receive the motions of the Holy Spirit. This fact should deepen our understanding of the great value of these gifts,

and hence, of the importance of their growth in us in all their plenitude. In fact, the gifts we have received as a seed, at Baptism, are intended, like sanctifying grace and the infused virtues, to grow and develop until we die. It is a very consoling thought that, due to the profound unity of our supernatural organism, grace, the virtues, and the gifts increase simultaneously with and in proportion to the growth of charity. If we want the gifts to be fully developed in our soul, we must practice charity constantly, for with every advance in divine love, there will be a corresponding new development of the gifts. They are the sails of the soul, but these sails can be let down, weighted by our egoism, our self-love and attachment to ourselves and to creatures. Charity, on the contrary, frees them from every impediment and turns them toward the gentle breeze of the Holy Spirit. The more open and full the sails are, the better they will be able to receive the least impulse of the divine Paraclete.

#### COLLOQUY

" I behold You, O God, Father, Word, and Spirit, and I know You are looking for Your creature with sovereign wisdom and eternal goodness; so that it seems that You have no glory or pleasure except in Your creature who is yet so vile. Your Spirit is the love by which You try to attract him. And his heart which receives this Spirit is like the bush that Moses saw, burning but not consumed. With supreme purity, it burns with the desire that God may never be offended, and it is consumed with the desire that God be honored, although it does not seem to be consumed.

" Come, come, Holy Spirit! Come, union of the Father, contentment of the Word, glory of the angels. O Spirit of Truth, You are the reward of the saints, the refreshment of souls, light in darkness, wealth of the poor, treasure of those who love, abundance of food for the hungry, comfort of pilgrims, and in a word, the One who contains all treasures.

" O Holy Spirit, with everlasting wisdom you gently urge rational creatures who want to receive Your gifts, but You do not take away their liberty. You knock at all hearts, but You knock gently, urging each one to prepare to receive these gifts. Softly singing, You are the source of sweet tears. Rejoicing and lamenting, You strive ardently that everyone

may be disposed to receive You. May the intellect admire, the will and memory understand Your immense goodness, O Holy Spirit, in infusing Yourself and all Your gifts into the soul! O Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Word, You infuse Yourself into the soul so gently that it does not understand You, and, not being understood, Your ineffable gift is esteemed by few. Yet besides Your goodness, You infuse into the soul the power of the Father, and the wisdom of the Son. The soul, having thus become powerful and wise, is made fit to bear You within itself as a sweet Guest, cherishing You, that is, behaving in such a way that You take pleasure in it and do not leave it" (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

## 196

*FEAST OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY*

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PRESENCE OF GOD - "I return thanks to You, O God, one and true Trinity, one sovereign divinity, holy and indivisible unity. (*RB*)."

## MEDITATION

1. From Advent until today, the Church has had us consider the magnificent manifestations of God's mercy toward men : the Incarnation, the Redemption, Pentecost. Now she directs our attention to the source of these gifts, the most Holy Trinity, from whom everything proceeds. Spontaneously, there rises to our lips the hymn of gratitude expressed in the Introit of the Mass : "Blessed be the Holy Trinity and undivided Unity; we will give glory to Him, because He has shown His mercy to us": the mercy of God the Father, "who so loved the world that He gave it His only-begotten Son" (cf. *Jn* 3,16); the mercy of God the Son, who to redeem us became incarnate and died on the Cross; the mercy of the Holy Spirit, who deigned to come down into our hearts to communicate to us the charity of God and to

make us participate in the divine life. The Church has very fittingly included in the Office for today the beautiful antiphon inspired by St. Paul : “*Caritas Pater est, gratia Filius, communicatio Spiritus Sanctus, O beata Trinitas!*” ; the Father is charity, the Son is grace and the Holy Spirit is communication : applying this, the charity of the Father and the grace of the Son are communicated to us by the Holy Spirit, who diffuses them in our heart. The marvelous work of the Trinity in our souls could not be better synthesized. Today’s Office and Mass form a veritable paean of praise and gratitude to the Blessed Trinity; they are a prolonged *Gloria Patri* and *Te Deum*. These two hymns—one a succinct epitome, and the other a majestic alternation of praises—are truly the hymns for today, intended to awaken in our hearts a deep echo of praise, thanksgiving, and adoration.

2. Today’s feast draws us to praise and glorify the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, not only because of the great mercy They have shown to men, but also and especially in Themselves and for Themselves : first, by reason of Their supreme essence which had no beginning and will never have an end; next, because of Their infinite perfections, Their majesty, essential beauty and goodness. Equally worthy of our adoration is the sublime fruitfulness of life by which the Father continually generates the Word, while from the Father and the Word proceeds the Holy Spirit. The Father is not prior to, or superior to the Word; nor are the Father and the Word prior to or greater than the Holy Spirit. The three divine Persons are all co-eternal and equal among Themselves : the divinity and all the divine perfections and attributes are one and the same in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. What can man say in the presence of such a sublime mystery? What can he understand of it? Nothing! Yet what has been revealed to us is certain, because the Son of God Himself, “who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (*Jn 1,18*). But the mystery is so sublime and it so exceeds our understanding, that we can only bow our heads and adore in silence. “O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable His ways!” exclaims St. Paul in today’s Epistle (*Rom 11,33-36*). He who, having been “caught up into paradise,” could neither know nor say anything except that

he had "heard secret words which it is not granted to man to utter" (*2 Cor 12,2-4*). In the presence of the unspeakable mystery of the Trinity the highest praise is silence, the silence of the soul that adores, knowing that it is incapable of praising or glorifying the divine Majesty worthily.

#### COLLOQUY

"O eternal Trinity, You are a deep sea in which the more I seek the more I find, and the more I find, the more I seek to know You. You fill us insatiably, because the soul, before the abyss which You are, is always famished; and hungering for You, O eternal Trinity, it desires to behold truth in Your light. As the thirsty hart pants after the fount of living water, so does my soul long to leave this gloomy body and see You as You are, in truth."

"O unfathomable depth! O Deity eternal! O deep ocean! What more could You give me than to give me Yourself? You are an ever-burning Fire; You consume and are not consumed. By Your fire, You consume every trace of self-love in the soul. You are a Fire which drives away all coldness and illumines minds with its light, and with this light You have made me know Your truth. Truly this light is a sea which feeds the soul until it is all immersed in You, O peaceful Sea, eternal Trinity! The water of this sea is never turbid; it never causes fear, but gives knowledge of the truth. This water is transparent and discloses hidden things; and a living faith gives such abundance of light that the soul almost attains to certitude in what it believes."

"You are the supreme and infinite Good, good above all good; good which is joyful, incomprehensible, inestimable; beauty exceeding all other beauty; wisdom surpassing all wisdom, because You are Wisdom itself. Food of angels, giving Yourself with fire of love to men! You are the garment which covers our nakedness; You feed us, hungry as we are, with Your sweetness, because You are all sweetness with no bitterness. Clothe me, O eternal Trinity, clothe me with Yourself, so that I may pass this mortal life in true obedience and in the light of the most holy faith with which You have inebriated my soul" (St. Catherine of Siena).

**THE VIRTUES AND THE GIFTS**

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - Teach me, O Holy Spirit, to remain in an attitude of continual attention to Your inspirations, and of perpetual dependence upon Your impulses.

**MEDITATION**

1. St. Thomas teaches that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to us as a help to the virtues : “*dona sunt in adjutorium virtutum.*” This is a very meaningful expression : note that we receive the gifts to *help* the virtues, *not* to substitute for them. If the soul does its best, seriously applying itself to the practice of the virtues, the Holy Spirit, by means of the gifts, will complete the soul’s work. To make the gifts operative then, personal activity and application are essential. The whole Catholic tradition places them at the starting point, for “if a soul is seeking God, its Beloved is seeking it much more....He attracts the soul and causes it to run after Him” (J.C. *LF*, 3,28).

Although the assiduous practice of the virtues will not suffice to bring the soul to God, the manifestation of good will implied by this practice is very necessary. The sailor who is anxious to reach the port does not lazily wait for a favorable wind, but begins at once to row vigorously; similarly, the soul who seeks God, while waiting for Him to attract, it, does not abandon itself to indolence; on the contrary, it searches fervently on its own initiative : making efforts to overcome its faults, to be detached from creatures, to practice the virtues and to apply itself to interior recollection. The Holy Spirit perfects these efforts by activating His gifts. Thus we see how erroneous is the attitude of certain souls who remain too passive in the spiritual life, failing to exert their own initiative to advance in holiness and to meet God. These souls are wasting their time and easily exposing themselves to deception. It is necessary to take up the task vigorously, especially at the beginning of the spiritual life. Only by so doing can one hope to have the aid of the Holy Spirit.

2. Generally, at the outset of the spiritual life, the influence of the gifts, although never wanting, is rather hidden and rare. At this time, the soul's initiative—the active exercise of the virtues and prayer—must naturally predominate. But as the spiritual life develops, according to the measure of charity, the influence of the gifts increases too. If the soul is faithful, this influence gradually becomes stronger and more frequent until the soul's own initiative is eclipsed by it. Thus, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the soul attains sanctity.

From the foregoing it can readily be seen why, from the very beginning, we must acquire the habit of being both *active* and *passive* in our journey toward God, making efforts, yes, but at the same time trying to be attentive and obedient to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit. In fact, if there are some souls who are too passive, there are others who err on the active side by making everything consist in their plans for spiritual reform, in their good resolutions, and spiritual exercises, as if sanctity depended solely upon their own industry. They depend too much on their own strength and too little on the help of God. Such souls run the risk of misunderstanding the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, of stifling His impulses, and consequently, of getting tired without reaching the goal. Tractability, docility, and surrender are needed : their minds must become more *tractable* in order to recognize the interior inspirations of the Holy Spirit; their wills must become more *docile* that they may carry them out. They need the spirit of *surrender* in order to let themselves be led by paths which are obscure, unknown, and contrary to their own liking. No one can be his own teacher of sanctity; there is only one Teacher, the Holy Spirit. To remain in His school and to be wholly dependent upon Him implies a twofold task : the active striving to correct our faults and to acquire virtue, and the interior attentiveness to His inspirations. Herein lies the true purpose of the gifts. The Lord "wakeneth my ear, that I may hear Him as a master," says Isaias, "The Lord hath opened my ear, and I do not resist : I have not gone back" (50,4.5). This should be the interior attitude of a soul who wishes to let itself be guided by the Holy Spirit.

**COLLOQUY**

"O Holy Spirit, God of love, bond of love of the Blessed Trinity, You remain with the children of men and find Your delight in them, in that holy chastity which, under the influence of Your power and attraction, flourishes on earth like the rose among thorns. Holy Spirit! Love! Show me the way that leads to this delightful goal, that path of life that ends in the field made fertile by the divine dew, where hearts burning with thirst may find refreshment. O Love, You alone know this road which leads to life and truth. In You is consummated the wonderful union of the three divine Persons of the Holy Trinity. The most precious gifts are diffused in us by You, O Holy Spirit. From You come the fertile seeds which produce the fruits of life. From You flows the sweet honey of the delights which are found only in God. Through You descend upon us the fertilizing waters of the divine blessings, the precious gifts of the Spirit.

"O Holy Spirit, You are the Font for which I sigh, the desire of my heart. O overflowing ocean, absorb this stray little drop which wishes to leave itself and enter You. You are the only real substance of my heart, and I cling to You with all my might. Oh! what a wonderful union! Truly, this intimacy with You is more precious than life itself; Your perfume is a balm of propitiation and of peace.

"O Holy Spirit of love, You are the most sweet kiss of the Blessed Trinity, uniting the Father and the Son. You are that blessed kiss which royal divinity gave to humanity by means of the Son of God. O sweet embrace, clasp me, a poor little speck of dust; hold me tight in Your embrace, that I may become completely united with God. Let me experience what delights are in You, O living God. O my sweet Love, let me embrace You and unite myself to You! O God of love, You are my dearest possession, and I hope for nothing, want and desire nothing in heaven or on earth but You" (St. Gertrude).

*THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PRAYER*

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Holy Spirit, Spirit of piety, come and pray in me; come to regulate my filial relations with the heavenly Father.

## MEDITATION

1. Our relations with God are essentially filial ones, trustful and confident, for we are not strangers, but "domestics of God" (*Eph 2,19*) : we belong to God's family. Our prayer then ought to express the feelings of a happy child who enjoys talking heart to heart with his father, and can throw himself into his father's arms with complete abandon. Unfortunately, we are always poor sinners, and the knowledge of our wretchedness and unfaithfulness may paralyze this filial affection, causing a certain fear to arise in our souls, a fear which, sometimes, spontaneously puts on our lips Peter's cry : "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man," (*Lk 5,8*). This happens especially when the soul is going through dark periods of struggle, temptations, and difficulties, all of which tend to throw it into agitation and confusion, impeding, in spite of its efforts, that confident outpouring of the heart which submerges all its worries in God. Then one day, during prayer, the soul becomes recollected under the influence of a new light which drives away all fear, not a new thought, but an intimate realization of truth never before experienced : God is my Father, I am His child. It is the influence of the gift of piety, set in motion by the Holy Spirit. St. Paul speaking to the first Christians told them : "You have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear; but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry : Abba, Father. For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God" (*Rom 8,15,16*). Hence it is the Holy Spirit who infuses into the soul this strong feeling of filial piety, of full confidence in its heavenly Father; furthermore, He Himself, with unspeakable groanings, whispers within it : "Father!" "God hath sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying : Abba, Father!" (*Gal 4,6*). Thus the soul feels itself transformed, and its relations with God become filial.

2. Interior prayer is intimate converse of the soul with God. But who will teach man, so coarse and earthly minded, the delicacy required to converse intimately with the King of heaven and earth? There will never be a ritual nor a devout book capable of regulating the intimate relations of friendship between the Creator and His creature. But there is one Master, whose ability is fully proportioned to His aim, and whose instruction is within the reach of every Christian soul.

This Master is the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmity, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings" (*Rom 8,26*). This is a consoling truth for the soul which feels its powerlessness, its inability to treat with God, its need of a prayer which is fully suitable to the sovereign Majesty, the infinite transcendency of the Most High. This is how the Holy Spirit alternates in the soul sentiments of complete confidence and of profound adoration, of loving friendship and of recognition of God's supreme greatness. He repeats within us: "Pater," and also, "*Tu solus Sanctus, Tu solus Dominus, Tu solus Altissimus.*" Thou alone art holy, Thou alone art God, Thou alone art the Most High. Even when we are in a state of aridity, when our heart is cold and our mind in darkness, the Holy Spirit is praying within us, and we can always offer His prayer to God—prayer that is the truest and the most precious, prayer which will most certainly be heard, because the Holy Spirit cannot inspire sentiments and desires contrary to the divine will, but "He asketh for us according to God" (cf. *ibid. 8,27*).

#### COLLOQUY

"Come, Holy Spirit, send down from heaven a ray of Your light. Come, Father of the poor; come, Dispenser of gifts; come, Light of hearts! O perfect Comforter, sweet Guest of the soul, delicious refreshment. You are rest in toil, shelter from burning heat, consolation in sorrow! O blessed light! Fill with Your light the depths of my heart! Without Your powerful help, nothing in me is good, nothing is without imperfection. Cleanse what is soiled, water what is dry, heal what is wounded. Soften what is hard, warm what is cold, guide him who has gone astray. Give me, who trust in You,

Your seven gifts. Give reward to virtue, save me and bring me to eternal joy" (cf. Sequence of the Holy Spirit).

"Come, Holy Spirit, be my interior Master. Give me a true filial spirit toward our heavenly Father, great confidence in His paternal goodness, total adherence, both active and passive, to His will, and immense gratitude for His graces. Come and advise me in all things, reminding me of all that Jesus said; guide me, take upon Yourself the direction of my whole being, strengthen my weakness, supply for all my deficiencies. Come and fulfill in me my mission of continual prayer, for what would my prayer be worth unless it were inspired and given value by You? 'No man can say : the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost.' O Divine Spirit, pray then in me and through me. I ought to think that it is You who are praying and praising God in me, even when weariness or aridity or distractions prevent me from being recollected. I should remain, then, in a humble attitude of prayer, confident that You will draw from me the praise and glory which I do not know how to give, but which I desire to give to my God" (Sr. Carmela of the Holy Spirit, O.C.D.).

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### *THE HOLY SPIRIT AND ACTIVITY*

**PRESENCE OF GOD** - O Holy Spirit, inspire my actions, direct my activity.

#### MEDITATION

1. An interior soul gradually arrives at the point where its whole life—prayer as well as activities—is under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Himself has told us that He would "teach us *all things* and bring *all things* to our minds" (cf. *Jn* 14,26). Let us first consider the activity which is so closely connected with the spiritual life and which consists in trying to carry out, in the course of the day, the prayerful resolutions made daily and also during our annual retreats, our monthly days of recollection, and our weekly

confessions. Sometimes we make this an almost exclusively "moral" work, and not sufficiently a "theological" one; that is, we try to correct our faults and practice the virtues with the intention of pleasing God, while remaining, as it were, aloof from Him. We labor alone, almost forgetting that there is Someone within us who cannot only help us, but can do the work better than we can. Our activity resembles that of a sailor who is so busy rowing that he pays no attention to the direction of the wind, and thus receives no help from it. Certainly personal efforts are not to be neglected, but they should be expended in a more interior manner, that is, in a *theological* way, depending more upon God and the action of the Holy Spirit. Rather than aim directly at correcting a fault or acquiring a virtue, it would be much more profitable for us to maintain a continual dependence on the interior Teacher, and to act only after listening to His intimate, silent voice. In short, it is a question of acting always in conformity with the interior movement of grace, with the inspirations of the Holy Spirit; thus we transfer the reins of our interior life from our hands to His, entrusting it completely to His direction.

2. In our relations with others, in the performance of our daily duties, in our professional activity, as well as in our apostolic work, we should let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit. He should direct all our actions. In order that He may do so, we must first of all maintain a continual contact with Him, even in the midst of activity. It will help us to pause for a few moments, from time to time, to strengthen this contact, or to re-establish it, when excessive activity or the movements of our passions have interrupted it in one way or another. "I do nothing of Myself," Jesus said, "but as the Father hath taught Me, these things I speak" (*Jn* 8,28). This was the norm of the conduct of Jesus, and it should also be ours : to act with continual dependence on God, who will suggest to us, through His Spirit, everything we should do. In this respect, however, it is very necessary to know how to distinguish the inspirations of the Holy Spirit from the movements of nature and the suggestions of the evil spirit. Without this prudent discretion, we may easily expose ourselves to illusions and errors, taking for divine inspiration what is, on the contrary, the result of the more or less unconscious impulses of our defective nature, of our passions.

A practical, easy way to recognize true inspirations of the Holy Spirit is to see if they maintain us, or rather, make us enter ever more fully into the plan of God's will, in accordance with the commands of our superiors, the rules to which we are subject, and the duties of our state in life; or if, on the contrary, they make us leave, or even only sidestep this course. In the latter case, there would be reason to fear, for the Holy Spirit can urge us only to the accomplishment of God's will. Anything contrary to obedience and our duties cannot be inspired by Him. In doubtful cases, we should seek the advice of an enlightened, prudent person and then, if we are really being led by the Holy Spirit, we will follow that person's opinion with docility, even if it is contrary to our own.

The Holy Spirit, said Jesus, "shall abide with you and shall be in you" (*Jn 14,17*); what unpardonable folly it would be to act independently of Him who has been given us to be our guide, our sanctifier!

#### COLLOQUY

"O Holy Spirit, You are the dispenser of the treasures contained in the Father's bosom; You are the treasurer of the counsels of the Father and the Word. You show us what we should do in order to please the Trinity : You teach us in the intimacy of our hearts by Your inspirations, and exteriorly in our lives by the preaching and advice of Your ministers. The gates of heaven are always open so that grace may come down to us, but we do not open our hearts to receive it. Oh! send down this grace, O eternal Father, send it down, O most pure Word, since You deign to send Your loving Spirit, the Spirit of goodness. O Holy Spirit, how generous You are to us and blessed are they who welcome You! You bring us the Father's power, the ardent love of the Word!" (cf. St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

"O Lord, show me the path I must follow to reach You, teach me to do Your will, and let Your Spirit guide me on the right path. Create in me, O God, a clean heart, and infuse into me Your Spirit, the Spirit of uprightness and of truth. O my God, let me not depart from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me, for without Him I should be deprived of life and grace. Sustain me, O God,

by Your magnanimous Spirit, without whom I can do nothing" (cf. *Ps* 142-50).

O Holy Spirit, Spirit of truth, You who speak to souls and instruct them interiorly, make me attentive to Your teaching and docile to Your inspiration.