

DIVINE INTIMACY

MEDITATIONS ON THE INTERIOR LIFE
FOR EVERY DAY OF THE LITURGICAL YEAR

Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D.

DIVINE INTIMACY



THE MEDIATION OF MARY - FRANCESCO NAGNI

DIVINE INTIMACY

MEDITATIONS ON THE INTERIOR LIFE
FOR EVERY DAY OF THE LITURGICAL YEAR

By

Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D.

*Translated from the seventh Italian edition by the
Discalced Carmelite Nuns of Boston*

TAN BOOKS AND PUBLISHERS, INC.
Rockford, Illinois 61105

IMPRIMI POTEST:

FR. CHRISTOPHORUS A SS. SACRAMENTO, O.C.D.
Provincialis

July 19, 1963

NIHIL OBSTAT:

FR. CHRISTOPHORUS A SS. SACRAMENTO, O.C.D.
FR. JOANNES A JESU MARIA, O.C.D.
Censores Ordinis

July 19, 1963

IMPRIMATUR:

† RICHARD CARDINAL CUSHING
Archbishop of Boston

July 16, 1964

The original edition of *Divine Intimacy* was published in Italian by the Carmel of St. Joseph in Rome under the title: *Intimitá Divina*, del P. Gabriele di S. M. Maddalena, O.C.D. Originally published in English circa 1964 by Desclée Company, New York, Paris, Tournai, Rome and printed in Belgium by Desclée & Co., Éditeurs, S.A., Tournai.

All rights reserved.

Acknowledgements. Courtesy of: Sheed and Ward Inc., New York, N.Y.—most quotations from St. Teresa, taken from *The Complete Works of St. Teresa*, translated and edited by E. Allison Peers from the critical edition of P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, O.C.D., published in three volumes; The Newman Press, Westminster, Md. and Burns and Oates Ltd., London—most quotations from St. John of the Cross, taken from *The Complete Works of St. John of the Cross*, edited and translated by E. Allison Peers.

Library of Congress Control Number: 93-61593

ISBN 0-89555-676-6

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

TAN BOOKS AND PUBLISHERS, INC.

P.O. Box 424
Rockford, Illinois 61105

1996

SECRETARIATE OF STATE
OF HIS HOLINESS

N. 633114

The Vatican, July 7, 1961

Reverend Mother,

The Reigning Pontiff accepts with pleasure the copy of the fifth edition of *Intimità Divina*, a book of meditations following the course of the liturgical year, inspired by the late Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, which you humbly offer Him. It should be added that several Religious of the Monastery of St. Joseph, Rome, collected and diligently arranged the material furnished by the Author, who had not the consolation of seeing his work, an effective compendium of Carmelite spirituality, published.

The meditations are substantial and solid, adapted to the various degrees of spirituality, and within reach of every person of good will. Priests, seminarians, contemplative souls, those dedicated to the apostolate, and finally the laity of every social class have meditated these pages and found encouragement and spiritual profit. This has been so, not only in Italy, but, it may be said, throughout the world, thanks to the translations into all the principal languages.

The Holy Father is glad to know that a new edition in Italian is being prepared. He is pleased that the book has been so successful; He hopes that it will have an ever wider diffusion, so that the innumerable souls in every state of life who long above all things for God, and aspire to an intimate life with Him, may draw light and strength from it to persevere with increased fervor in the work of their salvation.

Finally, His Holiness is happy to impart to you, and to all the Religious of your Monastery, in token of Divine Grace, the Apostolic Benediction.

Yours devotedly in Our Lord,

✠ ANGELLO DELL'ACQUA

Substitute

Reverend Mother
Priorress of the Discalced Carmelites
Monastery of St. Joseph
Rome



Dal Vaticano, il 7 luglio 1961

N. 63514

Reverenda Madre,

Ella ha umiliato al Regnante Pontefice copia della quinta edizione del volume "Intimità Divina", meditazioni per l'anno liturgico, dovute al cuore e alla penna del compianto P. Gabriele di S. Maria Maddalena. Bisogna aggiungere che è merito di alcune Religiose di codesto Monastero aver diligentemente raccolto ed ordinato il materiale fornito dall'Autore stesso, il quale non ebbe la consolazione di vedere pubblicata l'opera, efficace compendio della spiritualità carmelitana.

Di fatto, il libro è sostanzioso, adatto a tutti i gradi della vita spirituale e alla portata di ogni anima volonterosa. Sacerdoti, seminaristi, anime di contemplativi o di persone dedicate all'apostolato, laici infine di ogni categoria sociale hanno meditato su queste pagine e si sono sentiti incoraggiati a migliorarsi. Ciò non solo in Italia ma, si può dire, in tutto il mondo, per le traduzioni che di esso sono state fatte nelle principali lingue.

Il Santo Padre, Che ha gradito l'omaggio, ha appreso con soddisfazione che si prepara una nuova edizione italiana; e mentre Si compiace per il successo dell'opera, fa voti per una sua larga diffusione, affinchè quelle innumerevoli anime, che, in tutti gli stati di vita, desiderano soprattutto Dio ed aspirano alla vita intima con Lui, possano ottenervi luce e forza per meglio attendere alla propria santificazione.

Sua Santità è lieta, infine, d'impartire a Lei e alle Religiose tutte di codesto Monastero, l'Apostolica Benedizione, auspicio della divina grazia.

Con sensi di religiosa stima mi confermo

Rev.da Madre Priora
del Monastero di S. Giuseppe
delle Carmelitane Scalze
Roma

di Lei
dev.mo nel Signore

+ Meyer felix degny
Lambert

INTRODUCTION

In these times when the lines of battle are being drawn more and more clearly between the forces of religion and those of atheism, we see the devotees of each of these systems calling upon every resource at their disposal. Before one can really fight for a cause, he must be fully convinced of the truth of it. He must ponder its ideals and adapt his thoughts and actions to it.

We can be sure that the fervent Communist gives serious thought and frequent consideration to the ideals for which he is sacrificing himself. Only in this way can he fire his zeal to continue the struggle. But we, as Christians, have a much greater cause to fight for. It is greater precisely because it is true and divine. How mistaken we are if we neglect to increase our knowledge of and zeal for our Faith. We can hardly expect to remain fervent and apostolic Christians unless we make it a practice to ponder the truths of our holy religion, to strive to identify our thoughts with those of Christ, our Leader, and to transform those thoughts into effective action in His service.

This book is a mine of inspirational thoughts, an excellent book of meditations which aims at helping us to review and concentrate on the treasures of our Faith, so that an intelligent appreciation thereof will become a significant factor in our thinking and acting. It should also prompt us to be one with Christ and to bring about the most intimate union that is possible in this life between souls and God. The author of *DIVINE INTIMACY*, Father Gabriel of St. Mary

Magdalen, O.C.D., was one of the outstanding Discalced Carmelite authors and lecturers of modern times. A devout son of St. John of the Cross, he devoted himself generously and tirelessly to the task of promoting that desired union, both in himself and in others. His book of meditations for each day of the year is an outstanding part of his effort. Faithful to these meditations from day to day, we shall know Christ and live Christ, absorb His teachings more fully and become more dedicated to His service. Our zeal for the cause of Christ will then equal — nay, far outstrip — that of the atheistic Communist. He meditates on false doctrines, the work of Godless men, which lead him to become less than a man. The Christian meditates on the Gospel of Christ, which leads him to become something more than a man—to share in an intimate manner in the life of God Himself—to become God-like, or in the words of St. John of the Cross, “God by participation.”

✠ Richard Cardinal Cushing
Archbishop of Boston

FOREWORD

The extraordinary success with which the volume, DIVINE INTIMACY, has been received among clergy and religious, as well as among those in the world who are consecrated to God, those engaged in Catholic Action, and the faithful in general, is a fitting crown to the author's life, one which was permeated with the desire for intimate union with God and the apostolate of fostering the interior life.

The late Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen entered the Order of Discalced Carmelites in Bruges, Belgium, in 1910, at the age of seventeen.

The First World War (1914-18) forced him to continue his study of philosophy and theology in Ireland. He was ordained priest in 1919. From 1919 to 1926, while teaching philosophy in the Seminary of the Order at Courtrai in Belgium, he had the opportunity of completing his own studies at the nearby University of Louvain, and finally in Rome, where he attended the Pontifical Institute, the " Angelicum."

From 1926 to 1936 Father Gabriel was spiritual director of the young theologians at the International College of St. Teresa in the city where, at the same time, he was teaching theology. From 1931 until his death (March 15, 1953), he dedicated himself especially to the study of spiritual theology. During this last period of his life, his remarkable talents as a teacher and spiritual director were clearly evidenced, both in the conferences on Carmelite spirituality, which he gave in Rome and in the larger cities of Italy, as well as in his numerous publications on St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, and St. Teresa Margaret of the Heart of Jesus.

He was also a member of the Roman Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas and a Consultor of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

By his lectures and writings, this great religious and eminent spiritual director became an ardent leader in the spiritual movement in Italy.

In 1941 he founded the review Vita Carmelitana, the title of which was changed in 1947 to Revista di Vita Spirituale. This review continues to propagate the sound doctrine of the spiritual life that is needed more than ever today.

Father Gabriel was profoundly aware of the spiritual needs of our times, and he also understood the special mission of Carmel in the Church, that of leading souls to a life of intimate union with God by means of the practice of mental prayer. Thus he conceived the idea of a book which, taking its inspiration from the great teachers of Carmel, would set forth the whole doctrine of the spiritual life in the form of simple, but solid, meditations—a book which would introduce souls to intimate prayer.

DIVINE INTIMACY, therefore, seeks to arrange daily meditations “in such a way that in the course of one year the most important problems of the spiritual life and all the supernatural realities met with in the interior life will have been reviewed” (Preface).

To promote his work, Father Gabriel asked the assistance of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns of the Monastery of St. Joseph in Rome. To this end, he furnished them with the vast amount of material at his disposal (his publications, the texts of his conferences, instructions, sermons, and so forth). He then outlined the plan for the whole book and directed the work on it. This collaboration with his spiritual daughters in Carmel proved truly providential. After the untimely death of the renowned master, the Nuns, who were in possession of all his manuscripts, were able to bring to a happy conclusion the publication of their venerated Father's work.

The first edition of DIVINE INTIMACY, received with great enthusiasm by Christians everywhere, was quickly exhausted. Translations into several languages were requested. Numerous letters from prelates, directors of seminaries, superiors of religious houses, priests, and the laity have testified to the benefit received from this work.

May this English edition of DIVINE INTIMACY awaken many souls to the need of a solid interior life and lead them to close union with God, the source of a really fruitful apostolate in the Church.

Fr. Benjamin of the Holy Trinity, O.C.D.
First Definitor General of the Discalced Carmelites

PREFACE

Mental prayer is indispensable to the spiritual life; normally it is, so to speak, its very breath. However, this spontaneity in prayer is usually realized only if the soul applies itself to meditation for some time by its own personal effort. In other words, one must learn how to pray. It is to teach souls this devout practice that various meditation books have been published. There are many methods, each with its own merit; among them is the Teresian method, so called because it is based on the teachings of St. Teresa of Jesus, the Foundress of the Discalced Carmelites and the great mistress of the spiritual life.

Some years ago, we outlined this method in a pamphlet called the *Little Catechism of Prayer*,¹ which has since been translated into many European languages and into some of the Asiatic tongues. It is a simple exposition of the Teresian method according to the writings of many Carmelite authors; its widespread circulation shows very clearly that this method answers the needs and the desires of many prayerful souls. Hence we judged it timely to offer souls aspiring to advance in the interior life, a collection of subjects for meditation for each day of the year, according to the Teresian idea and method of mental prayer.

* * *

¹ FATHER GABRIEL OF ST. MARY MAGDALEN, O.C.D., *Little Catechism of Prayer*, translated by the Discalced Carmelite Nuns of Concord, New Hampshire, 1949.

The idea of mental prayer which St. Teresa has left us is well known in our day. In her *Autobiography* she defines it as "friendly intercourse and frequent solitary converse with Him who we know loves us" (*Life*, 8).

In these words St. Teresa reveals the affective spirit of mental prayer which is its special characteristic. It is "friendly intercourse," and exchange of "mutual benevolence" between the soul and God, during which the soul "converses intimately" with God—intimacy, as we know, is the fruit of love—and the soul speaks with Him whose love she knows. Each element of the definition contains the idea of love, but at the end the Saint mentions that the soul ought also to "know" and be conscious of God's love for her : this is the part which the intellect plays in prayer. Therefore, according to St. Teresa, there is an exercise of both the intellect and the will in mental prayer : the intellect seeks to convince the soul that God loves her and wishes to be loved by her; the will, responding to the divine invitation, loves. That is all. There could be no clearer concept of prayer. But how translate it into practice? This is the task of the *method*.

* * *

In order to understand the structure of the Teresian method clearly, we must keep in mind the definition of prayer given above; then we shall easily see that it is fully realized by such a method, that it truly means conversing lovingly with Our Lord, once we understand that He loves us.

We cannot speak to God intimately unless we are in contact with Him. For this reason, we make use of the "preparation," which consists in placing ourselves more directly in the *presence of God*, turning to Him by means of a good thought.

In order to convince ourselves that God loves us, we choose for the subject of meditation one of the truths of faith which can make His love evident : this is the purpose of the *reading* of an appropriate passage.

However, it does not suffice merely to read the matter ; we must examine it thoroughly, and there is no better way of doing this than by reflecting upon it—by *meditating*.

All revealed truth can manifest God's love for me, but today I try to understand it by reflecting on the theme I have

chosen in my *reading*. I make use of the good thoughts contained in the subject of the meditation to actually convince myself of His love, so that love for Him will come spontaneously into my heart, and words perhaps, to my lips.

Thus my *colloquy* with God begins; I tell Him in every way possible (using the words which come to me most spontaneously) that I love Him, that I want to love Him, that I want to advance in His holy love, and that I wish to prove my love for Him by my actions, by doing His holy will.

And now we are at the center, *the heart of prayer*. For many souls, nothing more is needed. Some, however, prefer greater variety; therefore, to facilitate the prolonging of our loving conversation with God, the three final steps of the method are offered. These, however, are *optional*.

Thanksgiving : After having told Our Lord again that we love Him, we thank Him for all the benefits we have received from Him and show Him that we are grateful.

Offering : Aware of having received so many favors, we try to repay our debt as far as we can by making some good resolution. It is always useful to end our prayer in this way.

Petition : The consciousness of our weakness and frailty urges us to implore the help of God.

This is the whole Teresian method, divided into seven steps :

Two *introductory* : the preparation (presence of God) and reading.

Two *essential* : the meditation and the colloquy.

Three *optional*, to help in prolonging the colloquy : the thanksgiving, the offering, and the petition.

* * *

The meditations in this book are based on this method.

We begin with the *presence of God*, an appropriate thought which brings us into contact with our Creator and orientates us toward Him.

The *reading* provides the subject for the meditation. And as many spiritual persons apply themselves to meditation twice a day, each meditation offers two points.

The soul then begins to *reflect*, using freely the text already read. In this way it will pass spontaneously to the *colloquy* which, according to the Teresian concept, is the "heart," the center of mental prayer.

That is why our meditations are directed toward helping souls especially on this point. To this end we have tried to give the colloquies a form that is sufficiently ample; nevertheless, they may be used freely as desired, each soul choosing whatever corresponds to the need of the moment. To make the colloquies more efficacious, we have selected suitable ardent expressions and thoughts taken by preference from the writings of the saints and other loving souls. Very often we have been obliged to make slight modifications in these texts, in order to adapt them to the intimate form of a colloquy. However, we always indicate their source in parentheses.¹

The colloquies consist of expressions of love, alternating with petitions, acts of thanksgiving, and transports of the soul toward God; these are made concrete in the resolutions.

We hope that these meditations, written in this way, will help souls to apply themselves to mental prayer according to the Teresian idea and method.

* * *

Teresian spirituality is the spirituality of divine intimacy,² that is, it tries to nourish in souls the ideal of intimacy with God and it directs them toward this ideal, principally by means of mental prayer. Mental prayer should be attuned, therefore, to this great and lofty aspiration.

This is the "tone" we have tried to give our meditations, and the title, DIVINE INTIMACY, indicates our intention to help souls as far as possible to attain this great end.

In addition, Teresian spirituality is also doctrinal. St. Teresa of Jesus, the great "mistress of the spiritual life," always desired—and endeavored to put her desire into practice — that the ascetical and mystical life of those who were dear to her be based on solid doctrine, for the Saint greatly loved theology. That is why we have desired to build these meditations upon a sound theological basis.

¹ In spite of the modifications we have made, we have not used the customary "cf.," so as to avoid constant repetition. We have used this sign only when the colloquies were merely inspired by the writings of the saints and not quoted from them.

² See our work, *Carmelite Spirituality*, Rome, College of St. Teresa 1943.

We have attempted to arrange them in such a way that, in the course of one year, the most important problems of the spiritual life and all the supernatural realities met with in the interior life will have been reviewed.

The meditations begin with the opening of the liturgical year, and are arranged in the following order :

December - The Ideal : Holiness, Intimacy with God, The Apostolate - The Mystery of the Incarnation.

January - Jesus : His Person, His Works, Our Relations with Him - The Church - The Sacraments.

February and *March* - Interior Purification and the Exercice of Abnegation - The Passion of Jesus.

April - The Life of Prayer.

May - Our Blessed Lady - The Holy Spirit.

June - Jesus in the Holy Eucharist - The Sacred Heart of Jesus - The Most Holy Trinity.

July - The Divine Perfections - The Theological Virtues.

August and *September* - The Moral Virtues - The Gifts of the Holy Spirit - The Beatitudes.

October and *November* - The Apostolate - Union with God.¹

* * *

We should like to call attention to one last point.

Precisely because Teresian spirituality is the spirituality of divine intimacy, the spirit impregnating the exercises by which we hope to attain this lofty ideal must be the *spirit of love*. We have tried to keep in mind this special mark of the spirit of Carmel. Not all meditation books are adapted to souls thirsting for divine intimacy, simply because they are too much imbued with a spirit of fear. Not, indeed, that fear is not profitable for certain souls, but since there are so many books of this type, we judged it timely to publish a collection of meditations in which love would be united to filial, reverential fear, instead of servile fear, while not denying that this latter can be very salutary. This is also the reason we have

¹ Because of the desire of many to facilitate the use of the work, it was decided to abolish the division into months, leaving only the order of the liturgical weeks.

by preference emphasized the positive topics of virtue and spiritual progress rather than the negative ones of vice and sin.

May the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love, who deigns to dwell in our souls in order to bring them gradually under His complete influence and direction, kindle in us, "with abundant effusion," that love of charity which will lead us to intimacy with God! May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of fair love, whose soul, filled with grace, was ever moved by the Holy Spirit, obtain for us from this divine Spirit the favor of remaining docile to His invitations, so that we may realize, with the help of an assiduous, effective practice of mental prayer, the beautiful ideal of intimate union with God.

Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D.
Rome, Feast of the Sacred Heart, 1952.

CONTENTS

	Page
Letter of His Holiness Pope John XXIII	v
Introduction by His Eminence Richard Cardinal Cushing . .	vii
Foreword	ix
Preface	xi
Abbreviations	xxix

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT TO THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

THE IDEAL : SANCTITY, INTIMACY WITH GOD, THE APOSTOLATE —
THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION — JESUS : HIS PERSON, HIS WORK,
OUR RELATIONS WITH HIM — THE CHURCH — THE SACRAMENTS.

<i>Meditation</i>	Page
1. THE LORD COMETH FROM AFAR	3
<i>(First Sunday of Advent)</i>	
2. Invitation to Sanctity	5
3. Sanctity and the Plenitude of Grace	8
4. Charity the Essence of Sanctity	11
5. Sanctity and God's Will	14
6. Sanctity and My Duties	17
7. The Mount of Perfection	20
8. THE LORD WILL NOT DELAY	23
<i>(Second Sunday of Advent)</i>	
9. THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY .	26
<i>(December eight)</i>	
10. Invitation to Divine Intimacy	29
11. In Search of God	32
12. Seeking God in Prayer	35
13. Seeking God in Our Daily Duties	38
14. The Virgin of the Incarnation	41

<i>Meditation</i>	<i>Page</i>
15. THE LORD IS NIGH <i>(Third Sunday of Advent)</i>	44
16. Guard of the Senses	47
17. Interior Silence	50
18. Seeking God in Faith	53
19. Seeking God in Love	56
20. Seeking God in Creatures	59
21. Seeking God in Activity	62
22. BEHOLD THE SAVIOR COMES <i>(Fourth Sunday of Advent)</i>	65
23. The Call to the Apostolate	67
24. The Interior Apostolate	70
25. Apostolic Action	73
26. The Mystery of the Incarnation <i>(December twenty-second)</i>	76
27. The Word Was Made Flesh <i>(December twenty-third)</i>	79
28. The Great Mystery Is Accomplished <i>(December twenty-fourth)</i>	82
29. THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD <i>(Christmas Day)</i>	85
30. Believing in Love <i>(December twenty-sixth)</i>	88
31. Returning Love for Love <i>(December twenty-seventh)</i>	91
32. Glory to God <i>(December twenty-eighth)</i>	94
33. Peace to Men <i>(December twenty-ninth)</i>	97
34. A SIGN OF CONTRADICTION <i>(Sunday within the Octave of Christmas)</i>	100
35. Let us Make Good Use of Time <i>(December thirty-first)</i>	103
36. THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD <i>(January first)</i>	106
37. Feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus <i>(Sunday from January second to fifth; otherwise, January second)</i>	109
38. Jesus Our Mediator	112
39. Jesus the First-Born of All Creatures	115
40. Jesus the Universal King	118
41. The Epiphany of Our Lord <i>(January sixth)</i>	120
42. FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY, JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH <i>(First Sunday after the Epiphany)</i>	123
43. Jesus the True Vine	126
44. The Mystical Body of Christ	129
45. "I Am the Life"	132
46. The Influence of Jesus	135
47. The Soul of Jesus	138

<i>Meditation</i>	<i>Page</i>
48. Living in Christ	140
49. THE FIRST MIRACLE OF JESUS <i>(Second Sunday after the Epiphany)</i>	143
50. "I Am the Truth"	146
51. The Doctrine of Jesus	149
52. Jesus Shows Us the Father	152
53. Jesus the Teacher of Sanctity	155
54. What Jesus' Teaching Exacts	158
55. The Power of the Divine Teacher	160
56. JESUS WELCOMES EVERYONE <i>(Third Sunday after the Epiphany)</i>	163
57. "I Am the Way"	166
58. "I Am in the Father"	169
59. The Prayer of Jesus	172
60. Jesus and His Father's Will	175
61. The Works of Jesus	177
62. Jesus and the Glory of the Father	180
63. JESUS CALMS THE TEMPEST <i>(Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany)</i>	183
64. Jesus and Mankind	186
65. Living Christ	188
66. Jesus Our All	191
67. The Church	194
68. The Priesthood	197
69. The Sacraments	200
70. THE BOND OF PERFECTION <i>(Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany)</i>	203
71. Baptism	206
72. Confirmation	209
73. Penance	212
74. Extreme Unction	215
75. Vocation	218
76. Correspondance to Vocation	221

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY TO HOLY SATURDAY

THE PURIFICATION OF THE SENSES AND THE PRACTICE OF
ABNEGATION — THE STRUGGLE AGAINST SIN —
HUMILITY, OBEDIENCE, AND ACCEPTANCE OF
THE CROSS — THE PASSION OF JESUS.

77. A NEW PROGRAM <i>(Septuagesima Sunday)</i>	227
78. The Necessity for Interior Purification	230
79. Voluntary Attachments	233
80. The Essence of Detachment	236
81. The Way of the "Nothing"	239
82. Rules for Detachment	241

<i>Meditation</i>	<i>Page</i>
83. The Night of the Senses	244
84. THE DIVINE SEED <i>(Sexagesima Sunday)</i>	247
85. Evangelical Poverty	250
86. Voluntary Poverty	253
87. The Spirit of Poverty	256
88. Chastity	259
89. Modesty	262
90. Chastity of Heart	265
91. PREDICTION OF THE PASSION <i>(Quinquagesima Sunday)</i>	268
92. Corporal Mortification	271
93. With Jesus Crucified	273
94. Ash Wednesday	276
95. Death	279
96. The Proof of Love	282
97. The Spirit of Mortification	285
98. THE GREAT COMBAT <i>(First Sunday of Lent)</i>	288
99. Conversion	291
100. Sin	294
101. Venial Sin	297
102. Imperfections	300
103. Examination of Conscience	303
104. Confession	306
105. THE TRANSFIGURATION <i>(Second Sunday of Lent)</i>	309
106. Humility	312
107. Our Place	315
108. Humility and Confidence	318
109. Humility in Our Falls	321
110. Humiliations	323
111. Humility of Heart	326
112. THE POWER OF JESUS <i>(Third Sunday of Lent)</i>	329
113. The Lowest Place	332
114. The Hidden Life	335
115. To Be Hidden from Myself	338
116. To Be Hidden with Christ in God	341
117. True Glory	344
118. Not Excusing Oneself	347
119. THE MULTIPLICATION OF THE LOAVES <i>(Fourth Sunday of Lent)</i>	350
120. The Value of Obedience	353
121. Come, Follow Me	356
122. Free Sacrifice of Liberty	359
123. Supernatural Obedience	362
124. Blind Obedience	365
125. Difficulties in Obedience	368

<i>Meditation</i>	<i>Page</i>
126. JESUS PERSECUTED <i>(The First Sunday of the Passion)</i>	371
127. The Value of Suffering	374
128. Patience	377
129. The Daily Cross	380
130. Suffering and Abandonment	383
131. The Seven Sorrows of Mary	386
132. Love of the Cross	389
133. THE TRIUMPH OF JESUS <i>(The Second Sunday of the Passion or Palm Sunday)</i>	392
134. The Supper at Bethany <i>(Monday of Holy Week)</i>	395
135. The Meek Lamb <i>(Tuesday of Holy Week)</i>	398
136. The Man of Sorrows <i>(Wednesday of Holy Week)</i>	401
137. The Gift of Love <i>(Holy Thursday)</i>	405
138. The Mystery of the Cross <i>(Good Friday)</i>	408
139. The Victory of the Cross <i>(Holy Saturday)</i>	412

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.

140. THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD <i>(Easter Sunday)</i>	419
141. Stay with Us <i>(Easter Monday)</i>	422
142. Whom Seek You?	425
143. The Living Water	428
144. God Invites All Souls	430
145. Our Preparation	434
146. Prayer	437
147. THE PASCHAL HARVEST <i>(Low Sunday)</i>	441
148. Vocal Prayer	443
149. Meditative Reading	446
150. Meditation	449
151. Intimate Converses with God	452
152. Prayer of Recollection	455
153. Aridity	458

<i>Meditation</i>	<i>Page</i>
154. THE GOOD SHEPHERD <i>(Second Sunday after Easter)</i>	461
155. Aridity and Progress	464
156. Energetic Resolve	467
157. Aridity and Contemplation	470
158. Loving Attention to God	473
159. Practical Conduct	476
160. The Life of Prayer	479
161. GOD'S PILGRIMS <i>(Third Sunday after Easter)</i>	482
162. Practice of the Presence of God	485
163. The Spirit of Faith	488
164. Liturgical Prayer	491
165. Holy Mass	494
166. Participating in Holy Mass	497
167. The Divine Office	500
168. THE GREAT PROMISE <i>(Fourth Sunday after Easter)</i>	503
169. Mary Our Guide and Model	506
170. The Handmaid of the Lord	509
171. Spouse of the Holy Spirit	512
172. The Mother of God	515
173. Our Mother	518
174. The Marian Life	521
175. EFFICACIOUS PRAYER <i>(Fifth Sunday after Easter)</i>	523
176. Mary's Humility	526
177. Mary's Faith	529
178. Mary's Hope	532
179. THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD <i>(Forty days after Easter)</i>	535
180. The Growth of Charity in Mary	538
181. Mary and Fraternal Charity	541
182. WAITING <i>(Sunday after Ascension)</i>	544
183. Mary's Prayer	547
184. Mary's Apostolate	550
185. Mary Our Mediatrix	553
186. The Holy Spirit	556
187. The Spirit of Christ	559
188. Sweet Guest of the Soul	562
189. PENTECOST SUNDAY <i>(The Descent of the Holy Spirit)</i>	565
190. The Action of the Holy Spirit	568
191. The Initiatives of the Holy Spirit	571
192. Our Cooperation	574
193. Conformity with Christ through the Action of the Holy Spirit	576
194. The Way of the Cross	579

<i>Meditation</i>	<i>Page</i>
195. The Gifts of the Spirit	582
196. FEAST OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY <i>(First Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	585
197. The Virtues and the Gifts	588
198. The Holy Spirit and Prayer	591
199. The Holy Spirit and Activity	593

THE FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI TO THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

THE HOLY EUCHARIST — THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS — THE MOST HOLY TRINITY — THE DIVINE PERFECTIONS — THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES.

200. FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI <i>(Thursday after the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity)</i>	599
201. The Real Presence	601
202. The Mystery of Faith	604
203. THE INVITATION TO THE BANQUET <i>(Second Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	607
204. Mystery of Hope	610
205. Mystery of Love	613
206. The Sacrament of Union	616
207. Let Us Prepare for Union	619
208. FEAST OF THE MOST SACRED HEART OF JESUS <i>(Friday following the Second Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	622
209. Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus	625
210. MERCIFUL LOVE <i>(Third Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	628
211. Returning Love for Love	631
212. Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus	633
213. Reparation	636
214. The Heart of Jesus Our Model	639
215. The Heart of Jesus Our Refuge	642
216. The Sacred Heart and the Eucharist	645
217. FIRM CONFIDENCE <i>(Fourth Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	648
218. Abiding in Christ	651
219. From the Eucharist to the Trinity	654
220. The Mystery of the Trinity	657
221. In the Presence of the Trinity	660
222. The Trinity within Us	663
223. Effusion of the Trinity in the Soul	666
224. FRATERNAL HARMONY <i>(Fifth Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	669
225. Living with the Trinity	672
226. The Glory of the Most Holy Trinity	675
227. The Divine Perfections	678

<i>Meditation</i>	<i>Page</i>
228. The Divine Essence	681
229. Divine Simplicity	684
230. The Immutability and Eternity of God	687
231. THE COMPASSION OF JESUS <i>(Sixth Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	691
232. God's Infinite Goodness	694
233. God's Infinite Goodness Is Diffusive	697
234. Infinite Wisdom	700
235. Infinite Love	703
236. Infinite Mercy	706
237. Infinite Justice	709
238. THE FRUITS OF LIFE <i>(Seventh Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	711
239. Divine Providence	714
240. Divine Omnipotence	717
241. Faith	720
242. The Obscure Light of Faith	723
243. The Power of Faith	726
244. Faith in Practice	729
245. OUR RICHES <i>(Eighth Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	732
246. Hope	735
247. The Motive for Hope	738
248. The Test of Hope	741
249. Boundless Hope	744
250. Charity	747
251. The Love of Friendship	750
252. CORRESPONDENCE WITH GRACE <i>(Ninth Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	753
253. The Precept of Charity	756
254. The Excellence of Charity	759
255. The Act of Love	762
256. The Life of Love	765

THE TENTH TO THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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

257. Fraternal Charity	771
258. The Motive for Fraternal Charity	774
259. CHARITY AND HUMILITY <i>(Tenth Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	777
260. The Extent of Fraternal Charity	780
261. The Measure of Fraternal Charity	783
262. The New Commandment	786
263. Judge Not	789
264. Be Ye Merciful	792

<i>Meditation</i>	<i>Page</i>
265. The Mantle of Charity	795
266. BAPTISMAL GRACE	798
<i>(Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	
267. Bear Ye One Another's Burdens	801
268. Charity Is not Selfish	804
269. Charity Adapts Itself to Everyone	807
270. Mildness	810
271. Love of Neighbor and Love of God	813
272. Prudence	816
273. THE GOOD SAMARITAN	819
<i>(Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	
274. Prudent Judgment	822
275. Prudence and Rectitude	824
276. Diligence	827
277. Justice	830
278. Hunger and Thirst After Justice	832
279. Perfect Justice	835
280. THE TEN LEPERS	838
<i>(Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	
281. Justice and Religion	841
282. Piety and Devotion	844
283. Gratitude	847
284. Sincerity	850
285. Simplicity	853
286. Fortitude	856
287. THE TWO KINGDOMS	859
<i>(Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	
288. Courage	862
289. Magnanimity	865
290. Generosity	868
291. Fortitude and Patience	871
292. The Practice of Patience	874
293. Perseverance	877
294. JESUS OUR LIFE	880
<i>(Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	
295. Perseverance and Confidence	883
296. Temperance	886
297. Meekness	889
298. Spiritual Progress	892
299. The Gift of Fear	895
300. Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit	898
301. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A CHRISTIAN	901
<i>(Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	
302. The Gift of Fortitude	904
303. Blessed Are They That Hunger and Thirst after Justice	907
304. The Gift of Piety	910
305. Blessed are the Meek	913
306. The Gift of Counsel	916
307. Blessed Are the Merciful	991

<i>Meditation</i>	<i>Page</i>
308. FRATERNAL UNION <i>(Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	922
309. The Gift of Knowledge	925
310. Blessed Are They That Mourn	928
311. The Gift of Understanding	931
312. Blessed Are the Clean of Heart	934
313. The Gift of Wisdom	937
314. Blessed Are the Peacemakers	940
315. THE POWER AND LOVE OF JESUS <i>(Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	943
316. Our Meeting with the Holy Spirit	946

THE NINETEENTH TO THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

THE APOSTOLATE : DUTY, FORMATION, PREPARATION,
PRACTICE — UNION WITH GOD : PURIFICATION OF THE
SPIRIT, DEVELOPMENT OF LOVE, UNION OF WILL,
COMPLETE UNION.

317. Zeal for Souls	953
318. The Duty of the Apostolate	956
319. God's Collaborators	959
320. One with the Mind of Christ	962
321. The Soul of the Apostolate	965
322. THE DIVINE INVITATION <i>(Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	968
323. The Apostolic Ideal	971
324. Various Forms of the Apostolate	974
325. Apostolic Prayer	977
326. Apostolic Immolation	980
327. The Apostolate of Example	983
328. Apostolic Works	986
329. THE ROAD TO OUR ETERNAL HOME <i>(Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	989
330. The Formation of Apostles	992
331. Sanctification in the Apostolate	995
332. A Right Intention	999
333. Self-forgetfulness and Abnegation	1002
334. Humility in the Apostolate	1005
335. Human Qualities and Apostolic Charity	1008
336. FORGIVENESS <i>(Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	1011
337. Education and Culture at the Service of the Apostolate	1015
338. Apostolic Hope	1018
339. Progress in the Apostolate	1021
340. Apostolic Maturity	1024
341. Spiritual Paternity and Maternity	1026
342. Martha and Mary	1030

<i>Meditation</i>	<i>Page</i>
343. OUR DUTIES <i>(Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	1034
344. The Holy Spirit and the Apostolate	1037
345. Union with God	1040
346. The Way of Union	1043
347. The Night of the Spirit	1046
348. Purifying Love	1049
349. Toward Complete Purification	1052
350. DESIGNS OF PEACE AND LOVE <i>(Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	1055
351. Passive Purification	1059
352. Interior Trials	1062
353. Desolation and Darkness	1065
354. Consolation and Abandonment	1068
355. The Development of Love	1071
356. The Love of Esteem	1075
357. THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED <i>(Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost – Sixth after Epiphany)</i>	1078
358. Courageous and Impatient Love	1081
359. Humble and Reverent Love	1084
360. Strong and Active Love	1087
361. Unitive Love	1091
362. Union of Will	1094
363. Divine Assistance	1097
364. THE END OF THE WORLD <i>(Last Sunday after Pentecost)</i>	1100
365. The "Yes" of Perfect Consent	1103
366. The Reciprocal Gift	1106
367. Perfect Union	1109
368. The Triumph of Love	1112
369. Transforming Love	1115
370. Divine Intimacy	1118

IMMOVABLE FEASTS

9. THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY <i>(December eighth)</i>	26
29. THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD <i>(December twenty-fifth)</i>	85
36. THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD <i>(January first)</i>	106
41. The Epiphany of Our Lord <i>(January sixth)</i>	120
371. The Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary <i>(February second)</i>	1124
372. St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Patron of the Universal Church <i>(March nineteenth)</i>	1127

373.	St. Joseph's Life of Faith	1130
374.	The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary <i>(March twenty-fifth)</i>	1133
375.	Feast of SS. Peter and Paul <i>(June twenty-ninth)</i>	1136
376.	Feast of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ <i>(July first)</i>	1140
377.	The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary <i>(July second)</i>	1143
378.	Our Lady of Mount Carmel <i>(July sixteenth)</i>	1146
379.	THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY <i>(August fifteenth)</i>	1149
380.	The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary <i>(September eighth)</i>	1152
381.	Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Rosary <i>(October seventh)</i>	1155
382.	Feast of the Motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary <i>(October eleventh)</i>	1158
383.	Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King <i>(Last Sunday of October)</i>	1161
384.	FEAST OF ALL SAINTS <i>(November first)</i>	1164
385.	Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed <i>(November second)</i>	1167
386.	The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary <i>(November twenty-first)</i>	1170
	ANALYTICAL INDEX	1175

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Ep</i>	= Epistle
<i>Gosp</i>	= Gospel
<i>RB</i>	= Roman Breviary
<i>RM</i>	= Roman Missal
J.C.	= ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS
<i>AS</i>	= Ascent of Mt. Carmel
<i>CR</i>	= Counsels to a Religious
<i>DN</i>	= Dark Night of the Soul
<i>LF</i>	= Living Flame of Love
<i>P</i>	= Precautions (Cautions)
<i>SC</i>	= Spiritual Canticle
<i>SM</i>	= Spiritual Maxims :
<i>l</i>	= Words of Light
<i>ll</i>	= Points of Love
<i>lll</i>	= Other Counsels
T.J.	= ST. TERESA OF JESUS
<i>Con</i>	= Conceptions of the Love of God
<i>Exc</i>	= Exclamations of the Soul to God
<i>F</i>	= Foundations
<i>Int C</i>	= Interior Castle (Mansions)
<i>Life</i>	= Life
<i>M</i>	= Maxims for her Nuns
<i>SR</i>	= Spiritual Relations
<i>Way</i>	= Way of Perfection
T.M.	= ST. TERESA MARGARET OF THE HEART OF JESUS
<i>Sp</i>	= Spirituality of St. Teresa Margaret of the Heart of Jesus (Not yet translated)
T.C.J.	= ST. THERESE OF THE CHILD JESUS
<i>C</i>	= Counsels and Souvenirs
<i>NV</i>	= Novissima Verba
<i>St</i>	= Story of a Soul
E.T.	= SR. ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY
<i>I</i>	= First Retreat (Heaven on Earth)
<i>II</i>	= Last Retreat
<i>III</i>	= Elevation to the Most Holy Trinity
ALL AUTHORS	
<i>L</i>	= Letters

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
TO
THE FIFTH SUNDAY
AFTER THE EPIPHANY

THE IDEAL: SANCTITY, INTIMACY WITH GOD, THE APOSTOLATE –
THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION – JESUS: HIS PERSON,
HIS WORK, OUR RELATIONS WITH HIM – THE CHURCH –
THE SACRAMENTS.

THE LORD COMETH FROM AFAR

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

PRESENCE OF GOD - The Lord is coming; I place myself in His presence and go to meet Him with all the energy of my will.

MEDITATION

1. "The Name of the Lord cometh from afar.... I look from afar, and behold I see the power of God coming.... Go out to meet Him, and say, 'Tell us if You are He who shall rule....'" These words are taken from today's liturgy, and in reply, it invites us, "Come, let us adore the King, the Lord who is coming!..." (*RB*).

This coming was expected for long ages; it was foretold by the prophets, and desired by all the just who were not granted to see its dawn. The Church commemorates and renews this expectation with each recurring Advent, expressing this longing to the Savior who is to come. The desire of old was sustained solely by hope, but it is now a confident desire, founded on the consoling reality of the Redemption already accomplished. Although historically completed nineteen centuries ago, this longing should be actualized daily, renewed in ever deeper and fuller reality in every Christian soul. The spirit of the Advent liturgy, commemorating the age-long expectation of the Redeemer, will prepare us to celebrate the mystery of the Word made Flesh by arousing in each one of us an intimate, personal expectation of the renewed coming of Christ to our soul. This coming is accomplished by grace; to the degree in which grace develops and matures in us, it becomes more copious, more penetrating, until it transforms the soul into an *alter Christus*. Advent is a season of waiting and of fervent longing for the Redeemer : "Drop down dew, ye heavens, and let the clouds rain the Just One!" (*ibid.*).

2. In today's Epistle (*Rom 13,11-14*), St. Paul exhorts us, "Brethren, it is now the hour...to rise from sleep." During Advent, the "springtime" of the Church, we must

arouse ourselves and bring forth new fruits of sanctity. Even now, the Apostle shows us the great fruits of Advent : " Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light...put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." If we have been somewhat drowsy and languid in Our Lord's service, now is the time to arouse ourselves to a new life, to strip ourselves generously of our meanness and weakness, and to " put on Jesus Christ," that is, His holiness. In order to help us attain this end, Jesus encourages us by reminding us of His love in coming as our Redeemer : He comes to meet us with His grace; it is infinite mercy that inclines to us.

On the other hand, the Church, in today's Gospel (*Lk 21,25-33*), puts before us the last coming of Jesus as supreme Judge, " and then they shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with great power and majesty." He came with love to Bethlehem; He comes with grace into our souls; He will come with justice at the end of the world : Christ's triple coming, the synthesis of Christianity, an invitation to a vigilant, trusting expectation, " Lift up your heads, for your redemption is at hand!"

COLLOQUY

O my God, Word of the Father, Word made flesh for love of us, You assumed a mortal body in order to suffer and be immolated for us. I wish to prepare for Your coming with the burning desires of the prophets and the just who in the Old Testament sighed after You, the one Savior and Redeemer. " O Lord, send Him whom You are going to send.... As You have promised, come and deliver us!" I want to keep Advent in my soul, that is, a continual longing and waiting for this great Mystery wherein You, O Word, became flesh to show me the abyss of Your redeeming, sanctifying mercy.

O sweetest Jesus, You come to me with Your infinite love and the abundance of Your grace; You desire to engulf my soul in torrents of mercy and charity in order to draw it to You. Come, O Lord, come! I, too, wish to run to You with love, but alas! my love is so limited, weak, and imperfect! Make it strong and generous; enable me to overcome myself, so that I can give myself entirely to You.

Yes, my love can become strong because "its foundation is the intimate certainty that it will be repaid by the love of God. O Lord, I cannot doubt Your tenderness, because You have given me proofs of it in so many ways, with the sole purpose of convincing me of it. Therefore, trusting in Your love, my weak love will become strong with Your strength. What a consolation it will be, O Lord, at the moment of death to think that we shall be judged by Him whom we have loved above all things! Then we can enter Your presence with confidence, despite the weight of our offenses!" (*T.J. Way*, 40).

O Lord, give me love like this! I desire it ardently, not only to escape Your stern eye at Judgment, but especially in order to repay You in some degree for Your infinite charity.

O Lord, do not, I beseech You, permit that this exceeding great love which led You to become incarnate for my salvation, be given in vain! My poor soul needs You so much! It sighs for You as for a compassionate physician, who alone can heal its wounds, draw it out of its languor and tepidity, and infuse into it new vigor, new enthusiasm, new life. Come, Lord, come! I am ready to welcome Your work with a docile, humble heart, ready to let myself be healed, purified, and strengthened by You. Yes, with Your help, I will make any sacrifice, renounce everything that might hinder Your redeeming work in me. Show Your power, O Lord, and come! Come, delay no longer!

INVITATION TO SANCTITY

PRESENCE OF GOD - I place myself in the presence of Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament, contemplating Him as the Redeemer and Sanctifier of my soul.

MEDITATION

1. "Where sin abounded, grace did more abound" (*Rom 5,20*). Adam's fall brought about the destruction of God's plan for man's sanctification. Our first parents,

created to the image and likeness of God, in a state of grace and justice, and raised to the dignity of children of God, were hurled into an abyss of misery, drawing with them the whole human race. For centuries man groaned in his sin, he could no longer call God by the sweet name of Father, he did not even dare to pronounce His name, regarding the Most High with a sense of terror : " He is a powerful and terrible God, the God of justice and vengeance." Sin made an insurmountable abyss between man and God, and man groaned in the depths of the abyss, utterly incapable of rising from it.

To do what man could not do, to destroy sin and restore divine sonship to the human race, a Savior was promised. The most merciful God, " so loved the world, as to give His only-begotten Son " (*Jn* 3,16) for its salvation. The Word, the splendor of the Father, and the figure of His substance became flesh in order to destroy sin and restore grace to us, that " we might once again be called, and really be the children of God " (cf. 1 *Jn* 3,1).

God wants us " all to be saved "; for this reason He gave us His Son, and with Him and through Him, all the means necessary for our salvation. Therefore, if a soul is not saved, it alone will be responsible.

2. Jesus was not satisfied with destroying sin and meriting only a sufficient amount of grace for our salvation. He did much more and He Himself declared it, " I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly " (*Jn* 10,10). This plenitude of life is the plenitude of grace, the supernatural life which causes sanctity to blossom.

Sanctity is not reserved for a few; Jesus, by His Incarnation and by His death on the Cross, merited the means of salvation and sanctification for all who believe in Him. He, the All-holy, came to sanctify us, and has taught us, " Be you therefore perfect, as also Your heavenly Father is perfect " (*Mt* 5,48).

Jesus did not give this precept to a chosen group of persons, nor did He reserve it for His Apostles and close friends; He proclaimed it to the multitude who were following Him. St. Paul received His message and announced it to the Gentiles, " This is the will of God, your sanctification " (1 *Thes* 4,3). And in our times the Church, speaking through the great Pope Pius XI, has repeated it strongly and on many

occasions to the modern world : " Christ has called the whole human race to the lofty heights of sanctity.... There are some who say that sanctity is not everyone's vocation; on the contrary, it is everyone's vocation, and all are called to it.... Jesus Christ has given Himself as an example for all to imitate." And elsewhere : " Let no one believe that sanctity belongs to a few chosen people, while the rest of humanity can limit itself to a lesser degree of virtue. Everyone is included in this law; no one is exempt from it."

Jesus comes not only to save me, but to sanctify me. He is calling me to sanctity and has merited for me all the graces I need to attain it.

COLLOQUY

" It grieves me, my God, that I should be so wicked and that I am able to do so little in Your service. I well know that it is my own fault that You have not granted me the favors which You gave to those who went before me.... I grieve over my life, Lord, when I compare it with theirs; and I cannot say this without weeping. When I meditate, my God, upon the glory which You have prepared for those who persevere in doing Your will, and when I think how many trials and pains it cost Your Son to gain it for us, and how little we have deserved it, and how bound we are not to be ungrateful for this wondrous love which has taught us love at such a cost to itself, my soul becomes greatly afflicted. How is it possible, Lord, that all this should be forgotten, and that, when they offend You, mortal men should be so forgetful of You? O my Redeemer, how forgetful are men! They are forgetful even of themselves. And how great is Your goodness that You should remember us when we have fallen and have tried to strike You a mortal blow, and that You forget what we have done and give us Your hand again and awaken us from our incurable madness so that we seek and beg You for salvation. Blessed be such a Lord, blessed be such great mercy and praised be He forever for His merciful pity! O my soul, bless forever so great a God! How can a soul turn against Him? " (T.J. F, 4 - *Exc*, 3).

O Lord, although I know how much this poor soul of mine has cost You, yet how often have I offended You,

resisted Your grace, been unfaithful to Your love, and deaf to Your invitation to a more perfect life, to sanctity.

You, my God, have given everything, You have given Yourself entirely for me; therefore, it is not seeking too much in return to ask me to give myself entirely to You, to give You everything in order to match Your love for me. Yes, I know that You are not satisfied with my thinking only of saving my soul, just as You were not satisfied to acquire for me only the means necessary for my salvation, but willed also to acquire the means necessary for my sanctification. You have already purchased and paid for all of them; therefore, if I do not become a saint, it is entirely my own fault.

But, O Lord, how can a soul as weak and miserable as mine, one so full of faults, selfishness and meanness aspire to an ideal as high as that of sanctity? Oh yes, my pretensions would certainly be the greatest temerity if You Yourself had not shown me that this is exactly what You will. You have even given me a precious commandment concerning it, "Be you therefore perfect as also Your heavenly Father is perfect" (*Mt 5,48*).

I beseech You, O Lord, repeat this sublime invitation to my poor soul, pressingly, compellingly, so that held by this ideal, it may be urged to greater generosity, stronger resolutions, and more complete confidence in Your merciful work of redemption and sanctification.

3

SANCTITY AND THE PLENITUDE OF GRACE

PRESENCE OF GOD - I draw near to Jesus, the "fountain of life and holiness," with an ardent desire to drink from this inexhaustible fountain.

MEDITATION

i. If Jesus came to sanctify all, if it is God's will that "all should be saints," then sanctity cannot consist in extraordinary gifts of nature and grace, which depend solely upon God's liberality.

Sanctity, therefore, must consist in something that all souls of good will, even the simplest and most humble, can attain, sustained by the divine assistance. Sanctity is the perfection of the Christian life. It is the full development in us of the supernatural life, whose beginnings are sanctifying grace, the infused virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism has deposited within us this seed of sanctity, which is grace, a seed capable of blossoming into precious fruits of supernatural and eternal life for the soul which zealously cultivates it.

By elevating us to the supernatural state, grace makes us capable of entering into relations with the Blessed Trinity, that is, capable of knowing and loving God as He is in Himself, as He knows and loves Himself. Grace, therefore, engenders and nourishes a new life of knowledge and love in us, a life which is a participation in the divine life. What could be holier or more sanctifying than these intimate relations with the Blessed Trinity? Such are the lofty heights to which grace raises us, and this gift is bestowed on all who have been baptized.

2. This supernatural life, proceeding from grace, must permeate our entire human life in such a way that the latter will be supernaturalized in all its activities, in every detail, as well as in its totality. As grace grows and flourishes in our soul, its influence becomes deeper and wider; and when this influence extends effectively to all our actions, directing them solely to God's glory and uniting us wholly to Him by means of charity, then we have reached the fullness of Christian life, sanctity.

Grace is a wholly gratuitous gift bestowed on us by God through the infinite merits of Jesus. He merited it for us by His death on the Cross, and not in a limited measure, but superabundantly. St. John says that He is "full of grace... and of His fullness we all have received, and grace for grace" (*Jn 1,14.16*). Hence, we can all become saints.

This does not mean, however, that we are all called to the same degree and kind of sanctity. Besides those we call the "great" saints, those who had a special mission to accomplish and therefore received singular gifts of nature and grace, there have always been the humble, hidden saints, who were sanctified in obscurity and silence.

Sanctity does not consist in the greatness of the works accomplished or of the gifts received, but in the degree of sanctifying grace and charity to which the soul has attained by faithful correspondence with God's invitations. I, too, can aspire to this kind of sanctity with no fear of rashness or self-deception.

COLLOQUY

O my sweet Savior, it was not only for certain privileged souls, but also for me, that You willed to merit the fullness of the life of grace which is sanctity. I understand that the infinite love which made You become incarnate for us and become one of us, which made You who are God, suffer death on the Cross and shed Your precious Blood for us, is more than sufficient to merit not only the salvation, but even the sanctification of the whole human race.

Why then are there so few who really become saints? Why am I so backward on the way of sanctity, I who, because I have received from You not only the gift of holy Baptism, but also that of so many confessions and Holy Communions, should already have greatly increased my treasure of grace; I who have received so many actual graces, inspirations, and invitations, and have been called by Your infinite love to a state of consecrated life?

O my Lord, make me understand it well : You created me without any help from me, but You will not save me, You will not sanctify me, without my help. You have already merited all that serves for my sanctification; Your gifts are unnumbered, but I shall not become a saint unless I cooperate with You.

You alone are holy and You alone can make me holy, and yet You demand my full cooperation to such a degree that, if I refuse it, You will not make me a saint, despite Your omnipotence and infinite love.

O Jesus, by my sloth, my scanty love, my coldness, I can nullify all Your merits, all the Blood which You shed on the Cross. How could a miserable creature who owes everything to his God, be so bold as to oppose and hinder His action in his soul? Shall I, a little worm, have the audacity to do this? O Lord, never allow me to act thus; pursue me with Your grace until I give myself entirely to You.

To prove to You that I am sincere, I intend, with Your help, to be generous, to overcome myself in the things which cost me most, and to say "yes" to You, even when it is most repugnant to my evil nature. Help me with Your all-powerful aid, assist and sustain my poor efforts, for You know that I am weakness itself. Grant, O Lord, that I may drink from the fountain of living water which has its source in You, the fountain of life and grace, of strength and holiness, so that when my thirst is quenched, I can once again continue with fresh ardor along the way You point out to me.

4

CHARITY THE ESSENCE OF SANCTITY

PRESENCE OF GOD - I place myself in the presence of God, considering that He is infinite charity : "Deus caritas est," God is charity.

MEDITATION

I. "Be you therefore perfect, as also Your heavenly Father is perfect" (*Mt* 5,48). Before we can begin to imitate God, we must know who He is, and in what His perfection consists. Holy Scripture tells us, *God is charity* (*I Jn* 4,16). It does not say, "in God there is charity," but "*God is charity*," that is, everything in God is love, God is essentially love. Now love, even human love, is a desire for what is good; to love is to desire the good of another; it is the act by which the will is drawn toward the good. In God, the infinite Being, love is an infinite will for good, and is directed toward infinite good, the divine essence which God possesses and in which He delights. This love, which is God, is therefore an infinite, complacent love of His own infinite goodness. Yet His embrace extends even to the creatures whom He creates, to communicate to them His own goodness and happiness. Infinite charity, which is God, turns therefore to creatures, bringing them into existence by an act of love which does not stop at the limited good they possess, but brings them back to the infinite good,

the Trinity. In other words, God creates and loves them for His own glory.

We, poor creatures, are called to share in this sublime life of love which is God, and grace has been given us for this express purpose. St. Paul exhorts us, "Be ye, therefore, followers of God, as most dear children, and walk in love" (*Eph 5,1-2*).

If we are to imitate God, our supernatural life must be essentially love, that is, a love of benevolence for God and a will directed toward good, loving that infinite good which He is, and loving all creatures for Him and in Him.

2. Charity is so essential in the supernatural life that on its presence or absence depends the Christian's state of life or death. He who does not possess charity, does not possess sanctifying grace either, because they are absolutely inseparable, "He that loveth not, abideth in death" (*I Jn 3,14*). On the other hand, he who possesses charity, also possesses grace and shares in the life of God. "He that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him" (*ibid. 4,16*), and according to St. Thomas, "Charity... unites man with God so that he no longer lives for himself but for God" (*II^a II^{ae}, q.17, a.6, ad 3*).

The three theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity, are infused into the soul together with sanctifying grace. God is the object of all three, but "the greatest of these is charity" (*I Cor 13,13*). It is the greatest, because without charity there can be no Christian life; the greatest, because it will never end. Further, it is the unitive force which binds us to God and is a participation in that infinite charity which is God Himself. In fact, to the Pharisee who asked which was the greatest commandment of the law, Jesus answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment" (*Mt 22,37-38*).

When our charity is perfect, it will keep us completely united to God and will direct all our activity to Him. Hence, in the measure that a soul is dominated by charity, it is mature in the supernatural life, and is holy, to a greater or lesser degree.

COLLOQUY

O my God, make me understand, even in a small degree, Your infinite charity. You are all charity and everything in you is charity. Charity is Your Being, Your Essence, Your Life. You are that sovereign charity by which You love Yourself *ab aeterno*, from all eternity, and take pleasure in Yourself. O Father, You love the Word, the figure of Your substance. O Word, You love the Father from whom you proceed. This reciprocal charity by which You, O God, love Yourself is so perfect that it constitutes a Person, the third Person of the Most Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

"O my soul, reflect on the great delight and the great love which the Father has in knowing His Son and the Son in knowing His Father and the ardor with which the Holy Spirit unites with Them, and how none of These can cease from this love and knowledge since They are One and the same. These sovereign Persons know each other, love each other and delight in each other. What need, then, have They of my love? Why do You seek it, my God, or what do You gain by it?" (T. J. *Exc*, 7)

Yet, O Most Holy Trinity, You who are all—because You are infinite charity and enjoy from all eternity the reciprocal love of Your divine Persons—have willed, in time, to diffuse Your love, and to communicate Your infinite good to us Your creatures. By an act of Your love You brought us out of nothing; Your love is our first principle, the first principle of all things. Everything receives life from it; it is the cause of our existence and we, like little fishes, swim and live in the ocean of Your infinite love.

But, Lord, of what use can we, poor creatures, be to You, who possess within Yourself all love, all felicity, all glory? I understand: You have created us to share with us Your infinite goodness, to bring us back to the bosom of the infinite charity which is You Yourself, from whom we have received life. You have created us for the glory of the Most Holy Trinity, to communicate to us Your life of infinite love and to give us a part in it.

"O my God and my mercy! What shall I do, so as not to destroy the effect of the wonders which You deign to work in me? O Lord, how smooth are Your paths! Yet who will walk them without fear? I fear to live without serving You, yet when I set out to serve You I find no way of doing

so that satisfies me or can pay any part of what I owe. I feel that I would gladly spend myself wholly in Your service, and yet when I consider my wretchedness, I realize that I can do nothing good unless You help me" (*T.J. Exc.*, 1).

Without Your help, indeed, how can I obtain a treasure as precious as charity? O my God, if You want my whole life to be one of charity, it is absolutely necessary that You, charity itself, come to transform my poor soul. My faults—selfishness, pride, sensuality, coldness, avarice, sloth—all are obstacles to Your charity which should triumph in me. Give me grace to remove these obstacles with generosity, so that Your infinite charity may take entire possession of my nothingness.

5

SANCTITY AND GOD'S WILL

PRESENCE OF GOD - I place myself in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, asking Him to penetrate my soul with His words, "He that doth the will of My Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" (*Mt 7,21*).

MEDITATION

1. The path which leads to sanctity, that is, to God, can be marked out only by God Himself, by *His will*. Jesus expressed this very strongly when He said, "Not everyone that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of My Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" (*Mt 7,21*). And to show that the souls who are most closely united to Him, the ones He loves most, are precisely those who do the will of God, He does not hesitate to say: "Whosoever shall do the will of My Father, that is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother" (*ibid. 12,50*).

The saints learned in the school of Jesus. St. Teresa of Avila, after having received the most sublime mystical communications, did not hesitate to declare, "The highest

perfection consists not in interior favors, or in great raptures, or in visions, or in the spirit of prophesy, but in the bringing of our wills so closely into conformity with the will of God that, as soon as we realize He wills anything, we desire it ourselves with all our might, and take the bitter with the sweet" (*F*, 5). St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus echoes this statement, "The more joyfully [souls] do His will, the greater is their perfection" (*St*, 1).

True love of God consists in adhering perfectly to His holy will, not desiring to do or be other than what God indicates for each of us, to the point of becoming, as it were, "a living will of God." Seen in this light, sanctity is possible for every soul of good will; it is not impossible that a soul which leads a humble, hidden life, may adhere to the divine will as well and perhaps even better than a "great" saint who has received from God an exterior mission and has been enriched with mystical graces. The perfection of a soul may be measured by the degree to which it does the will of God, and finds its happiness in doing it.

2. To become saints we must have total conformity of our will with God's. It is necessary, then, that there should be nothing in our soul which is not in harmony with the divine will, and that our actions be motivated by His will alone. "Divine union consists in the soul's total transformation, according to the *will*, in the will of God, so that 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" (*J.C. AS I*, 11,2).

In all our actions we are always impelled by love, love of ourselves, love of creatures, or love of God. As long as the soul clings to the least thing contrary to God's will, that is, to some irregular attachment to self or creatures, it will often act, not under the impulse of God's love, but through a desire for personal satisfaction, or because of a disordered love of creatures, and therefore, will walk apart from God's will. Sin is not the only thing which is opposed to God's will; even the slightest imperfection or deliberate attachment prevents the soul from acting under the motion of God's will alone.

But when the soul no longer has any attachments, and is entirely free from love of self and of creatures, it can adhere to God alone, acting only according to His will,

and living moment by moment according to His good pleasure. The soul thus transformed has lost its will in the will of God and therefore is perfectly united to God Himself. This is the essence and the apex of sanctity.

COLLOQUY

O my God, You make me understand that the only thing necessary is Your holy will, that it is my one and only treasure. In this life, what can be more beautiful, more safe, more perfect and more holy than to do Your will? You have given me free will; to what better use can I put it than to make it adhere to Your divine will? If I should perform great works and carry out marvelous undertakings which are not fully in accordance with Your will, they would have no value for eternity and would therefore be destined to perish; whereas the slightest works done according to Your will have an eternal value.

O Lord, I know that I am nothing, I acknowledge the weakness of my poor will which now turns to one good, now to another, and considers as good what is really imperfection, fault, sin. But Your will is indefectible; You can desire nothing but the true, sovereign good; hence, You desire only my good, my salvation, my sanctification. Nothing, then, can be more advantageous to me than to consecrate my will to Yours, O my God.

"At this moment, O Lord, I freely consecrate my will to You without reserve.... Grant that Your will may always be fulfilled in me, in the way which is most pleasing to You. If You wish me to do this by means of trials, give me strength and let them come. If by means of persecutions and sickness and dishonor and need, here I am, my Father, I shall not turn my face away" (*T.J. Way*, 32).

So many times I have made You the offering of my will, consecrating it to You and declaring that I wanted nothing but Your divine will. But an equal number of times, alas, I have taken back my offering, and in my actions, labors, and apostolic works; instead of allowing myself to be guided by You, I have been led more or less by pride and personal satisfaction. How far I am, O Lord, from losing my will in Yours! How attached I still am to my own ideas and tastes! How many things still remain in me which are

contrary to Your will! Give me light to recognize them, and strength to free myself from them! I confess that every time I draw away from Your will, even if only in little things, to act according to my own will, I feel remorse, and a lessening of peace in my soul. Only in Your will is my good, my peace, my salvation, my sanctification.

O Lord, hear my poor prayer : once more I offer You my will; take it, keep it a prisoner, so that I shall never be able to withdraw my offering.

With St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, I repeat, "My God...I will not be a saint by halves, I am not afraid of suffering for You. One thing only do I fear, and that is to follow my own will. Accept, then, the offering I make of it, for I choose *all* that You will" (T.C.J. *St*, 1).

6

SANCTITY AND MY DUTIES

PRESENCE OF GOD - I place myself in the presence of God, ardently beseeching Him to help me know and fulfill His holy will.

MEDITATION

I. Jesus has said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments.... If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love; as I also have kept My Father's commandments, and do abide in His love" (*Jn* 14,15 – 15,10).

The perfection of charity consists in the perfect conformity of our wills with the divine will; this divine will is expressed, first of all, in the commandments of God and the precepts of the Church. Moreover, it is expressed in a more concrete and detailed way in the duties of my state and the various circumstances of life. The *duties of my state* determine particularly how I must act in daily life, so as to be always in conformity with the divine will : if I am a religious, these duties are set forth in my Rule, the customs of my Institute, the commands of my superiors, and the tasks imposed by

obedience. If I am a priest, my duty is the care of souls; if I am a lay person, my duties are those required by my family life, my profession or occupation, my social activities and by good citizenship.

God's will is also marked out for me by the *circumstances of my life*, whether important or not, down to the smallest detail, health or sickness, poverty or wealth, aridity or interior consolation, success or failure, misfortunes, losses, and struggles. From time to time, God asks me to fulfill special tasks of charity, patience, activity, or renouncement, detachment, submission, generosity, sacrifice. But everything is permitted by God, all is ordered by Him for my sanctification, "To them that love God, all things work together unto good" (*Rom 8,28*); "everything is a grace!" (T.C.J. NV).

2. "Sanctity properly consists only in conformity to God's will, expressed in a constant and exact fulfillment of the duties of our state in life" (Benedict XV). This statement confirms my knowledge that sanctity does not consist in doing extraordinary things, but is *essentially* reduced to the *fulfillment of duty*; therefore, it is possible for me.

For this reason I must be punctual and persevering in the fulfillment of my duties : *punctual*, that is, diligent, being careful to please God in all my actions, in order to do His holy, sanctifying will. Hence, I must accustom myself to see the expression of God's will in every one of my duties, for then everything I do will be an opportunity to submerge myself in God's love and to unite myself to Him; *persevering*, that is, fulfilling my duties faithfully, not only when I feel great fervor, but also when I am sad, tired, or in aridity; constancy calls for generosity. "It takes uncommon virtue to fulfill with exactitude, that is, without carelessness, negligence, or indolence... but with attention, piety, and spiritual fervor, the whole combination of ordinary duties which make up our daily life!" (Pius XI).

This untiring, generous fidelity will not always be easy; however, I must not become discouraged by my failures, but begin again every day, fully confident that some day, God will make my poor efforts fruitful.

COLLOQUY

O my God, in spite of my unworthiness, I have a fervent longing to become a saint. I desire this not for my own satisfaction, nor to obtain the esteem and praise of others, but solely because You desire it; for You have said : "Be ye holy, because I am holy" (*Lev 19,2*). My one aim is to conform entirely to Your will and Your desire, to please You, to give You glory, to correspond to Your infinite love, to give You all the love You expect of me and of which I am capable. You teach me more and more clearly that sanctity does not demand of me great exterior works, but only a strong, generous love which will lead me to fulfill Your holy will perfectly.

O my God, when I consider that You, the Creator and Lord of the universe, have deigned to make known Your will to me, who in comparison with You, am less than a little worm, I am filled with confusion. A King so great and so powerful speaks to the least of His servants with the goodness with which He would speak to a beloved son! Yes, O my God, You speak to me thus, and manifest Your will by Your commandments, the duties of my state, and all the circumstances of my life. Everything that surrounds me—every incident, event, sorrow and joy—all express Your will and tell me at every moment what You desire of me.

O my God, how I wish I had that profound spirit of faith to help me recognize each circumstance of my life as a messenger of Your divine will!

Yes, even at difficult moments and in painful experiences, it is You who come to me and ask a special act of charity, patience, sweetness, humility, or self-sacrifice. O my God, how this changes my point of view! Creatures, circumstances, causes, and human motives, all disappear, and I see only You and Your holy will, which always envelops me and urges me to greater generosity. Seen in this light, even the duties that are hardest and most repugnant to human nature, the "terrible daily duties," become sweet and lovable, everything seems easy and agreeable. All I have to do at every moment and under all circumstances is to say a generous "Yes" to Your sweet, lovable will.

I beseech You, O Lord, give me the fidelity I need to persevere with humility and constancy in this path of continual

adherence to Your will. With Your help, I will make this practice the center of my interior life.

O my God, shall I ever fall again? Yes, for I am frailty itself; but I know that You will be even more eager to help me rise again than I shall be prone to fall. My firm resolution and my perseverance will be to "begin again" every day, every instant, humbling myself profoundly for my weakness, but having utter confidence in Your will to sanctify my soul.

7

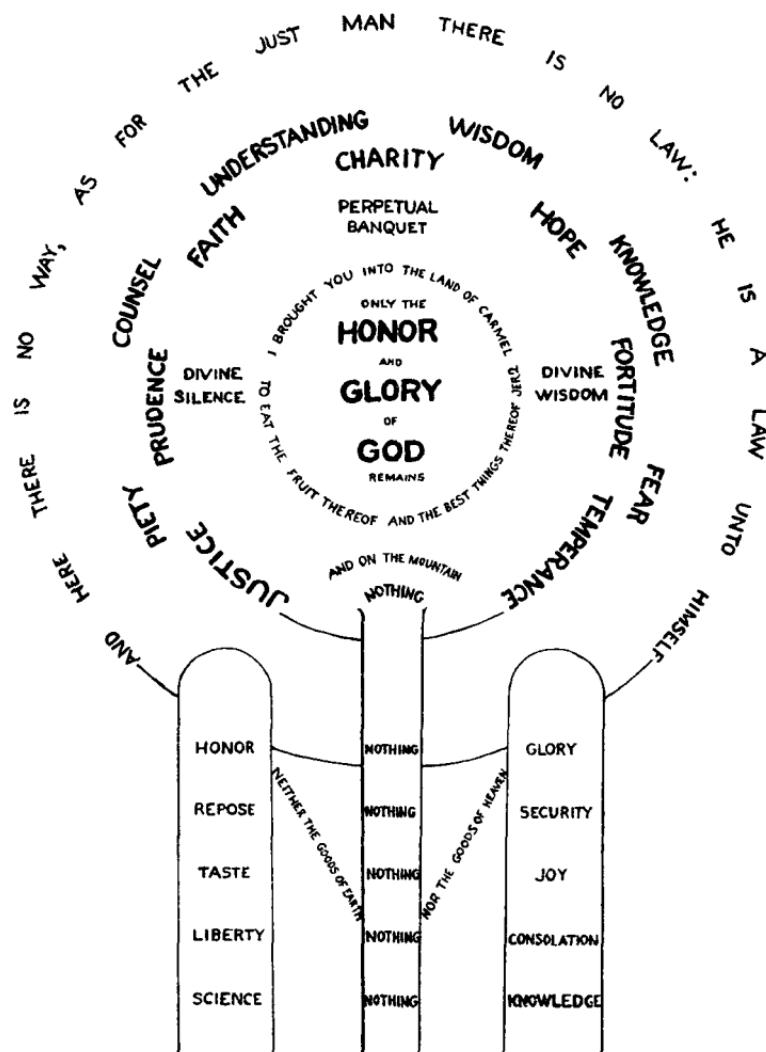
THE MOUNT OF PERFECTION

PRESENCE OF GOD - "Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord?" (*Ps 23,3*). I beg my God to permit me to approach the holy mountain on which He dwells, where His honor and glory alone reign.

MEDITATION

1. St. John of the Cross has left us a drawing which sums up, expresses in synthesis the whole spiritual life. It is the outline of a mountain whose summit, symbolized by a circle, represents the state of perfection. The ascent is symbolized by three paths, all leading toward the summit, but only one of them, the narrowest, reaches it. This is the way of the "nothing" (*nada*), the way of total abnegation. It leads directly to the summit of the mount, where there is an inscription : "Only the honor and glory of God remain."

The soul arrives at this supreme height, when dominated by perfect charity, it adheres totally to the divine will, and moved by that divine will alone, tends solely to the glory of the Most Holy Trinity. On the periphery of the circle are the words : "And here there is no way, as for the just man there is no law..." In fact, the soul which is completely dominated by the love of God no longer needs the stimulus of an external law obliging it to keep on the right road; God's



IN ORDER TO ENJOY KNOW POSSESS AND BE EVERYTHING
 DESIRE TO ENJOY KNOW POSSESS AND BE NOTHING
 YOU MUST CONTINUE ON THE WAY WITHOUT ENJOYING WITHOUT KNOWING WITHOUT POSSESSING
 YOU MUST FOLLOW THE PATH ON WHICH YOU ARE NOTHING

GRAPH OF THE MOUNT OF PERFECTION
 OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

will has become the one "principle of activity" which moves and directs it in all its actions. This is why the Saint says that, in this state, the two wills—the will of God and the will of the soul—have become one, and this one will is the divine will which has now become the will of the soul, which, losing itself in this divine will, has abandoned all other choice.

All the infused virtues, together with the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit, flourish abundantly in this soul, making it enjoy intimacy with God in a "perpetual banquet, divine silence, and divine wisdom."

Thus, by following the rugged path of the "nada" (nothing) the soul reaches the immense "All" of God, its only treasure, in which it loses itself.

2. The only road that can bring us to the summit of perfection is the rugged path of "nothing" which leaves aside the two easy roads of the "imperfect spirit"; these end half-way up the mountain and go no farther. The imperfect spirit is one that is "attached" to the things of earth, or even to spiritual goods, using these goods in a disordered way and with a view to personal satisfaction.

In order to leave the "road of the imperfect spirit," we must no longer love anything, unless it be in perfect conformity with God's will. In fact, every object which we love for itself and not according to God's will, becomes for us a source of preoccupation, desires, distress, and anxiety; it moves our hearts and makes us act only for our own satisfaction. In a soul attached to created things, how many principles of action there are which are not conformable to God's will! Such a soul finds itself on these "paths of the imperfect," which will never take it to the goal. This is why next to them is written : "Neither the goods of earth, nor the goods of heaven"; therefore *nothing*. A few lines inscribed at the foot of the mountain stress this fundamental idea : "In order to enjoy, know, possess, and be *everything*, desire to enjoy, know, possess, and be *nothing*. You must continue on the way without *enjoying*, without *knowing*, without *possessing*, you must follow the path on which you are *nothing*." It is the arid, desolate path of the purification of the senses and of the spirit, the path which reduces the soul to nothing in order to prepare it for meeting God, for the "all" of perfect conformity of its will to His.

COLLOQUY

O my God, behold me at the foot of the sublime mountain of perfection! How shall I be able to follow such a long, rugged road?

To encourage my faintheartedness, I must consider that Your beloved Son came down to earth expressly to show us the one way that leads to You, and to walk before us on that way. He said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (*Mt 16,24*). Does this not mean the path of the *nothing*? When He said, "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect" (*ibid. 5,48*), was He not inviting me too, to attain that high perfection in which only God's honor and glory are sought?

If You, O Lord, call me to sanctity, You are ready to provide me with the graces necessary to reach it. Your divine assistance always goes before me and gently urges me on. With You, even the most difficult things become easy and pleasant.

"O my God, how abundantly do You manifest Your power! There is no need to seek reasons for what You will, for You transcend all natural reason and make all things possible, thus showing clearly that we have only to love You truly, and truly to forsake everything for You, and You, my Lord, will make everything easy.

"It is well said with regard to this, that 'You feign labor in Your law'; for I do not see, Lord, and I do not know how the road that leads to You can be narrow. To me it seems a royal road, not a pathway; a road upon which anyone who sets out in earnest will travel securely. Mountain passes and rocks that might fall upon him—I mean occasions of sin—are far distant.... He who truly loves You, my God, travels by a broad and royal road and travels securely. It is far away from any precipice, and hardly has such a man stumbled in the slightest degree when You, Lord, give him Your hand. One fall—and even many falls, if he loves You and not the things of the world—will not be enough to lead him to perdition : he will be traveling along the valley of humility. I cannot understand why it is that people are afraid to set out upon the way of perfection.... Our eyes must be fixed upon You, and we must not be afraid that You, the Sun of Justice, will set, or that You will allow

us to travel by night, and so be lost, unless we first forsake You.

"People are not afraid to walk among lions, each of which seems to be trying to tear them to pieces – I mean among honors, delights, and pleasures of that kind...but when it is a question of virtue, the devil frightens us with scarecrows!... How sad this makes me! Fain would I weep ten thousand times!... You, whose goodness is all powerful, open my eyes and never let them become blind again. Amen" (*T.J. Life*, 35).

8

THE LORD WILL NOT DELAY

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

PRESENCE OF GOD - I place myself in the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to receive His two-fold invitation to confidence and repentance, contained in today's liturgy.

MEDITATION

1. After we have considered the sublime program of sanctification which we should follow, it is very consoling to consider the magnificent texts of today's liturgy. They invite us to have complete trust in God's help. "Thy salvation cometh quickly: why art thou wasted with sorrow?... I will save thee and deliver thee, fear not.... As a mother comforteth her sons, so will I comfort thee, saith the Lord" (*RB*). God does not want anxiety or discouragement. If He proposes to us an exalted way of sanctity, He does not leave us alone, but comes to help and sustain us.

Today's Mass shows clearly how Jesus comes not only for the people of Israel, for a small number of the elect, but also for the Gentiles, for all men. "Behold the Lord shall come to save the nations" (*Introit*), Therefore, let us have confidence and rejoice, as St. Paul exhorts us: "Now

may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope" (*Ep : Rom 15,4-13*). And in order to stimulate our hope in Christ, the Gospel (*Mt 11,2-10*) presents His wonderful works : "The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them."

There is no physical or moral misery which Jesus cannot cure. He asks only that we go to Him with a heart dilated by faith, and with complete trust in His all-powerful, merciful love.

2. In today's Gospel Jesus directs our attention to the strong, austere figure of John the Baptist. "What went you out to see? A reed shaken by the wind?... A man clothed in soft garments?"

If we want to prepare our hearts for Jesus' coming, we, like St. John the Baptist, must detach ourselves from all the goods of earth. John had left everything and gone into the desert to lead a life of penance. His example invites us to retire into the interior desert of our heart, far from creatures, to await the coming of Jesus in deep recollection, silence, and solitude, insofar as the duties of our state in life permit. We must persevere in this waiting, in spite of aridity and discouragement. "The Lord shall appear and shall not deceive us : if *He make any delay, wait for Him*, for He will come and will not tarry" (*RB*).

To our interior recollection, let us add a greater spirit of penance and mortification. Let us examine our generosity in practicing the penances and mortifications prescribed by our Rule, and those which we have imposed upon ourselves with the approval of our confessor or superior. If we discover that we are lax in this regard, it would be well to resolve to do something more : some mortification at meals, in our rest, or in our clothing, some work that is hard or painful to nature.

If we wish to taste the sweet joys of Christmas, we should know how to prepare ourselves with these dispositions which the Church invites us to pray for today : "We beseech You, O Lord, to teach us...to despise the things of earth and to love those of heaven" (*RM*).

COLLOQUY

O my Savior, Word of God, how can I doubt that You are coming upon earth to save and sanctify me? Why do I not go to You with complete, loving confidence, when You have spared nothing to show me Your infinitely merciful love? Your Incarnation, Your infant tears, Your humble, hidden life, Your apostolate, Your miracles, Your sorrowful Passion and death, all Your precious Blood poured out, shall they not be enough to make me believe in Your love, to open my heart in the most complete confidence?

"I repeat with all confidence the humble prayer of the publican. Most of all do I imitate the behavior of Magdalen, for her amazing—rather I should say her loving—audacity, which delighted Your heart.... I am certain that even if I had on my conscience every imaginable crime, I should lose nothing of my confidence, but would throw myself, my heart broken with sorrow, into Your arms, for I remember Your love for the prodigal son who returns to You" (*T.C.J. St.*, 12).

With this confidence, O my Jesus, I will resume my way and begin again my poor efforts.

During this Advent You invite me to greater recollection, to greater interior and exterior silence, so that I may be able to hear Your voice and prepare for Your coming. Help me, then, to quiet my continual chatter about useless things, the discordant voices of nature, self-love, sensitiveness, the distracting prattle of my fantasies, imaginations, thoughts and useless preoccupations.

I acknowledge that often my mind and heart are like a raging sea in which the waves thunder continually; and yet, if You wish, a sign from You will be enough to make calm return and all be silent.

Yes, You teach me that interior silence exacts detachment from self and from creatures, exacts interior and exterior mortification. For love of You I will mortify my curiosity, curiosity of my eyes, ears, thoughts, and imagination. I also want to silence my passions and, therefore, I resolve to be more generous in the practice of corporal mortification.

O eternal Word, my Savior, draw all my powers to Yourself; fasten my interior gaze upon Yourself, so that I shall no longer seek or hear anything or anyone but You alone, eternal Word of my eternal God!

*THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY*

DECEMBER EIGHTH

PRESENCE OF GOD - I place myself in the presence of Mary Immaculate, my loving Mother, and listen to her invitation : "Come over to me all you who desire me, and I will declare to you what great things God has done for my soul" (*RB*).

MEDITATION

1. The Feast of the Immaculate Conception is in perfect harmony with the spirit of Advent; while the soul is preparing for the coming of the Redeemer, it is fitting to think of her, the all-pure one, who was His Mother.

The very promise of a Savior was joined to, or rather, was included in the promise of this peerless Virgin. After having cursed the insidious serpent, God proclaimed : "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed : she shall crush thy head" (*Gen 3,15*). And behold, the Virgin whose coming was foretold, approaches, "white as snow, more beautiful than the sun, full of grace, and blessed above all women" (*RB*).

Precisely in view of the sublime privilege which would make her the Mother of the Incarnate Word, Mary alone, among all creatures, was preserved from original sin. Yet in Mary Immaculate we see not only her preservation from original sin, and the complete absence of the slightest shadow of an imperfection, but we also see the positive side of this mystery which made her, from the very first moment of her existence, "full of grace."

Theologians teach that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary began her spiritual life with grace much more abundant and perfect than that which the greatest saints have acquired at the end of their lives. When we consider also that during her whole life, the Blessed Virgin corresponded fully and most perfectly to every movement of grace, to every invitation from God, we can understand how charity

and grace increased in her with incessant and most rapid progress, making her the holiest of creatures, the one most completely united to God and transformed in Him.

2. St. John of the Cross, in describing the marvels of the state of perfect union with God, presents Mary Immaculate to us as the prototype and model. "Such were those [works and prayers] of the most glorious Virgin our Lady, who, being raised to this high estate of union from the beginning, never had the form of any creature imprinted in her soul, neither was she moved by such, but was invariably guided by the Holy Spirit" (*AS III*, 2, 10).

The two essential conditions for achieving divine union are found in their fullness in Mary. The first condition, which is a negative one, is that there be nothing in the soul's will which is contrary to the divine will; that is, no attachment which would cause it to be subject to a creature, so that this creature would rule in its heart in any way, or impel it to act for love of this same creature; all such attachments must be eliminated. The second condition, which is positive and constructive, and is the consequence of the first, is that the human will be moved in all and through all, only by the will of God. This was realized so perfectly in the most pure soul of Mary Immaculate that she never had even the faintest shadow of an attachment to a creature; in her soul there was never any impression of a creature which could move her to act; she was so completely seized by divine love that she could act only under the inspiration and "motion of the Holy Spirit."

Thus we see Mary as the most pure spouse of the Holy Spirit, not only in relation to her divine maternity, but also in relation to her whole life in which she was moved only by His impulse.

COLLOQUY

O Mary, Mother of God and my Mother, what light and strength your sweet image brings me! The most beautiful, the holiest, the purest of all creatures, so "full of grace" that you were worthy to bear within you the Author and Source of all grace, you do not disdain to give yourself to me—a poor creature, conscious of my sin and misery—as a model of purity, love, and holiness.

The privileges of your Immaculate Conception and divine maternity are inimitable, but you have hidden them within such a simple, humble life that I am not afraid to approach you, and ask you to take me by the hand and help me to ascend the mountain of perfection with you. Yes, you are Queen of heaven and earth; but because you are more Mother than Queen, you encourage me to have recourse to you, saying, "O my child, hear me; blessed are they who keep my ways.... He who finds me, finds life, and will obtain salvation from the Lord" (*RB*). And I answer you in the words of the Church, "Draw me, O Immaculate Virgin, I will run after you in the odor of your ointments" (*ibid.*).

Yes, draw me, Immaculate Mother, draw me above all by the luminous charm of your spotless purity! I feel so impure and stained by the things of earth compared with you, the all-pure, so detached from everything, so forgetful of yourself that nothing moves you to act apart from the divine will, apart from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

If I see you always docile and ready to respond to every least divine invitation, even though it be hidden under the most human, ordinary circumstances; if I hear you gently repeating your "yes," *Ecce ancilla Domini... fiat*, in all the happenings of your life, big and little, agreeable and disagreeable, it is because you are the Immaculate. No shadow of creatures or purely human interests or affections touches your heart; and therefore, nothing can delay your most rapid course toward God.

O Immaculate Virgin, I am so reluctant, indolent, and miserly in giving myself to God, so immersed in the things of earth! Teach me how pure my heart ought to be, so that I will never refuse anything to the Lord, and will always be able to repeat with you my sweet, prompt *fiat*.

Illumine my mind, then, with the light which emanates from your resplendent purity, so that no attachment, no earthly affection may remain hidden in me to prevent my leading a life truly and fully consecrated to my God.

To you I entrust, in a very special way, my vow of chastity; guard it and make me pure, not only in body, but also in mind and heart. With your help, O Mother, I am ready to renounce any affection, even if slight, which could still bind me to creatures. I want my heart to belong wholly to God, for whom I would keep its every throb in a spirit of perfect chastity.

INVITATION TO DIVINE INTIMACY

PRESENCE OF GOD - I recollect myself in the presence of my God living in me by grace, and I ardently desire to come close to Him.

MEDITATION

1. "If any one love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him" (*Jn* 14,23). This is the great mystery of the divine indwelling, which assures us, in Jesus' own words, that the one, triune God is not far away from a soul who loves Him, but rather lives in it and makes His abode in it.

Catholic doctrine teaches that God is necessarily present in all His creatures. In fact, in order to exist, they need not only to be created by Him, but also to be kept in existence by Him. God conserves them by operating in them, that is, by continually communicating existence to them. Since He operates by His substance, He is present wherever He operates, and therefore, in all His creatures. Thus God is everywhere, even in the souls of unbelievers and sinners.

However, in the case of a soul filled with sanctifying grace and charity, there is a special presence of God, which was promised by Jesus, and which is called *indwelling*. "The divine Persons are said to be indwelling in as much as They are present to intellectual creatures in a way that lies beyond human comprehension, and are known and loved by them in a purely supernatural manner alone, within the deepest sanctuary of the soul" (*Enc. Mystici Corporis*). In other words, the three divine Persons are present in the soul that is in the state of grace, so that it may know Them by faith, and love Them by charity, and that They may even make Themselves known to the soul by the intimate illumination of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

2. The three Persons of the Blessed Trinity are present in a soul in the state of grace to invite it to live in Their society, in intimate friendship with Them. Jesus

states this clearly and authoritatively : “ Abide in Me and I in you ” (*Jn* 15,4); “ I in you and the Father in Me, that you may be perfect in one ” (cf. *ibid.* 17,23); “ as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us ” (*ibid.*, 21). But wherever the Father and the Son are, the Holy Spirit is there also, and Jesus has expressly said : “ The Spirit of Truth...shall abide with you, and shall be in you ” (*ibid.* 14,17).

To every soul in the state of grace may be repeated in all truth the words which made such an impression on Sr. Elizabeth of the Trinity, “ The Father is in you; the Son is in you; the Holy Spirit is in you. ”

God is within you as your Father and as the sweet Guest of your soul, to invite you to live, not only *by* Him, but *with* Him and *in* Him. He is within you to manifest Himself to your soul, just as a friend manifests himself to his friend, according to the word of Jesus, “ He that loveth Me...I will love him and will manifest Myself to him. I will not now call you servants...but I have called you friends ” (*Jn* 14,21—15,15). God Himself—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit—offers you the invitation to live with Him; He offers you His friendship.

What a tremendous gift! “ If thou didst know the gift of God! ” (*ibid.* 4,10).

COLLOQUY

O my God, adorable Trinity, make me know Your gift, the immense gift by which You dwell in my poor soul, You, One and Three, You, the Immense, the Omnipotent!

“ O Deity eternal, O high, eternal Deity, O sovereign, eternal Father, O ever-burning fire!... What do Your bounty and Your grandeur show? The gift You have given to man. And what gift have You given? Your whole self, O eternal Trinity. And where did You give Yourself? In the stable of our humanity which had become a shelter for animals, that is, mortal sins ” (St. Catherine of Siena).

“ O my Lord and my good! I cannot say this without tears and great delight of soul! Is it possible, O Lord, that You love us so much that You wish to be with us? If our faults do not impede us, we may rejoice in You and You will take Your delight in us, since You say that Your delight is

to be with the children of men. O my Lord! What is this? Whenever I hear these words they are a great comfort to me. But is it possible, Lord, that after realizing You take delight in it, the soul would turn again to offend You, and to forget so many favors and such signal marks of love that it cannot doubt them, since it sees Your work so clearly? Alas, yes, O Lord, I am this soul. And I have done this, not once, but many times.

"I knew perfectly well that I had a soul, but I did not understand what that soul merited or who dwelt within it. If I had understood then as I do now that You dwell in this little palace of my soul, You who are so great a King, it seems to me I would not have left You alone so often, but would have kept You company from time to time and would have been more diligent to keep it spotless. There is nothing more wonderful than to see You, my God, whose greatness could fill a thousand worlds and still more worlds, confine Yourself within so small a thing! You are the Lord of the world, free to do what You will, and yet, because You love us, You fashion Yourself to our measure" (*T.J. Life*, 14 – *Way*, 28).

O Blessed Trinity, my God, I shall no longer close my ears to Your loving invitation. I do not wish You to be any longer the "great abandoned One" in my soul. Help me to establish all my faculties in You, especially my intellect and my will, so that I shall live in intimate, perpetual union with You. Grant that I may seek You and You alone, that my gaze may always be turned toward You, and that I may suffer, pray, and work with You and in You.

O eternal Trinity, my sweet love! O Father, draw me by the power of Your omnipotence! O Son, enlighten me by the brilliance of Your wisdom! O Holy Spirit, inflame me with the burning fire of Your charity!

II

IN SEARCH OF GOD

PRESENCE OF GOD - I recollect myself in the interior sanctuary of my soul to seek God there, living in me by grace.

MEDITATION

I. "The kingdom of God is within you" (*Lk 17,21*), Jesus taught us, and St. Teresa of Avila comments, "If a soul wishes to speak with its Father and enjoy His company, it does not have to go to heaven.... It needs no wings to go in search of Him but only to find a place where it can be alone and look upon Him present within itself" (*T.J. Way*, 28).

But if God is within us, why do we have so much difficulty in finding Him and recognizing His presence? St. John of the Cross answers, "It is to be observed that the Word, the Son of God, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is hidden, in essence and in presence, in the inmost being of the soul. Wherefore, the soul that would find Him must go forth from all things according to the affection and will, and enter within itself in deepest recollection, so that all things are to it as though they were not.... God, then, is hidden within the soul and there the good contemplative must seek Him with love" (*J.C. SC*, 1,6).

The answer is clear : God is within us but He is *hidden*. *If we wish to find Him, we must go forth from all things, according to the affection and will.* To "go forth," according to the terminology of the Saint, signifies to *detach oneself, deprive oneself, renounce oneself, annihilate oneself, to die spiritually to oneself and to all things.* This is the path of the "nothing," of complete detachment : it is the death of the old man, the indispensable condition for life in God. St. Paul too has said, "You are dead; and your life is hid with Christ in God" (*Col 3,3*).

The loving search for God hidden within us goes hand in hand with this dying to the world and to ourselves. The more we die to ourselves, the more we find God.

2. St. John of the Cross continues, "He that has to find some hidden thing must enter very secretly even into that same hidden place where it is, and when he finds it, he too is hidden like that which he has found. And since thy beloved Spouse is the treasure hidden in the field of thy soul, for which treasure the wise merchant gave all that he had, it will be fitting that, in order to find it, thou *forget all that is thine, withdraw thyself from all creatures*, and hide in the interior closet of thy spirit" (J.C. *SC*, 1,9). This is a new invitation to detachment—to *forget* everything, to *withdraw* from everything—in order to *enter into* the depths of your soul, the place where God hides Himself.

We live too much in the exterior. Too often there is in us a host of inclinations, ideas, and strong passions which make us turn to creatures and induce us to give them our hearts, build our hopes on them, and find consolation in thinking about them. We live in this superficial world which absorbs us so completely that it makes us forget the more profound life, the really interior life where a soul may live in intimate union with its God. The Lord waits for us, so to speak, in the depths of our soul, but we do not go into these depths, taken up as we are with our affairs, to which we give all our interest.

We must then *go forth* from ourself and from all things, *forget* ourself and everything else; we must escape from the exterior world, from the superficial life, in order to hide ourself with the hidden God.

COLLOQUY

"O my God, make me understand that I am Your dwelling-place, the hiding place where You conceal Yourself. Have courage and rejoice, my soul, knowing that the object of your hope is so near to you that He dwells in you and you cannot exist without Him. What more could I desire, and what do I seek outside of myself, O my Lord and my God, when You have deigned to put Your kingdom, Your dwelling-place, in my very soul? Here, then, in the innermost sanctuary of my heart, I wish to love, desire, and adore You; no, I shall no longer go to seek You outside myself" (cf. J.C. *SC*, 1,7.8).

Exterior things, creatures and their discourse, may perhaps speak to me of You, but they are not You Yourself; therefore, they weary and distract me, whereas here, in the little heaven of my soul, I can find You as You really are, in Your whole essence, Your substance, Your charity.

But I understand, O my God, that in order to find You, I must *go forth* from all things : *go forth* from the confusion and turbulence of the exterior life, from the noise of earthly things, from the curiosity which draws me outside to see, to hear, to know. I must *go forth* by my will, from all this exterior world which ever tries to attract my attention, thoughts, and affections. Help me to subdue my vain curiosity, my excessive loquacity; help me to pass through the vicissitudes of earthly life, its ostentatious attractions, its affairs, its whirling activity, without letting my eyes or my heart rest on these things, seeking for satisfaction, comfort and personal interest in them.

To *go forth* from all things means to die—to die to the superficial life, to the purely human life, to the old man with all his passions. To *go forth* is to free oneself, to detach oneself from everything, to seek You alone. Does not this “going forth” call to mind that steep ascent of the mountain of perfection, that narrow path of the “nothing” which leads to the “all” of the life of perfect union with You?

What a new light, O my God! How well I see that this ascent, this mountain of perfection, is the same magnificent summit on which the soul is perfectly united to You, and is found, not outside, but wholly within myself. The summit is Your secret hiding-place, and if I would find You, I must also hide myself with You, always walking in the way of the “nothing” of total detachment from all things.

Will it be too much for me to detach myself from everything, to leave all things in order to find You, O my God? It is a comfort to my weakness to know that I am not alone on this rough road of complete renouncement—You are always with me. O Father, be my strength; O Word, be my light; O Holy Spirit, be my love!

O Most Holy Trinity, be my great treasure, for to find You, it is very little to sell all the things of this earth!

12

SEEKING GOD IN PRAYER

PRESENCE OF GOD - I leave all my duties and all earthly cares, to recollect myself in the little heaven of my soul, to place myself in intimate contact with God.

MEDITATION

1. "When thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret" (*Mt 6,6*). Exterior solitude, withdrawing physically from the noise, from the occupations and preoccupations of this world is a great means, and even, at least to a certain point, an indispensable means for leading a serious interior life.

Every Rule of religious life, even of a simple secular institute, prescribes certain hours for prayer, during which every occupation must be firmly laid aside, and one must retire into solitude in order to renew one's spirit by means of a more direct and more intense contact with God.

Without these prayerful intervals, it is a real illusion to pretend to live a spiritual life—not only a serious one, but even the most elementary one.

Every activity, no matter how important or urgent it is, must therefore be suspended at the prescribed time, so that all the strength of the soul may be concentrated in the supreme activity of prayer. These hours are sacred. A soul consecrated to God cannot, of its own initiative, subtract even a small part of this time under pain of seeing its spiritual life weaken. The time of prayer is the time to apply Jesus' great commandment : "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God" (*ibid. 6,33*), this kingdom that we now know is within us. In order to find it, we must have these moments of retirement, solitude, total avoidance of creatures, of business and occupations. During these blessed minutes we can and should effectively "go forth" from all things and "withdraw ourselves" from all creatures to seek God hidden within us.

2. When the Samaritan woman asked Jesus where the Lord should be adored, He answered, "God is a spirit,

and they that adore Him, must adore Him in spirit and in truth" (*Jn* 4,24). The Divine Master tells us that more important than the *place* in which we pray, is the interior spirit with which we pray, for from it alone can flow the "true adoration" of God, who is "spirit" and truth. Although retirement and material solitude are of great importance in prayer, they will not suffice if they are not accompanied by interior recollection.

St. John of the Cross says, "...shutting the door upon thee (that is to say, *shutting thy will upon all things*), pray to thy Father in secret" (*SC*, 1,9). This does not mean to shut only the material door of our room, but that it is necessary to close our will to everything, that is, as the Saint again says, to "shut all thy faculties upon all creatures."

If we wish to find God in prayer, we must begin by making this very firm decision of our will : to put aside everything—all care, all preoccupation with human things—and concentrate all the powers of our souls on God alone.

St. Teresa of Jesus offers the following advice, "Since we have resolved to devote to Him this very brief period of time...let us give it to Him freely with our minds unoccupied by other things and with a firm resolve never to take it back again, whatever we may suffer through trials, annoyances, or aridities" (*Way*, 23).

We often give the prescribed time to prayer, but we do not give our hearts to it; they are still preoccupied with earthly cares. We go to the chapel or our room, but do not know how to withdraw ourselves from the thoughts and cares of life; therefore, we cannot reach that intimate interior hiding-place where God conceals Himself.

COLLOQUY

O my God, teach me how to seek You in prayer, to put my heart in contact with Yours, to learn how to withdraw, not only materially, but also spiritually, from all the attractions which this world offers. How many times I am kneeling, but my mind is wandering all over the world!

And You, O Blessed Trinity, are here in the depths of my soul, waiting to manifest Yourself to me in the intimacy of prayer; You are here to draw me to Your secret hiding-place, but Your efforts are of no avail because my mind

remains without, still immersed in human things and preoccupations.

If, because of my natural weakness and the deficiencies of my poor human nature, I am not always able to silence my memory and imagination, it is, however, always possible for me to seek You with my heart and will, and this is exactly what You ask of me.

Make me understand that the essence of prayer does not consist in "thinking much, but in loving much" (T.J. *Int C IV*, 1). Help me to set my heart free from creatures, so that in prayer I may devote it wholly to seeking and loving You alone. O Lord, strengthen my will so that it can leave all things and apply itself only to You; give me the strength to resist temptations and to continue to seek You in spite of the distressing wanderings of my thoughts, aridity, and powerlessness. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence" (*Mt 11,12*); by these words You emphasize the fact, O my God, that even to attain the kingdom of heaven which is within me, in other words, to find You within me, I must do violence to myself.

When You Yourself attract me, O Lord, all difficulties disappear; but when You hide Yourself, my poor soul wanders about restlessly, not knowing where to stay, and the slightest remembrance of creatures is sufficient to distract it. O my God, deign to fix my mind and my heart on You!

"O my God, Trinity whom I adore, help me to become entirely forgetful of self, that I may establish myself in You, as changeless and as calm as though my soul were already in eternity! May nothing disturb my peace nor draw me forth from You, O my immutable Lord! but may I penetrate more deeply every moment into the depths of Your mystery. Give peace to my soul, make it Your heaven, Your cherished dwelling place, Your home of rest. Let me never leave You alone, but keep me ever there, all absorbed in You, in living faith, adoring You and wholly yielded up to Your creative action!" (E.T. *III*).

SEEKING GOD IN OUR DAILY DUTIES

PRESENCE OF GOD - O my soul, withdraw into yourself and, forgetting all things, persevere in seeking God with all the affection of your heart.

MEDITATION

1. "Whatsoever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him" (*Col 3,17*). We must seek God, not only during the hours prescribed for prayer, but in all the acts and occupations of life. Jesus said in this regard, "We ought always to pray" (*Lk 18,1*). There are employments and contacts with creatures required by the duties of our state in life; these are expressions of God's will, and we should not think that we must avoid them in order to seek Him. If they are regulated exactly according to God's will, these contacts with others can never, of themselves, be obstacles to the union of our soul with God. However, we must always keep ourselves within the limits of God's will. In other words, in our contacts with creatures and in our various activities, we must have but one end in view, the fulfillment of our duties. When, on the contrary, the "affection" of our will fixes itself upon such things, seeking in them a little personal satisfaction, gratifying our curiosity or our natural desire for affection, trying to gain recognition for ourself or looking for esteem from others, then our will strays away from the path of God's will; our heart becomes attached to creatures, and thus meets a real obstacle—the greatest—to its continual seeking for God. St. John of the Cross expressly requires that we "go forth from all things *according to the affection and will*" (*SC, 1,6*). He demands not only the detachment that is material withdrawal from the world, but much more, the detachment of the heart.

2. "Whether you eat or drink or speak or converse with persons in the world, or whatever else you do, be ever

desiring God and having your heart affectioned to Him, for this is a thing most necessary for *interior solitude*, which demands that the soul have no thought that is not directed toward God" (J.C. CR, 9). In order to be able to seek God and live in close union with Him, even in the midst of our occupations and contacts with the world, we must have *interior solitude*; that is "the inner cell" of which St. Catherine of Siena speaks. If this foundation is lacking, solitude itself, just like the material cell, would be useless. This "inner solitude" is detachment. A heart which is not completely detached will always and everywhere find something to distract it from seeking God, to enslave it and make it more or less a prisoner of creatures, and to fill it with worldly affections and desires. But once the soul becomes detached, it acquires the great, supreme liberty of being able to seek God and to tend only toward Him through all things, having become capable of *desiring God and having its heart affectioned to Him* in all its occupations and activities.

Here on earth our search for God and our union with Him are accomplished by means of the will, rather than by the intellect. Even when duty—study, work, teaching, the apostolate—requires intense application of the mind and dedication to the work, the soul can still remain oriented to God by the affection of the heart, that is, with the "desire of charity," which unceasingly urges it to seek God, His will and His glory. If the charity of Christ urges us, nothing will be able to separate us from Him.

COLLOQUY

As the thirsty stag pants for the spring of living water, so does my heart long for You, O God. My soul thirsts for You; it desires, seeks and wants nothing but You alone.

"O compassionate and loving Lord of my soul! You also say: 'Come unto Me, all ye that thirst and I will give you to drink.' O Life, who giveth life to all, deny me not this precious water which You have promised to those who desire it. I desire it, Lord, and I ask for it and I come to You: hide not Yourself from me, Lord, for You know my need and how this water is true medicine for the soul You have wounded.... O living streams, issuing from the wounds of my God! How abundantly do you ever flow for

our succor and how safely will one pass through the perils of this miserable life who can draw sustenance from this divine water!" (*T.J. Exc.*, 9).

Only You, O Lord, can satisfy my soul's thirst for supreme truth, infinite charity, and eternal beauty. When my heart becomes fixed upon any created thing, seeking a little satisfaction in it; when it lets itself be taken up, even to a slight degree, by some earthly affection, and without discretion becomes immersed in the business and cares of life, very soon it has to withdraw from them, weary and exhausted, empty and oppressed. O Lord, create in me a pure, upright heart which seeks You always and in all things; set in order charity within me, so that my affections and desires may remain constantly directed toward You.

"Who can free himself from base and mean ways, if Thou, O my God, wilt not lift him up to Thee in pure love? How shall a man raise himself up to Thee, for he is born and bred in misery, if Thou wilt not lift him up with the hand that made him?... Thou wilt not take away from me, O my God, what Thou hast once given to me in Thy only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, in whom Thou dost give me all I desire. I will therefore rejoice, Thou wilt not tarry if I wait for Thee. Wait in hope, then, O my soul, for from henceforth thou mayst love God in thy heart.

"The heavens are mine, the earth is mine, and the nations are mine; mine are the just, and the sinners are mine; mine are the angels, the Mother of God, and all things are mine : God Himself is mine and for me, because Christ is mine, and all for me. What dost thou, then, ask for, what dost thou seek for, O my soul? All is thine, all is for thee, do not take less, nor rest with the crumbs which fall from the table of thy Father. Go forth and exult in thy glory, hide thyself in it, and rejoice, and thou shalt obtain all the desires of thy heart" (*J.C. SM I*, Prayer of the Enamoured Soul).

THE VIRGIN OF THE INCARNATION

PRESENCE OF GOD - I draw near you, O Virgin Mary, with a lively desire to enter into the secret depths of your interior life, so that you may be my light and my model.

MEDITATION

I. "It seems to me that Our Lady's attitude during the months that intervened between the Annunciation and the Nativity is the model for interior souls, for those whom God has chosen to live *within*, in the depths of the unfathomable abyss" (E.T. I, 10).

If Mary's whole life was one of recollection and concentration on God, it must have been especially such at the time when, overshadowed by the power of the Most High, the Word became incarnate within her.

The Angel Gabriel found Mary in solitude and recollection. *The Angel being come in*, says the Gospel; the expression "come in," leads us to believe that Mary was "within" her house. The Angel reveals to her in God's name what will take place in her. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (*Lk* 1,35). From that moment God made Himself present in Mary in a very special way, present not only by essence, knowledge, and power, as He is in all creatures; present not only by grace as He is in the souls of the just; but, far more, the Word of God was in Mary by "corporal presence," as St. Albert the Great says.

Although retaining her humility, Mary was perfectly conscious of the "great things" that were taking place within her; her sublime canticle, the *Magnificat*, is proof of this. Nevertheless, she kept the great mystery hidden in her soul, hidden even from Joseph, and lived recollected in the intimacy of her spirit, adoring and meditating: she "kept all these words, pondering them in her heart" (*ibid.* 2,19).

2. God never "gave" Himself to any creature more fully than He did to Mary, but no one ever understood better than Mary the grandeur of the divine "Gift"; nor has there ever been a more loving, more faithful guardian and adorer of it. Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity says, "If you but knew the gift of God!... There is one created being who knew this gift of God, one who never lost a particle of it... the faithful Virgin, who kept all things in her heart.... The Father, inclining toward this creature so beauteous, so unaware of her beauty, decreed that she should be the Mother in time of Him who is His Son in eternity. Then the Spirit of Love, who presides at all the workings of God, came upon this Virgin and she uttered her *Fiat!* 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done unto me according to Thy word.' The greatest of mysteries was accomplished, and through the descent of the Word into her, Mary was forever seized upon and held by God.

"In what peace, what recollection, Mary went to and lent herself to everything! How the most commonplace things were divinized by her—for she remained ever in adoration of the Gift of God!—yet that did not hinder her from spending herself externally when there was question of practicing charity. The Gospel tells us that 'Mary... went into the hill country with haste into a city of Juda...and saluted Elizabeth.' Never did the unspeakable vision which she contemplated within herself diminish her exterior charity for, says a spiritual writer, 'If contemplation is directed to the eternal praise of God, it possesses unity and will not lose it'" (E.T. I, 10).

COLLOQUY

O Mary, I love to contemplate you as you adore in profound recollection the great mystery which is taking place within you. You are the first temple of the Blessed Trinity, the first adorer of the Incarnate Word, the first tabernacle of His sacred humanity.

"O Mary, temple of the Trinity! Mary, you bore the divine fire; Mother of Mercy, from you has blossomed forth the fruit of life, Jesus! O Mother, you are that new plant from which we have the fragrant flower, the Word, the only-begotten Son of God, because in you, fertile land,

was sown this Word. O Mary, fiery chariot, you bore a hidden fire which was concealed beneath the ashes of your humanity. If I look at you, O Mary, I see that the hand of the Holy Spirit has inscribed the Trinity in you, by forming within you the Incarnate Word, the only Son of God. O Mary, I see this Word given to you, within you" (St. Catherine of Siena).

"O Mary, nearer than all to Jesus Christ, although at a distance that is infinite, you are the great 'praise of glory' of the Blessed Trinity. You were always holy, unspotted, blameless in the sight of the thrice-holy God. Your soul is so simple, its movements are so deeply hidden, that we cannot detect them. Your whole life may be summed up in these words from the Gospel, 'His Mother kept all these words in her heart.' You lived within your heart : so deeply did you enter therein that human eyes cannot follow you. When I read in the Gospel that you 'went into the hill country with haste into a city of Juda,' to perform an act of charity for your cousin Elizabeth, I picture you to myself as you pass by—beautiful, serene, majestic, absorbed in communion with the Word of God within you. Like Him, your prayer was always, 'Behold, here I am.' Who? The handmaid of the Lord; the last of His creatures, you, His Mother! Your humility was so genuine because you were always forgetful and disregarding of self, free from self. Therefore, you could sing, 'Behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me'" (E.T. II, 15).

O my Mother, teach me the secret of your interior life; teach me to live recollected with God present in my soul. Teach me your silence, communicate to me your spirit of adoration; close to you, in your school, I too wish to be the little temple of the Trinity. Help me to detach myself from creatures and to live in silent, loving adoration of the Trinity in the innermost depths of my soul.

THE LORD IS NIGH

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

PRESENCE OF GOD - The Lord is always drawing nearer to my soul by the solicitations of His grace; I too wish to draw near to Him by a renewal of my faith and my desires.

MEDITATION

1. "O Lord, we have patiently waited for Thee : Thy name and Thy remembrance are the desire of the soul. My soul hath desired Thee in the night; yea, and with my spirit within me in the morning early I will watch for Thee" (*RB*).

If you also, O consecrated soul, are preparing to commemorate the Incarnation of the Word in loving, watchful expectation, today's happy announcement will resound in your ears more joyfully than ever : "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice...the Lord is nigh." Thus today's Mass begins and the Epistle (*Phil 4,4-7*) repeats the theme. It is one of exultant joy : "The Lord is nigh!" For the soul who waits for Jesus and seeks Him alone, sincerely and ardently, with lively desire and love, there can be only one motive for its joy, to know that Jesus is near, nearer with each day. Even St. Paul admonishes us to have no other desire, "The Lord is nigh. Be nothing solicitous.... And may the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds..." (*Ep*).

The more a soul concentrates its desires and affections on God, the more it will be freed from earthly cares. It will no longer be troubled about anything, knowing that only one thing is necessary, "to seek God," and that in God it will find everything it needs. Hence to draw near to God, is to find not only true joy, but also peace. In Him it has everything, and God alone suffices.

2. "The Lord is in the midst of you." This is the second joyful message in today's liturgy. It is St. John the Baptist

who speaks to us in the Gospel (*Jn* 1,19-28), "There is one in the midst of you whom you know not." John, a man of faith, was telling the Jews with full conviction that Jesus had been living among them for thirty years and that they did not know Him because He had not yet manifested Himself by miracles.

His words have value for us, too; Jesus is really present in our midst: present in our tabernacles by the Eucharist, present in our souls by grace. But who recognizes Him? Only those who believe. Revive, then, your faith; you will find Jesus, and will know Jesus according to the measure of your faith in Him. Sometimes He conceals Himself from you, and you think that you will never find Him, never feel Him again. This is the time to redouble your faith, to walk "in pure faith." "Blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed" (*Jn* 20,29). Such was the faith of St. John the Baptist, who had not seen Jesus' miracles, and nevertheless believed. Such was Mary's faith, to which the Vesper antiphon refers, "Blessed art thou, O Mary, that hast believed the Lord; those things will be fulfilled in thee, which were spoken to thee." Even Mary lived by faith; she had to *believe* in the words of the Angel, and when she agreed to become the Mother of God, she had to accept a mystery which she did not understand. But Mary did believe, and by her faith, God's words were accomplished in her. And so shall they be in you; you will see all your hopes fulfilled, you will be able to realize your ideal of intimate union with God—if you have faith in Him and in His promises.

COLLOQUY

"O God, my God, to Thee do I watch at break of day. In a desert land, and where there is no water, my soul thirsts for Thee; my flesh hath thirsted for Thee. It is Thou I seek, O Lord; without Thee the world is a desert burned by the sun where nothing can quench my thirst. Thou alone art my salvation, my refuge, my Savior, and my Redeemer. Day and night I sigh for Thee; to Thee I direct all my desires and affections. As the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress, so are my eyes always on Thy face. Show me Thy face, O Lord, and illumine my path; be Thou my light and my strength.

" Come, Lord, and tarry not; reveal Thy power and come to save us. Come and be our salvation, according to Thy promise! Thou art our Savior; Thou wilt free us from all our iniquities and cast our sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt descend like rain upon the fleece and wilt bring us justice and peace.... Thou wilt be my guide and my shepherd; Thou wilt teach me Thy ways and I shall walk in Thy paths. Thy coming fills me with joy and my soul rejoices in Thee, my God and my Savior. O Lord, I rejoice in all Thy deeds and I exult in Thy works. How admirable are Thy works and how great is Thy mercy " (RB)!

My God and my Savior, I believe in You, I trust in You. I seek for You, yet I know that You are near me, and in me : near me, hidden under the Eucharistic veil; in me, by grace. O Lord, make me know You! Do not permit it to happen to me as to the Jews : You were living in the midst of them and they knew You not. Grant that my soul may always have a lively faith; increase my faith, for faith is the light by which I can know You on earth. You are within me, Lord, I know it, I believe it, even if I cannot feel You. But if You wish, You can illumine my soul with Your light and make me know Your divine, mysterious presence.

" You are the light surpassing all other light; You give supernatural light to the eye of the intellect with such abundance and perfection that You clarify the light of faith. My soul has life in faith, and in faith it receives You and knows You. In the light of faith, I acquire wisdom in the wisdom of the Word. In the light of faith, I am strong, constant and persevering. This light will never fail me in my way; it teaches me the path, and without it, I would walk in darkness. Therefore I beg You, O Lord, to illumine me with the light of holy faith " (St. Catherine of Siena).

GUARD OF THE SENSES

PRESENCE OF GOD - O my God, I recollect my senses and faculties in Your presence, withdrawing them from all exterior occupations, in order to fix my attention wholly on You.

MEDITATION

1. To live a serious interior life, one that is wholly concentrated on seeking God, it is necessary to prevent the outside world from entering the soul and filling it with distractions and noise; it is necessary, therefore, to guard its doors assiduously. The senses are precisely the doors which open to earthly things : sight permits its images to enter; hearing, its sounds, and so forth, so that, without a discreet mortification of the senses, the soul, the living temple of the Blessed Trinity, becomes like a market-place, open to all kinds of traffic, open to every wind of rumor. Then Jesus might well say to us what He once said to the profaners of the temple, " Make not the house of My Father a house of traffic " (*Jn* 2,16). A temple of the Blessed Trinity by Baptism, the consecrated soul is doubly so by reason of its vows and promises, and is, therefore, doubly obliged to guard the recollection of its spirit, in order to make it really a " house of prayer. " According to St. Teresa Margaret of the Heart of Jesus, " It suffices to keep well closed the outside doors, that is, the senses, so that the soul and the heart cannot go elsewhere than to their center, which is God. " This was her method : " I shall fix my gaze on my heart and I shall raise my heart to God " (*Sp*).¹ Mortification of the senses should not be limited to Carthusians and to those

¹ St. Teresa Margaret of the Heart of Jesus, a young Carmelite nun who died in the Carmel of Florence, March 7, 1770, had an extraordinary interior life which might be epitomized in her motto : " hidden with Christ in God. " A true contemplative, she knew how to unite the office of Mary to that of Martha, displaying surprising activity in caring for the sick sisters. For further details about her, consult our work, *La Spiritualità di S. Teresa Margherita Redi del Cuore di Gesù*, Libreria Fiorentina, 1950.

in cloisters, as it is an indispensable exercise for all souls, that they may become recollected and wholly concentrated upon God.

2. St. John of the Cross says that we should use our exterior senses in such a way as not to disturb our recollection. "The faculties and senses must not be employed wholly upon things, but only insofar as in unavoidable. With this exception all must be left free for God" (*J.C. SM II*, 38). The "unavoidable" is indicated by what duty requires, and when we use the powers of our soul only to this degree, which is that determined by God's will, the soul cannot be harmed in any way. But the Saint continues : " If there present itself to a man the pleasure of listening to things that tend not to the service and honor of God, let him not desire that pleasure, nor desire to listen to them; and if there present itself the pleasure of looking at things that help him not Godward, let him not desire the pleasure or look at these things; and if in conversation or in aught else, such pleasure present itself, let him act likewise" (*J.C. AS I*, 13,4). This means that we should not use our senses for anything that is not required by duty or which cannot serve to raise our mind to God. However, those who are obliged to have almost continual contact with the world will not always be able to keep strictly to this rule, because by doing so they might become disagreeable to others, or appear eccentric. Therefore, St. John adds that "if by reason of necessity or expedience he cannot avoid seeing or hearing such things, it suffices that he desire not to have this pleasure" (*ibid.*). In other words, it is necessary to learn how to pass over such sense satisfactions, without stopping at the pleasure we find in them, nor allowing them to take full possession of our senses, thus always maintaining that interior liberty which permits the soul to elevate itself to God in all things. Make use of the senses only insofar as is necessary; the rest must be "left free for God."

COLLOQUY

O Lord, guard my senses, so that I may never be separated from You. With Your help, I will keep a vigilant watch over the doors of my soul, and apply myself more

fervently to a perfect observance of the rules of modesty which apply to my state in life. I will make the spirit of mortification the guardian of my senses, exercising myself in not wishing to see, hear, or discuss anything but what is required for the fulfillment of my duties. "But if You, O Lord, do not keep my house, I shall watch it in vain" (cf. *Ps* 126); therefore, with my whole heart I beg You to restrain and moderate my tongue, guard my eyes so that they will not be fed by vanity. "Lord God, King of heaven and earth, deign to direct and sanctify, rule and govern my heart, my body, my thoughts, words, and deeds in Your law and in the works of Your commandments, so that now and forever, by Your help, I may attain salvation and freedom from all evil" (*RB*).

O my God, place a guard on my eyes, my ears, my lips—on all my senses—and may this guard be Your love. Your love does not permit me to occupy my senses voluntarily with useless, unnecessary, or frivolous things; Your love does not permit the rumors, images, or the vain curiosity of earthly things to enter the sanctuary of my soul.

May Your love be the weight which draws me continually toward you. Thus my eyes will always seek Your face; my ears, Your word; all my senses will ever tend toward You, to seek, enjoy, and possess You alone. Grant that this love may always attract my senses and faculties; Lord, fill them completely with Your beauty, Your words, the knowledge of Your mysteries, so that when they are obliged by necessity to turn to creatures, they will feel uneasy and be anxious to return in haste to recollect and fix themselves in You.

But if, through frailty and misfortune, I relax the watch over my senses and allow them to stray far away from You amongst the things of the world, I beg You, Lord, come to my aid at once! "Do not permit my senses to go astray, but do You Yourself deign to call them back to You, like the good shepherd who, with his flute, calls his sheep dispersed in the valley. You, more than any other shepherd, have a call so sweet and so powerful that the senses, as soon as they hear it, cannot resist, and quickly come back into the sanctuary of the soul where You await them and to which You call them. O loving Shepherd of my soul, do not refuse to show me this mercy, so necessary for my weakness" (cf. T.J. *Int C IV*, 3).

INTERIOR SILENCE

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, hush all the voices of the world, of creatures, and of self, so that I may listen to no voice but Yours.

MEDITATION

1. Holy Scripture says, "In the multitude of words there shall not want sin. He that hath no guard on his speech shall meet with evils" (*Prv* 10,19 – 13,3). The rule of life of a consecrated soul, even if she lives in the world, should always provide for the practice of silence; and if, because of the demands of her duties, it is absolutely impossible for her to observe fixed times of silence, it is indispensable that she hold fast to this principle: to speak as little as possible with creatures in order to be able to speak as much as possible with God. She must, therefore, accustom herself to keeping control over her words, thus avoiding loquaciousness, idle chatter, prolonged conversations, and excessive exchange of confidences. The same norm which governs the use of the senses governs also the use of speech—it is to be used only in the measure required by duty or charity. Of course, it is certainly licit to talk for the purpose of taking some just alleviation or recreation, but always with moderation and within reasonable limits.

However, it is not enough to observe exterior silence; we must also strive for interior silence, that is, silence of the interior senses—the memory, imagination, sensitive feelings, thoughts, recollections of the past and useless conjectures about the future.

"If any man think himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue...this man's religion is vain" (*Jas* 1,26), which is to be understood, says St. John of the Cross, "no less of inward speech than of outward" (*P*, 9).

2. God Himself says to the soul desirous of divine intimacy, "Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy

ear, and forget thy people and thy father's house" (*Ps 44, 11*). Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity makes the following comment on this verse, "In order to listen we must forget our 'father's house'; that means, whatever pertains to the natural life.... To forget our 'people' seems to me more difficult; for by 'people' is meant that world which forms, as it were, part of ourselves. It includes our feelings, memories, impressions, and so forth. In a word, it is *self*. We must forget it, give it up, and when the soul has broken with it, and is wholly delivered from all it means, 'the King greatly desires its beauty,'" (*E.T. II, 10*).

The beauty of a recollected soul is the unity of her spirit, which is not divided and dissipated among creatures but is entirely concentrated on God. Then God takes pleasure in her and often manifests Himself to her, transforming her recollection, that is, her "silence" and making it divine, for "the knowledge of Him is in divine silence" (*J.C. SM I, 26*).

This total silence, both exterior and interior, disposes the soul to know and listen to God who dwells within her : "One word spoke the Father, which Word was His Son, and this Word He speaks ever in eternal silence, and in silence must it be heard by the soul" (*J.C. SM II, 21*); and Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity exclaims : "O eternal Word, utterance of my God, I desire to spend my life in listening to You!" This is the fundamental occupation of a soul who wishes to be a "perfect praise of glory" of the Blessed Trinity : to live interiorly in continual silence, listening to and adoring God present within her, and exteriorly, being and doing only what the divine Word indicates from moment to moment.

COLLOQUY

O my God, teach me the secret of the silence which reaches unto interior silence.

I have often had this experience : when I pour myself out on creatures and waste my time in long, useless conversations, my spirit becomes dry, dissipated and empty; and then, if I want to be recollected in prayer, I am unable to silence that little world of impressions, talk, imaginings, and idle thoughts which continually brings me back to creatures.

O Lord, I know that You want greater fidelity to silence and more care to avoid spending myself on creatures. Yes, O God, I will be silent with creatures so that I can hear Your voice which speaks in silence.

“ But whenever I dally with my ‘ self,’ preoccupied with my sensitiveness; when I pursue useless trains of thought or any sort of useless desire, I am wasting my strength, and my soul is not perfectly ordered toward You, O Lord. My lyre is not in tune, and when You, my divine Master, strike it, You cannot bring forth the divine harmonies. It is still too human and there is discord. If I am keeping anything for myself in my interior kingdom, my powers are not all ‘ enclosed’ in You, my God, and I cannot be a perfect praise of glory...because unity does not reign in me, and instead of persevering in praise, in simplicity, no matter what happens, I am continually obliged to tune the strings of my instrument (the powers of my soul), because they are all a little discordant ” (E.T. II, 2).

Help me, O Lord, to attain this beautiful interior unity which unites all my faculties in silence in order to concentrate them on You, which makes my soul attentive to every one of Your words, capable of perceiving the slightest inspiration and motion of the Holy Spirit.

“ You, O Lord, wakeneth in the morning, in the morning You wakeneth my ear, that I may hear You as a master ” (cf. *Is* 50,4), but Your word is light as a whisper and sounds without noise; a profound silence is necessary, therefore, in order to hear it. O loving Incarnate Word who once, with one movement of Your hand, silenced the winds and calmed the waves on Genesareth, deign to repeat this action in my soul, so that a great calm, a great silence will reign in it.

“ O eternal Word, utterance of my God! I long to spend my life in listening to You; to become wholly ‘ teachable,’ that I may learn all from You ” (E.T. III).

SEEKING GOD IN FAITH

PRESENCE OF GOD - I recollect myself in the presence of God living in my soul, to learn how to seek Him by the light of faith.

MEDITATION

1. "He that cometh to God, must believe" (*Heb 11,6*), says St. Paul, and he gives us this definition of faith : "Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not" (*ibid. 11,1*). In heaven we shall see God by the light of glory, but on earth we know Him by the light of faith.

We must not base our interior life, our search for God, on sentiment or spiritual consolations, but on an intensive practice of the theological virtues. St. John of the Cross gives this advice to a soul seeking God, "Hear a word full of substance and unapproachable truth : it is that thou seek Him in faith and in love, without desiring to find satisfaction in aught" (*SC, 1,11*). Therefore, we must learn to seek God without any desire for pleasure, consolation, satisfaction, even though it be purely spiritual; we must learn to walk in the path of "naked faith." Faith, more than any kind of knowledge or of reasoning, puts the soul into direct contact with God. Faith is "the proximate and proportionate means whereby the soul is united with God; for such is the likeness between itself and God, that there is no other difference save that which exists between seeing God and believing in Him" (*J.C. AS II, 9,1*). Faith places us before God as He is; it does not make us see Him, but it makes us believe in Him, and thus puts our intellect in contact with Him. By means of faith, "God manifests Himself to the soul in divine light which passes all understanding. And therefore, the greater the faith of the soul, the more closely is it united with God" (*ibid.*). Faith unites the soul with God, even though it experiences no spiritual consolation; on the contrary, God often deprives the soul of all spiritual consolation that it may exercise itself more in faith and grow in it.

2. "Faith and love are like the guides of the blind which will lead thee by a way which thou knowest not to the hidden place of God" (J.C. *SC*, 1,11). Faith is an obscure but firm adherence to the divine Word which reveals the supreme greatness of our God, who is so sublime, so omnipotent, but also so good and merciful. Faith says to the Christian soul, "You are the temple of the living God"; and the more lively the soul's faith, the more it believes Jesus' words, "If any one love Me... My Father will love him and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him" (*Jn* 14,23). By faith the soul believes in the infinite love of God, who deigns to lower Himself to His creature even to making His dwelling within it, inviting it to live in intimate union with Him. "And we have known and have believed the charity which God hath to us" (1 *Jn* 4,16). This is our great act of faith, by which, although we do not see or experience by our senses, we proceed with the confidence of one who does see. "When the soul finally comes to believe in this 'excessive love' of God, we may say of it what was said of Moses, 'For he endured as seeing Him that is invisible'" (*Heb* 11,27). "What does it matter to the soul that is recollected in itself... whether it feel or does not feel, whether it be in light or in darkness, in sensible joy or not?" (E.T. *II*, 4). It believes in His love. "For I know whom I have believed, and I am certain that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him" (2 *Tm* 1,12). This is the cry of a soul of faith who perseveres in its search for God in spite of darkness and aridity. But to attain such unshakeable faith, we must practice it and pray: "I do believe, Lord: help my unbelief" (*Mk* 9,23). "Increase my faith" (*Lk* 17,5)!

COLLOQUY

O Lord, give me a pure, ardent, strong faith to sustain and guide me in my continual search for You, and to make me adhere to You with perfect confidence although You remain hidden from my sight.

Only by faith can my soul adhere to You, as You really are— infinite, omnipotent, and merciful, unity in Trinity: thus faith presents You to my soul. Faith comprehends You as You are, in Your divinity, Your

mysteries, and Your works—all of which it proposes to my belief, so that in faith I find You completely, and in the act of faith, even though I do not see You, I possess You truly. If faith holds You hidden and veiled, if it permits me to see You only “through a glass in a dark manner” (*1 Cor 13,12*), I am certain, however, that it does not deceive me; it proposes You to me as You have revealed Yourself. How shall I not believe, Lord, in Your word, since You have spoken to us not only by the mouths of the prophets, but by the mouth of Jesus, Your Incarnate Word? Even if faith presents mysteries and wonders to believe which my poor mind cannot understand, I shall not be bewildered. What mystery is greater than that of Your infinite charity which has loved me from all eternity, created me by an act of love, redeemed me by the Blood of Your Son, and made my poor soul the temple of the Most Holy Trinity? “On Your word alone, I believe with full certitude. I believe everything the Son of God has said; there is nothing more true than the Word of Truth” (St. Thomas).

“O God, far from being astonished by Your works, they are for me but one more reason for praising You. The more difficult they are to understand, the more they arouse devotion in me; and the greater they are, the greater is the devotion.... So the less of a natural foundation these truths of the faith have, the more firmly I hold them and the greater is the devotion they inspire in me. Since You are almighty, I accept all the wondrous works which You have done as most certain, and in this respect I have never harbored a doubt” (*T.J. Life*, 28 – 19).

I want to seek You, O God, in this ardent faith, and cling to You always, even if such faith is “naked” and stripped of every consolation. “Nothing shall affright me, neither wind nor rain; and should impenetrable clouds come, O Jesus, to conceal You from my eyes, I shall not change my place, knowing that beyond the dark clouds the sun of Your love is still shining and that its splendor cannot be eclipsed for a single instant” (*T.C.J. St*, 13).

SEEKING GOD IN LOVE

PRESENCE OF GOD - Help me, O God, to concentrate all my affections on You, so that my heart will be satisfied with You alone.

MEDITATION

1. Faith "is like the feet wherewith the soul journeys to God, and love is the guide that directs it" (J.C. SC, 1,11). Charity follows faith; in this life, faith and charity, as it were, go at an equal pace: the one depends on the other, one progresses with the progress of the other, and both of them immerse the soul deeper and deeper into God. A soul who believes with its whole strength that God is truly God, that He is the supreme Being to whom we all belong and that He is worthy of all our love, will have an ardent desire for Him, and in it will be fulfilled the words of St. John of the Cross: "The soul will merit the revelation by love of that which faith holds within itself" (*ibid.*). That is, faith will make us believe in the greatness, mercy and infinite charity of God, but love will make us taste and experience them: this happens especially during contemplative prayer in which God draws the soul to Himself. However, even prescinding from this experience, we ought to exercise ourselves in love in order to go to God "by steps of love."

Jesus Himself commanded us to practice this virtue in the highest degree: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength" (*Mk* 12,30). St. Paul exhorts us to "walk in love" (*Eph* 5,2), and St. Thomas teaches that "love is the life of the soul." However, the love that is charity is pure benevolence toward God; its intensity depends upon its purity, that is, this love must consist in the one desire of pleasing God and doing His will, without seeking personal satisfaction.

2. The love which will lead us to God does not consist in sentiment; it is an act of the will. To love is to "will

good"; to love God, is to "will good to God." The good which we can desire for God is that which Jesus Himself taught us to ask of our heavenly Father: "Hallowed be Thy name; Thy will be done." Since God is the infinite good upon which everything depends, the good that He desires and that by which He is pleased is none other than His own glory and the accomplishment of His holy will.

We love God, then, to the degree in which we apply ourselves to do His will, without any personal preoccupations or self-seeking. St. John of the Cross says that if a soul looks for sweetness and delight in God, "it would not then love God purely, above all things" (*L*, 11). In fact, together with Him the soul would also be seeking some personal satisfaction, because its heart would be divided between love of God and love of itself; and therefore, it would be unable to "set the strength of the will upon Him." Hence, the Saint concludes, it should "have that hunger and thirst for God alone, and desire not to be satisfied with aught else" (*ibid.*). A soul which, moment by moment and in all its actions, seeks nothing but the will of God, is really seeking God in love and is uniting itself effectively to Him, even though it feels no consolation. But because it is always true that "if a soul is seeking God, its Beloved is seeking it much more" (*J.C. LF*, 3,28), He may sometimes draw it to Himself, making it taste the sweetness of His love and the joy of belonging entirely to Him. However, not even then may the soul stop to relish these consolations, but humbly accepting them, it should use them to give itself to God with greater resolution and generosity.

COLLOQUY

O Lord, grant me this pure, strong love which seeks You alone, by a continuous and generous adherence to Your holy will! Grant that Your divine will may be my food and drink, as it was for Jesus; grant that like Jesus I may hunger and thirst for nothing but the fulfillment of Your will, and apply all my faith to recognize it and all my love to fulfill it in every circumstance of my life.

When I have learned how to see my duties in the light of faith, I shall realize that my daily duties, as they present themselves to me moment by moment, and under various

aspects, are the expression of Your will, which asks of me at this moment that certain task, that duty, that pious practice, that act of charity. If I know how to do this with fidelity and constancy, I shall really know how to "seek You in love," and You will not delay in letting Yourself be found by my soul.

But how weak, O Lord, is my love, how feeble it is, and how easily it comes to a standstill in the face of difficulties, vanishes in time of trial, and is dismayed in aridity!

"O my God, how can I have a love worthy of You, if the love You have for me is not united with it?... Love alone gives value to all things and the most needful thing is that it should be so great that nothing can hinder its operation. But alas! I have only words and am unable to give You more. May my desires, my God, be availing in the sight of Your divine presence: consider not my slight deserving.... Lord, since we have to live, let us live for You and let our own desires and interests disappear. What greater good can we gain than to please You? Lord I desire to please You. Well do I know that my pleasure can be found in no mortal being; since this is so, You will not blame my desire. Behold me here, Lord; if it is needful for me to suffer in order to do You some service, I refuse none of the trials that may come to me on earth.... Oh, my pleasure and my God! What shall I do to please You? Since I can serve You in nothing, I must needs console myself with any little service. Blessed are they who serve You by doing great deeds! If I could accomplish anything by merely envying them and desiring to imitate them I should not be backward in pleasing You. But I am of no worth, my Lord. Do You put worth in what I do, since You have such love for me" (*T.J. Exc*, 5 - 15 - *Life*, 39).

O Lord, in my weakness I cannot ask to do great things for You, nor do I wish to ask You for consolations and sweetness. I only desire that I may prove my love for You and know how to "seek You in love," doing Your will from moment to moment.

SEEKING GOD IN CREATURES

PRESENCE OF GOD - I place myself in the presence of Jesus in the tabernacle, asking Him to teach me how to seek Him and to find Him in others.

MEDITATION

1. The relations with our neighbor which duty imposes cannot distract the soul in its search for God if it has learned to consider creatures with a wholly supernatural view, that is, with a deep spirit of faith. When the eye is illumined by the light of faith, the soul seeks and finds God, not only present in itself, but also in all creatures and especially in its neighbor.

"Creatures are, as it were, traces of the passing of God, whereby are revealed His greatness, power, wisdom, and divine virtues"; in fact, every one of them has been created by God "through His wisdom, which is the Word, His only-begotten Son" (J.C. *SC*, 5,3.1). If this is true of all creatures, even of those that are inanimate, it is especially so of man, whom God expressly created "to His image and likeness" (*Gen* 1,26). The soul living by faith always relates its acts to God when dealing with its neighbor; and rather than detain itself on outward appearances, sees, serves, and loves God alone in all creatures indiscriminately. For the soul of faith, men, of whatever race, nationality, position or social standing, have only one aspect : the image of God; only one name : child of God.

Unfortunately, vice, sin, and faults can more or less disfigure the divine image in man, but the image remains and the spirit of faith knows how to find it. Furthermore, even those who live far from God are still His children, if not effectively by grace, at least by their vocation to grace. In other words, they too are always capable of being elevated to a supernatural state. When the soul sees God in all creatures, nothing can distract it from its spirit of recollection and its search for God.

2. Only when our relations with our neighbor remain on a purely human level can they disturb our interior recollection in various ways. This happens, first of all, because the soul easily becomes attached to creatures : not knowing how to see God in them, it stops at their human qualities, at the feelings of congeniality and affection which they arouse in it, and looks to these for consolation and the satisfaction of its natural need to love and be loved. In this way, creatures more or less invade it, preoccupying its mind and heart, and robbing its spirit of the precious liberty of remaining oriented toward God and recollected in Him. And even when its relations with the neighbor cease, the soul will remain occupied with him, and will therefore be unable, even in the very hours of prayer, to recollect itself in God.

Furthermore, if we see in creatures only human persons who disturb us with their requests and needs, who often besiege us from morning till night, not giving us a moment's rest or peace, who irritate us by their faults—when we see creatures in this manner, our relations with them, although required by our duties, will weary and bore us; and we shall often be tempted to evade them, even under the pretext of defending our interior recollection. When, on the other hand, the soul is fixed in the simple glance of faith, every creature is for it a messenger from God; it brings God to the soul and takes the soul to Him. Thus, through visible creatures, the soul goes to the invisible God and speaks familiarly with Him.

COLLOQUY

O Lord, how I want to learn to see You and recognize You in every creature! You have created all men to Your image and likeness; all therefore bear Your impression, Your mark. Teach me not to stop at human appearances, which might allure my heart, making it give to a simple creature that affection which, in virtue of my consecration, should be reserved for You alone, O my God! Whenever my glance and my heart stop at creatures and look for satisfaction, contentment, and understanding in them, I get lost, distracted, and tormented; I always come away from them more tired and weary, because, after much seeking

and loving, I find nothing to satisfy my infinite need for love.

Yes, I know that as long as I do not look upon creatures with that simple, profound glance of faith which enables me to find You in all of them, O my God, to deal with them—even when duty requires it—will always be an obstacle and an impediment to my interior recollection.

O my God, grant me the single eye mentioned in the Gospel, that eye which can pierce through exterior appearances and fix its gaze on that divine mark which You Yourself have imprinted on every man. Then I shall make no distinction between those who are congenial and attractive and those who are mean, disagreeable, or repulsive; all these “externals” will disappear and I shall recognize Your face in everyone, and shall serve and love You, my God. Shall I then be able to complain that the relations with my neighbor which duty imposes or the things I have to do for him distract me from You? Does not faith tell me that in treating with my brethren I am treating with You, and that when I serve them I am serving You? Did not Jesus say, “As long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me” (*Mt 25,40*)? You dwell in the soul of everyone who is in the state of grace, just as You dwell in mine and if, unfortunately, all men are not in the state of grace, all are capable of receiving grace; all are the objects of Your merciful love; all are called, by vocation, to be temples of the Blessed Trinity. Then, O Lord, if I wish to seek You within myself, why do I not seek You also in my brethren?

O my God, purify my sight which is so easily deceived by human appearances, and make it capable of discovering You and finding You in every creature.

SEEKING GOD IN ACTIVITY

PRESENCE OF GOD - I leave all exterior activity to become recollected before Jesus, and I beg Him to teach me how to preserve this interior spirit, even in the midst of my occupations.

MEDITATION

1. St. John of the Cross teaches the soul that would attain quickly to holy recollection: "Never undertake anything, however good and full of charity it may seem... without being ordered by obedience" (*P*, 11). In this way one is certain of acting solely according to the will of God; and God's will cannot permit the duties which it requires of us—even though they are absorbing and disturbing—to become a hindrance to the recollection of the soul in Him. "If one acts only by obedience and under obedience, it is God who commands, and it does not seem to me that He can destroy His own work," that is, His intimate union with the soul, affirms St. Teresa Margaret. When exterior activity is wholly regulated by obedience, not only is the risk of acting through self-love lessened, but also that of exposing oneself temporarily to distractions, for in every occupation one has the certainty of embracing the holy will of God. And if one embraces the holy will of God, there can be no danger of separation from Him, no danger of distracting the mind from its continual orientation toward Him.

Union of the soul with God is not accomplished so much in the sweetness of prayer, as in embracing perfectly the holy will of God.

2. "We must needs be careful, in doing good works, even those of obedience and charity, not to fail to have frequent inward recourse to our God" (*T.J. F*, 5). This is a further condition to be observed in order to prevent external activity from disturbing interior recollection. "I will never do anything with haste or agitation." This was the constant resolution of St. Teresa Margaret who, in the midst of

a surprising amount of activity, always maintained "a peaceful, calm attitude, which showed her perfect self-control in each one of her actions" (*Sp*). Such an attitude implies keeping complete control of oneself and of one's activity so as to avoid the danger of being dominated and carried away by this activity. Those who rush headlong into action, without taking precautions, will soon lose their calm, become agitated, unable to recollect themselves, and their activity will become ever more and more absorbing and demanding.

Jesus chided Martha, not because she gave herself to activity, but because she was too anxious about it : "Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and art troubled about many things" (*Lk* 10,41). God wants activity, but not anxiety, for even in activity, the soul should attend to "the one thing necessary," that is, union with Him. Therefore, as soon as a soul perceives that it is beginning to lose its interior calm, it should interrupt its work, if possible, at least for an instant, and retire into its interior with God. These brief moments of pause, frequently repeated, will accustom it, little by little, to keep calm and recollected in God, even in the most absorbing activity.

COLLOQUY

O Lord, here at Your feet, in the light of Your divine presence, I wish to examine my occupations sincerely, to find out if they are really all regulated by holy obedience. You have made me understand that when I act solely on my own initiative, with no real motive of obedience or charity, my actions can very easily draw me away from You; I am drawn away either because I occupy in activity that time which I ought to dedicate to prayer, or because in doing what pleases me, I often do nothing but follow my self-love, my natural tendency toward activity, my own ideas, my own will. In these cases, I am united not to Your will but to mine; not to You, but to my self-love. O my God, I beseech You, free me from such great danger! To weary myself, to suffer in order to do Your will, to unite myself to You—yes, with Your help I wish to do this always, O Lord. But to weary myself and to suffer in order to do my own will, would be truly foolish, and all the more so because my soul would pay dearly for it.

Guard me, O Lord, from such foolishness, and do not permit me to be so blind as to squander my strength uselessly, to the detriment of my interior life.

O Lord, give me a "passion" for Your will, so that I may never will or do anything except what You will, what You ask of me in the commands and wishes of my superiors or in the advice of my spiritual director. Nothing else should exist for me, for I want You and Your will alone.

O my God, help me also not to let myself be dominated and carried away by activity. Help me, O peaceful One, to keep myself always calm and recollected, always at peace in Your presence, even in the midst of the most intense activity. This continual calm and interior peace alone will permit me to gather all the powers of my soul and to keep them fixed on You, despite the many demands of exterior activity. O my Jesus, is not this what You meant to say when You spoke to Magdalen about the *one thing necessary*? "How well this great Saint understood! Illumined by the light of faith, she recognized her God beneath the veil of His humanity, and in silence and in the union of her powers, she listened to His word; she could chant, 'My soul is always in my hands' and also that little word *Nescivi!* I knew not. Yes, she knew nothing but You, my God! No matter what noise or disturbance went on around her, *Nescivi!* She could have accusations made against her, *Nescivi!*" (E.T. II, 2). Even when she was obliged to leave Your adorable feet to perform some task, her heart remained fixed on You. And after she had finally found You risen again, she had to leave You, at Your command, to run to announce Your resurrection to the Apostles, but her soul remained established in an attitude of profound calm, recollected and concentrated upon You.

With Your help, may I too so live!

BEHOLD THE SAVIOR COMES

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

PRESENCE OF GOD - I place myself at the feet of Jesus and ask Him to prepare my heart for His imminent coming.

MEDITATION

1. "Call together the nations, tell it among the people and say : Behold our Savior cometh!" (*RB*). The message becomes more and more urgent : in a few days, the Word of God made flesh will show Himself to the world. We must hasten our preparations and make our hearts worthy of Him.

The incarnation of the Word is the greatest proof of God's infinite love for men; today's liturgy very appropriately recalls to our mind the wonderful words : "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee" (*Jer 31,3*). Yes, God has loved man from all eternity, and in order to draw him to Himself, He did not hesitate to send "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (*Rom 8,3*). With hearts full of love, we must run to meet Love who is about to appear "incarnate" in the Infant Jesus. May it be a love that is faithful in great things as well as in small, an ingenuous love that is always seeking opportunities to repay God's infinite love. "Love is repaid by love!" This is the motto which has made saints, and spurred a multitude of souls to greater generosity.

With this love prepare for Christmas, be in this love faithful, for as St. Paul says in the Epistle (*1 Cor 4,1-5*), "What we desire is that everyone may be found faithful."

2. "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths. Every valley shall be filled; and every mountain and hill shall be brought low." The voice of John the Baptist, the great Advent preacher, is heard again in today's Gospel (*Lk 3,1-16*), inviting us to prepare "the way of the Lord."

This invitation is especially a call to humility; John was not only the herald of this virtue, but its model too. We know, by the testimony of Jesus Himself, that he was "more than a prophet" and that "there hath not risen among them, that are born of women, a greater than John the Baptist" (*Mt* 11,9.11). John claimed to be nothing more than a mere voice, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord," and declared that he baptized only with water, while another would come who would baptize in the Holy Spirit, another of whom John protested himself unworthy to loose "the latchet of His shoe" (*Jn* 1,23.27). And further, speaking of the Savior's coming, John adds, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (*ibid.* 3,30). Today's Office gathers up all this magnificent testimony of St. John the Baptist, as if to give us a concrete idea of the profound sentiments of humility with which, in our heart, we ought to make smooth "the way of the Lord." If the valleys, that is, our deficiencies, are to be filled up by love, then the mountains and hills, that is, the vain pretenses of pride, must be made low by humility.

A heart filled with self-love and pride cannot be filled with God, and too small will be the place reserved in it for the sweet Babe of Bethlehem.

COLLOQUY

O almighty, omnipotent, eternal God, what greater proof of love could You give Your poor creatures than the gift of Your Word, Your only-begotten Son? For our sake, You clothed with human flesh, like the flesh of sin, Him who is eternal splendor, the perfect image of Your substance!

"God of goodness, who art above all goodness, You alone art sovereign good! You gave us the Word, Your only Son, to live with us, to assume our evil, corrupt nature. Why did You make us such a gift? Out of love, because You loved us even before we existed.

"O eternal Greatness, O fathomless Bounty, You lowered Yourself to enoble mankind! Wherever I turn, I can see nothing but the abyss and fire of Your charity" (St. Catherine of Siena).

" Whenever I think of Christ, I should remember... how great is Your love, O Father, which in Jesus has given us a pledge of such great tenderness; for love begets love and although I am only a beginner and very wicked, I shall strive ever to bear this in mind and awaken my own love. Once You, O Father, do me the favor of implanting this love in my heart, everything will become easy for me and I shall get things done in a very short time and with very little labor. O my God, give me this love, since You know how much I need it, for the sake of the love You bore us and through Your glorious Son who revealed it to us, at such great cost to Himself" (*T.J. Life*, 22).

Love will fill the valleys in my heart, and humility will level its mountains and hills. Destroy my pride, arrogance, and vanity, O Lord, by the powerful fire of Your love. By the might of Your all-powerful arm, tear out of my heart every fiber which is infected with the poison of self-love, and which, therefore, does not belong to You. O Lord, I, too, wish to decrease, decrease that You may increase in me, so that on Christmas day You may find my heart entirely empty and free and therefore ready for the total invasion of Your love.

23

THE CALL TO THE APOSTOLATE

PRESENCE OF GOD - I place myself in the presence of Jesus, the Head of the Mystical Body, the Church, begging Him to show me how to collaborate with Him in the work of saving souls.

MEDITATION

I. " Prepare ye the way of the Lord " (*Lk 3,4*). This cry of St. John the Baptist is implicitly a call to the apostolate, to that apostolate practiced by St. John himself, when he tried to prepare the hearts of his brethren for the coming and for the work of the Messiah. This invitation is addressed to us, too, not only by St. John,

but also by Jesus, who wants to make of every Christian a collaborator in His work of Redemption.

We know that Jesus alone has merited the vast, precious treasury of grace necessary to redeem and sanctify the whole human race. Yet He has not disdained our humble cooperation; rather, He has positively willed "to have need of us." Pope Pius XII says in his Encyclical, *Mystici Corporis*: "It is manifestly clear that the faithful need the help of the divine Redeemer.... Yet this, too, must be held... Christ requires the help of His members.... This is not because He is indigent and weak, but rather because He has so willed it for the greater honor of His spotless Spouse."

The Spouse of Christ is the Church; the Church is the "company" of His faithful, that is, we ourselves. Certainly, Jesus had absolutely no need of us. As He alone merited grace for us, so He alone can apply it directly to each soul. "It was quite possible for Him personally to impart these graces immediately to men; but He wished to do so through a visible Church that would be formed by the union of men, and thus through that Church every man would perform a work of collaboration with Him in dispensing the graces of Redemption" (*ibid.*). Jesus then, in His infinite goodness, has willed to associate us with Him, to give us the honor and joy of being His collaborators in the greatest work to be accomplished in the world: the salvation of souls.

2. Since Jesus, in His infinite love for us, has willed to associate us with Him in His redemptive work, reserving in it a place for our activity, we must say that now, in the actual economy of the Redemption, our collaboration is necessary. Henceforth, to bring His work to a successful end, *Jesus has need of us*. We should have a holy pride in this, but we must not forget that it entails a tremendous responsibility: the salvation of our brethren depends also on the generosity with which we collaborate in Christ's work. "A tremendous mystery certainly, and one never sufficiently meditated, that the salvation of many souls depends on the prayers and voluntary mortifications offered for this end, by the members of the Mystical Body of Christ, and on the collaboration of both pastors and the faithful" (*Mystici Corporis*). A "tremendous" mystery, because of the

responsibility which it puts on us, and one "never sufficiently meditated." Hence, it is necessary to be profoundly convinced that "the salvation of many *depends*" also on us, upon our collaboration. If this fact ought to incite the faithful to a generous apostolate, how much more should it spur on a soul consecrated to God! She has left all to give herself to Him; therefore her interests should, in a very special way, be the interests of God. She is a spouse of Christ, and, as such, is bound to collaborate in the work of her divine Spouse: the salvation of souls and the glory of the heavenly Father.

Souls are the "patrimony" of a spouse of Christ; their salvation is her "passion"; the welfare and growth of the Church are her "interests"; she lives only for Jesus and for His work.

COLLOQUY

"O my God, You give me the keenest desire not to displease You in any respect whatsoever, however trivial, or to commit so much as an imperfection if I could avoid doing so. For this reason alone, if for no other, I would like to flee from other people, and I envy those who live, or have lived, in deserts. On the other hand, I would like to plunge right into the heart of the world, to see if by doing this I could help even one soul to praise God more. I am distressed at being prevented from doing this by my natural weakness and am very envious of those who are free to cry aloud and proclaim abroad this great God of Hosts.

"Have pity on me, O my God, and dispose things so that I may be able to do something toward fulfilling my desires for Your honor and glory. Remember not my want of merit or the baseness of my nature. Did not You, O Lord, order the sea to be divided, and the great Jordan to recede, and allow the children of Israel to pass over them?

"Stretch out Your mighty arm, O Lord; let Your greatness appear in this unworthy creature, so that men may realize that I can do nothing and may give You praise. Cost what it may, this is what I desire, and I would give a thousand lives if I had them, so that one soul might

praise You more. I would consider them all well spent, because I know that in actual fact I do not deserve to suffer the very smallest trial for You, still less to die for You.

"Lord, do not forget that You are a God of mercy; have mercy on this poor sinner, this miserable worm who is so bold with You. Behold my desires, my God, and the tears with which I beg this of You; forget my deeds, for Your Name's sake and have pity upon all these souls that are being lost, and help Your Church. Do not permit more harm to be done to Christendom, Lord; give light to this darkness" (*T.J. Int C VI, 6 – Way, 3*).

O Lord, grant me, too, a great love for souls; kindle in me an ardent thirst for their salvation, and grant that I may use my feeble powers to collaborate in Your great redemptive work.

24

THE INTERIOR APOSTOLATE

PRESENCE OF GOD - I place myself before Jesus, my sweet Savior and Redeemer, asking Him to teach me how to collaborate with Him in the salvation of souls.

MEDITATION

i. The apostolate, considered in its totality, consists in everything we can do in collaboration with Christ to diffuse the supernatural life in souls. The apostolate is always a collaboration with Jesus, and attains its end only when it helps to bring God's grace to souls and to develop it in them. Catholic doctrine gives us two fundamental means for our collaboration with Christ : prayer and sacrifice. Even the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis* speaks first of "prayer and voluntary mortification" and only then speaks of the exterior activity of the clergy and the faithful. Our cooperation with Jesus for the salvation of souls must be deeply rooted in prayer and sacrifice, for it was mainly by prayer and sacrifice that Jesus Himself redeemed the world.

Jesus saved us not only by His exterior activity of preaching, teaching, instituting and administering the Sacraments, but also by the obedience and silence of His hidden life, by His prayer which is expressly mentioned so often in the Gospel, and above all by the Sacrifice of the Cross, in which all His work of redemption reached its culmination. St. John of the Cross says, "Just then He wrought the greatest work that He had ever wrought...which was the reconciliation and union of mankind with God through grace" (*AS II*, 7,11). The "interior apostolate" of prayer and immolation, then, holds the first place. Upon it is founded the exterior apostolate of action which draws its strength and efficacy from the interior one.

2. The apostolate does not consist in doing "in a little way" all that Christ did "in a big way" for the salvation of the world, but in "taking part in His work." The more our action participates in what is deepest and most fruitful in Christ's work, the more efficacious it will be; this is accomplished precisely by means of prayer and sacrifice, embraced with generosity and constancy, and united to that of Christ's, offered for the salvation of souls. This is why the Church—although recognizing the urgent need of the exterior apostolate—continues to desire and support that form of contemplative life which is consecrated to the interior apostolate : "The Religious Orders which are vowed to contemplation are, in a certain way, *necessary* to the Church."¹

But if the interior apostolate is to be truly the most fruitful, the soul dedicated to it must nourish within itself a burning apostolic fire, as did St. Teresa of Avila, who used to say to her daughters, "If your prayers and desires, disciplines and fasts are not performed for the intentions of which I have spoken (the salvation of souls), you are not fulfilling the object for which the Lord has brought you here" (T.J. *Way*, 3). The apostolic ideal should urge the soul to embrace, with complete generosity, a life of continual, hidden immolation in order that it may be a powerful means of salvation for its brethren; and this same ideal should, on the other hand, urge the soul to make rapid

¹ Address of Pius XII to the International Congress for the modernization of the States of Perfection, December 8, 1950.

progress in the way of sanctity, so as to very soon become worthy to obtain from God all the graces that it desires for the Church. "And for them do I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified" (*Jn* 17,19). The holier a soul is, the greater is the influence that it exercises in the Church.

COLLOQUY

"To be Your spouse, O my Jesus...and by my union with You to be the mother of souls, should not all this content me? Yet other vocations make themselves felt, and I would wield the sword, I would be a priest, an apostle, a martyr, a Doctor of the Church, I would fain accomplish the most heroic deeds — the spirit of the crusader burns within me, and I would gladly die on the battlefield in defense of the Church.... Like the prophets and doctors, I would be a light to souls. I would travel the world over to preach Your name, O my Beloved, and raise on heathen soil the glorious standard of the Cross.... But the greatest of all my desires is to win the martyr's palm. Martyrdom was the dream of my youth! Yet this too is folly, since to slake my thirst for suffering, not one, but every kind of torture would be needful. O Jesus, to folly such as this, what answer will You make?... Is there on earth a soul more feeble than mine? Yet precisely because of my feebleness You have been pleased to grant my least, my most childish desires, and now You will to realize those others, more vast than the universe.

"I understand that love alone imparts life to all the members of the Church, so that should love ever fail, apostles would no longer preach the Gospel and martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. I realize that love includes every vocation, that love is all things, that love is eternal, reaching down through the ages and stretching to the uttermost limits of earth!

"O Jesus, my Love, my vocation is found at last — my vocation is love! Yes, I have found my place in the bosom of the Church, and this place, O my God, You Yourself have given to me : in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I will be Love!... Thus I shall be all things and my dream will be fulfilled" (*T.C.J. St*, 13).

O Lord, love alone will give value to my prayers, efficacy to my works. Love will make me eager to embrace all the mortifications and penances which the faithful observance of my rule continually offers and demands of me, as well as every opportunity for sacrifice which the actual circumstances of my life present. Give me this love, I beseech You, O Lord, so that in the bosom of the Church and in union with You I may exercise a fruitful, efficacious apostolate. "A very little of this pure love is more precious in the sight of God and of the soul, and of greater profit to the Church than are all other works together" (J.C. SC, 29,2). O my God, how I want to have this "pure love!" How I desire to strip myself generously of all selfishness and self-love; how I would like to forget myself entirely, so that I may attain to possessing a love which is so efficacious for the Church and souls!

25

APOSTOLIC ACTION

PRESENCE OF GOD - I place myself in the presence of Jesus, in order to learn from Him, the first Apostle, the Apostle par excellence, the qualities I need to make my activity of real value to souls.

MEDITATION

1. During the three years of His public life, Jesus carried out an exterior apostolate on a large scale, but His activity was never separated from His intimate union with the Father; rather, it blossomed from it : a union not limited to His hours of prayer, but a permanent, indissoluble union embracing every moment of His life. Such a union, a substantial union with God, could exist only in Christ because of the hypostatic union and the Beatific Vision which He enjoyed. Nevertheless, as far as is possible for mere creatures, we should strive to imitate this conduct of Jesus and to live in constant union with God, even while working for our brethren. In this sense the interior life is the soul of the

apostolate; a really efficacious activity, the bearer of grace to souls, can proceed only from one who lives intimately united to God. Jesus Himself has proclaimed it, "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (*Jn* 15,4).

Union with God, union with Jesus, is the preliminary and indispensable requisite for the efficacy of any apostolic life. This union is accomplished by means of sanctifying grace, it grows with the fervent reception of the sacraments and with the generous practice of the virtues; it is established more firmly and strengthened by prayer, and is consolidated and preserved by recollection and detachment. The more one's union with God increases, the more the action which flows from it will bear fruit for souls. An apostolic activity which is purely external, one which under the pretext of having important duties, neglects the exercises of the interior life—prayer and the quest for union with God—condemns itself to sterility.

2. Jesus' apostolic work, which was thoroughly impregnated with sacrifice, culminated in the supreme sacrifice of the Cross. So, too, our apostolic works, if they are to bear fruit, must sink their roots into the fertile soil of self-immolation. Apostolic action in itself demands sacrifice, either because of the fatiguing life it imposes, or because of the continual contacts with people of different mentalities, tastes, and habits, or because it can expose one to the possibility of failure and of becoming an object of derision. The apostle must accept all these difficulties with a generous heart, convinced that from them, if they are endured in union with Jesus Crucified, will come the fruit of his works. Furthermore, to be really supernatural, the exterior apostolate requires *rectitude of intention*: that is, the works must be undertaken *solely* for God's glory, and in a manner that is conformable to His will, as expressed by the superiors of one's Institute and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. To attain to this purity of intention, the apostle must die, day by day, to self-love and vainglory, to the tendency to draw upon himself the praises of others or to take complacency in his successes; he must die to his personal views and initiatives, to his own interests. This means a real immolation of the *ego* and will bear fruit in the apostolate in proportion to its depth. "Unless the grain

of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (*Jn* 12,24.25).

COLLOQUY

O Jesus make me understand that the greatest works of the apostolate are only useless agitation, if they do not proceed from a profound interior life. You are the true vine through which the sap of divine grace flows, and only the branch which is grafted onto You can distribute it to souls by bringing forth for them fruits of grace. What illusion is mine if, allowing myself to be carried away by the urgency of my works, I squander myself on them, neglecting to nourish and strengthen my union with You! Yet your warnings are ever before me: "Without Me, you can do nothing." Only "he who abides in Me bears much fruit." O vain agitation! O the uselessness of so many of my works, undertaken only by human activity, as if their fruit depended on my industry and ability! O my God, preserve me from such stupidity. No, I do not wish to waste my energy and lose my time in this way. What would be the value of being consecrated to You and dedicated to the apostolic life if afterwards I confined myself to a purely human activity which could be done by any professional or workman? Even those who do not believe in You devote themselves to social work: they open schools and hospitals, they print books and newspapers, and spread propaganda.... My activity must be distinguished from theirs by the interior spirit which animates it: the spirit of union with You, the spirit of prayer, of sacrifice. Only this spirit has the great power to transform poor human activity into supernatural action, into apostolate. Grant, O Lord, that my activity may be that of a vigorous branch which is firmly grafted onto You; grant that it may be impregnated with prayer, permeated with sacrifice.

Make me understand, O my Jesus, how necessary it is for me to die to myself in order to attain that complete purity of intention which should animate every true apostolate! How often I think I am moved by zeal for Your glory and the welfare of souls, when perhaps, on the contrary, I am moved, at least in great part, by my pride. I want that initiative, that work, because I find in it an

outlet for my natural tendency toward activity, for my secret hankering to put myself forward, to make myself important, to obtain praise and success. And is it not for just such motives that I so often resist obedience, the wishes, and even the expressed will of my superiors, thinking that they do not understand me, and that therefore, I can follow my own opinion in preference to theirs?

O my God, when I consider all these possible errors of my ego seen thus in Your light, how ugly, mean, hateful, and profoundly unworthy of a consecrated soul they seem! Yet if they arouse in me a feeling of horror, I do not ask You, O my God, to diminish Your light; on the contrary, I beg You to make it always more penetrating, so that I may be able to see clearly into my soul and, with the help of Your all-powerful grace, to fight energetically against these base inclinations of my ego which, like gnawing worms, threaten to ruin and destroy my apostolate. Grant me purity of intention, humility of heart, and the truth of love. Draw me to You, my God, and I shall seek none but You!

26

THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

DECEMBER TWENTY-SECOND

PRESENCE OF GOD - I place myself in the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, with an ardent desire to penetrate the infinite mystery of divine love which impelled God Himself to become "one of us."

MEDITATION

1. God is Love; everything He does, both in Himself and outside of Himself, is a work of love. Being the infinite good, He cannot love anything outside of Himself from the desire of increasing His happiness, as is the case with us; in Himself He possesses *all*. Therefore, in God, to love, and

hence to will creatures, is simply to extend, outside of Himself, His infinite good, His perfections, and to communicate to others His own Being and felicity. *Bonum diffusivum sui*, St. Thomas says. Thus God loved man with an eternal love and, loving him, called him into existence, giving him both natural and supernatural life. Through love, God not only brought man out of nothing, but chose him and elevated him to the state of divine sonship, destining him to participate in His own intimate life, in His eternal beatitude. This was the first plan of the immense charity of God with regard to man. But when man fell into sin, God, who had created him by an act of love, willed to redeem him by an even greater act of love. See then, how the mystery of the Incarnation presents itself to us as the supreme manifestation of God's *exceeding* charity toward man. "By this hath the charity of God appeared toward us, because God hath sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we may live by Him. In this is charity...He hath first loved us, and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins" (*I Jn 4,9.10*). After having given man natural life, after having destined him for the supernatural life, what more could He give him than to give Himself, His Word made flesh, for his salvation?

2. God is Love. It is not surprising, therefore, that the story of His benevolent action on behalf of man is all a poem of love, and of merciful love. The first stanza of this poem was our eternal predestination to the vision and to the fruition of the intimate life of God. The second stanza relates, in an even more touching way, the sublimity of His mercy : the mystery of the Incarnation.

The sin of our first parents had destroyed God's original plan for our elevation to a supernatural state; we had forfeited our claim, and we could never atone for the sin. God could have pardoned all, but it was becoming to His holiness and infinite justice to exact an adequate satisfaction; man was absolutely incapable of providing this. Then the most sublime work of God's mercy was accomplished : one Person of the Blessed Trinity, the second, came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Behold the Word, God's only-begotten Son, "who for us men and for our salvation, descended from heaven and became incarnate" (*Credo*). The merciful love of God thus attains its highest manifesta-

tion : if there is no ingratitude and misery greater than sin, there can be no love greater than that of Him who inclines over so much ingratitude and abjection to restore it to its primal splendor. God did this, not by the intervention of a prophet or the most sublime of the angels; but He did it personally : all three Persons of the Blessed Trinity acted in the Incarnation, the end of which was to unite a human nature with the Person of the Word. In this mystery, the immensity of the love and mercy of God for man appears and shines forth.

COLLOQUY

“ O my God! make me worthy to understand something of the mystery of the burning charity which is in You, which impelled You to effect the sublime act of the Incarnation, the root and source of our salvation. O ineffable Incarnation! which brings to man, with the outpouring of love, the assurance of salvation. How ineffable is this charity! Truly, there is no greater than this, that the Word was made flesh in order to make me like unto God! You became nothing in order to make me something; You clothed Yourself like the lowliest slave to give me the garments of a King and a God! Although You took the form of a slave, You did not lessen Your substance, nor injure Your divinity, but the depths of Your humility pierce my heart and make me cry out : ‘ O incomprehensible One, made comprehensible because of me! O uncreated One, now created! O Thou who art inaccessible to mind and body, become palpable to thought and touch, by a prodigy of Thy power!... ’

“ O happy fault! not in itself, but by the power of divine mercy. O happy fault, which has disclosed the sacred, hidden depths of the abyss of love! Truly, a higher form of charity cannot be imagined.... O ineffable love! Sublime, transforming love! Blessed art Thou, O Lord, because Thou teachest me that Thou wert born for me! Oh! how glorious it is to see and feel, as I believe and feel, that Thou wert born for me! To feel this, is indeed, a delight, and the joy of joys!... O admirable God, how marvelous are Thy mercies! O uncreated God, make me worthy to know the depths of Thy love and the abyss of Thy mercy! Make me worthy to understand Thy ineffable

charity, which was transmitted to us when the Father gave Jesus Christ to us in the Incarnation" (St. Angela of Foligno).

Permit me to say, O Lord, that my mind and heart are bewildered before the abyss of Your charity! It is a mystery in which I lose myself without being able to see it to its depths. Give me, O Lord, the grace to believe firmly, unshakably in Your exceeding charity; grant that I, too, may say with complete conviction : "I have known and I have believed in the charity of God for me!" The stronger my conviction, the more shall I trust wholly in Your charity, in Your infinite merciful love.

This immense charity, this ineffable mercy, by means of Your Incarnate Word, inclines over all men without distinction. You incline over me too; Your love surrounds me, nourishes me, gives me life, and brings me to You, O my God! O Lord, may Your love invade my soul; or rather, give me the grace to know and believe in that love, which from the first moment of my existence has surrounded and possessed me.

27

THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH

DECEMBER TWENTY-THIRD

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, eternal Word, permit me to penetrate more deeply into the sublime mystery of Your Incarnation, so that my heart may always be held captive by Your infinite love.

MEDITATION

i. The Word is the second Person of the Blessed Trinity. In the bosom of the one divine nature, there are three Persons, three subsistent relations. We too, are "subsistent": "subsistence" is that which permits me to say "I," and to attribute to this "I" the various acts that I perform as a person. In God, in the divine nature, there are three relations who can say "I" in regard to the divine operations, operations which are common to all

three, because they proceed from the one single nature, possessed by all and each one of the three divine Persons. The Word possesses the same divine nature as the Father and the Holy Spirit; He possesses the same divine attributes, such as infinity, eternity, omnipotence, omniscience—all the divine grandeur and perfections belong to the Word as well as to the other two Persons. The Word performs the same divine actions as the Father and the Holy Spirit: the intimate actions of knowledge and love which constitute the very life of the Blessed Trinity, and the external acts such as creation and preservation of creatures. The Word is God! St. John the Evangelist, in the beginning of his Gospel, before speaking of the temporal birth of Jesus, presents to us the eternal generation of the Word, existing *ab aeterno* (from all eternity), in the bosom of the Father, equal to the Father in all things, but distinct from Him. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (*Jn* 1,1). The Word is the one utterance of the Father—He expresses the Father completely. The Father, in giving the Word His whole essence and divine nature, also communicates to Him all the divine activity. Thus the Word is the efficient *cause*, the first principle of all natural and supernatural life: "All things were made by Him, and without Him was made nothing that was made" (*ibid.* 1,3). But the Word, the splendor of the Father, is not only life; He is also light, the *light* which reveals the greatness and mystery of God to men: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (*ibid.* 1,4). Natural life and the life of grace, light and knowledge of God—all come from the Word, who is God, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

2. "The Word was made flesh." As God, the Word is eternal and immutable; therefore, of necessity, He always remains what He was: *manet quod erat!* But nothing prevented Him, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, from creating in time a *human nature*, which instead of having a limited, weak *ego* like ours, was completely governed by its divine *Person*. And so it was done: the human nature assumed by Him is the same as ours, but instead of belonging to a *human person*, it belongs to a *divine Person*, to the subsistent Person of the Word; therefore, even the operations and passions of this human nature belong to the Word. Since

the Incarnation, the Word has a *two-fold nature* : the unique divine nature, which He possesses in common with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and the human nature, which is of the same quality and has the same properties as ours.

The Word remains what He was—perfect God. Nevertheless, He does not disdain to assume our poor human nature, fallen through sin, “but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men and in habit found as a man” (*Phil 2,7*). This is the work of the immense charity of God, who being full of mercy for His poor creatures who had fallen into the abyss of sin, did not hesitate to decree the redemptive Incarnation of His only-begotten Son. Thus the eternal Word comes to us like the good shepherd who leaves everything and goes down into the valley to look for the lost sheep. This is the fruit of the exceeding charity with which God has loved us!

COLLOQUY

“O eternal Word! O my Savior! Thou art the divine eagle whom I love and who allurest me. Thou who, descending to this land of exile, didst will to suffer and to die, in order to bear away each single soul and plunge it into the very heart of the Blessed Trinity — Love’s eternal Home! Thou who, returning to Thy realm of light, dost still remain hidden here in our vale of tears under the appearance of the white Host, to nourish me with Thy own substance. Forgive me, O Jesus, if I tell Thee that Thy love reacheth even unto folly, and at the sight of such folly what wilt Thou but that my own heart should leap up to Thee? How could there be any limit to my trust?”

“I know well that for Thy sake the saints have made themselves foolish—being ‘eagles’ they have done great things. Too little for such mighty deeds, my folly lies in the hope that Thy love accepts me as a victim, and in my confidence that the angels and saints will help me to fly unto Thee with Thy own wings, O my divine Eagle! As long as Thou willest I shall remain with my gaze fixed upon Thee, for I long to be *fascinated* by Thy divine eyes, I long to become Love’s prey” (*T.C.J. St. 13*).

Yes, my Jesus, I have a burning desire to become the prey of Your love; I desire it to take entire possession of

me, to purify and transform me, so that You will have the joy of fully accomplishing Your sanctifying, merciful work of redemption in me.

You come to us to cure all our ills, to transform us from children of sin into children of God. But alas! how often Your infinite charity is obliged to stop before our ungrateful hearts, which close the door to You! "You came unto Your own, and Your own received You not" (cf. *Jn* 1,11). Those do not receive You who do not believe in Your love, who doubt Your infinite mercy, and do not trust in You. Your exceeding charity brought You down from heaven to us; You did not find it unbecoming, O eternal Word, to take on our poor human nature; yet, You continue to find an obstacle to Your course in that same creature, Your creature, upon whom You have showered Your favors!

O eternal Word, my Savior, grant that I may never place any obstacle to Your work. Grant that my soul may always be ready to receive Your infinitely merciful love, so that You may be able to wholly accomplish in me Your work as Savior and Sanctifier.

THE GREAT MYSTERY IS ACCOMPLISHED

DECEMBER TWENTY-FOURTH

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Incarnate Word, my Savior, teach me the lessons of wisdom contained in the mystery of Your Incarnation.

MEDITATION

i. Of all the works done by God in time and outside of Himself, the redemptive Incarnation of the Word is the greatest. It is the greatest because it has for end not a mere creature, however sublime, but God Himself, the eternal Word who, in time, assumed a human nature. It is the greatest because it is the supreme manifestation of the

merciful love of God, and the work which above all others glorifies Him; and it glorifies Him precisely in reference to charity which is His very essence. It is also the greatest of His works because of the immense good it brings to mankind. The salvation, sanctification, and eternal happiness of the whole human race depend wholly upon the Incarnation of the Word, upon Jesus, the Incarnate Word. God the Father "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted.... Who hath predestined us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ unto Himself.... In whom we have redemption...the remission of sins according to the riches of His grace.... God hath quickened us together in Christ...and hath raised us up together, and hath made us sit together in the heavenly places, through Christ Jesus" (*Eph 1,4-5.7 – 2,5.6*). Jesus, the Incarnate Word, is the one source of our salvation and our sanctification. Without Him, man would not be able to call God by the sweet name of Father; he could not love Him as a son loves his father, nor could he hope to be admitted to His intimacy : there would be no grace, no Beatific Vision. Without Jesus, man would be imprisoned within the limits of a purely human life, deprived of every supernatural horizon, in time and in eternity.

2. God's greatest work, the Incarnation of the Word, destined to enlighten and save the whole world, takes place in obscurity and silence, and under the most humble and most human conditions. Caesar's edict obliges Mary and Joseph to leave their little home in Nazareth and undertake a journey. They travel on foot like the poor, in spite of the discomfort of Mary's condition. They do not think of objecting to the trip; they make no complaint, but obey with promptness and simplicity. He who commands is a man, but their profound spirit of faith discovers God's will in the command of the pagan emperor. And they go, trusting in God's Providence; God knows, God will provide : "To them that love God, all things work together unto good" (*Rom 8,28*). In Bethlehem there is no room for them; they are obliged to take shelter in a hillside cave. The poverty of this refuge for animals does not dismay or scandalize them. They know that the Child who is about to be born is the Son of God; but they

also know that God's works are entirely different from man's! And if God wishes His greatest work to be accomplished here, in this wretched stable, in utter poverty, Mary and Joseph embrace His will! The least bit of human reasoning would be enough to confuse and disturb them, and arouse doubts. Mary and Joseph are extremely humble; hence, they are docile and filled with faith in God. And God, as is His custom, made use of what is humble and despicable in the eyes of the world to accomplish the greatest of His works: the Incarnation of the Word.

COLLOQUY

O my God, what a luminous, sublime contrast! O eternal Word, Incarnate Word, source of life, salvation, grace, and sanctity! O Redemption and Light of all mankind! You are about to show Yourself to the world! All creation should exult, all nature should tremble with joy, all men should run to You, their God, their King and Savior! Instead, You choose to be born in secret, solitude, and silence, and all is pre-arranged to this end. "While all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, Thy almighty Word leapt down from heaven, from Thy royal throne...into the midst of the land" (*Wis 18,14.15*). O my God, You came down from heaven to save the world, and the world which is Yours, the work of Your hands, has not even a lodging to offer You! Who is this Child who has no house, however poor and wretched, to be born in? There was the humble little house at Nazareth ready to welcome You; Mary had prepared it with much love, but You did not want even that, and You dispose everything in such a way that You have not even a place to lay Your Head. Bethlehem is crowded with visitors; there is a little corner for everyone except You, the royal Guest, the Creator, the King of the universe. For You, there is no place. You come to us like a poor pilgrim, walking the streets, not knowing where to spend the night. No one notices You, no one is aware of Your imminent appearance, no one could suppose that this humble woman from Nazareth is about to give the world its Savior, its King and its God. Only Mary and Joseph know and

adore in silence. Nothing disturbs them; their hearts are firm in faith, anchored in perfect confidence; they are sure of You and of Your promises.

O Incarnate Word, impress this lesson deeply in my heart and help me to understand the mysterious ways of Your love. You are coming to save and sanctify me, but You want to accomplish Your work in me by means of the most humble, ordinary, and insignificant circumstances. Give me the humility, faith, and blind trust of Mary and Joseph, that I may know how to recognize and adore Your work, adhere to it with docility and love, and know that You love to surround Your works with humility, silence and secrecy.

29

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

CHRISTMAS DAY — THE SAVIOR HAS APPEARED

PRESENCE OF GOD - Behold, I am at the feet of my Incarnate God, who has become a Child for love of me! I adore, I thank, I love!

MEDITATION

1. God is charity : He has loved us with an everlasting love! "I think God must have said to Himself: Man does not love Me because he does not see Me; I will show Myself to him and thus make him love Me. God's love for man was very great, and had been great *from all eternity*, but this love had not yet become visible.... Then, it really appeared; the Son of God let Himself be seen as a tiny Babe in a stable, lying on a little straw" (St. Alphonsus). This is the mystery of the Nativity; this is St. Paul's exultant cry : "The grace of God our Savior hath appeared to all men.... The goodness and kindness of God our Savior appeared" (*Ep 1st and 2nd Masses : Ti 2,11-15 – 3,4-7*). These are the blessed tidings "of great joy" brought by the Angel to the shepherds; "This day is born to you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!"

(*Gosp* 1st Mass : *Lk* 2,1-14). The texts in today's liturgy, following each other in tones of increasing exultation, sing the praises of the sweet Child Jesus, the Word made Man, living and breathing among us : "Whom have you seen, O shepherds? Speak and tell us who has appeared on earth? We saw the new-born Child and choirs of angels loudly praising the Lord" (*RB*). "Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth exult in the presence of the Lord!" (*RM*). Our God is here in the midst of us, He has become one of us. "A Child is born to us, a Son is given to us.... His name is Admirable, God, Prince of peace, Father of the world to come!.... Rejoice, O daughter of Sion, sing, O daughter of Jerusalem.... Rejoice, ye inhabitants of the earth! Come, ye nations, adore the Lord!" (*RB*). Come! Come, adore, listen, and rejoice! Jesus, the Word of the Father, speaks to us a wonderful word : God loves you!

2. The three Christmas Masses place before us a majestic picture : the touching description of the birth of Jesus as man alternates with the sublime one of the eternal birth of the Word in the bosom of the Father; and there are also allusions to Christ's birth in our souls by grace. However, this three-fold birth is but one single manifestation of God who is Charity. No one on earth could know God's love; but the Word, who is in the bosom of the Father, knows it and can reveal it to us. The Word was made flesh and has shown to us the love of God. Through the Word, God's incomprehensible, invisible charity is made manifest and tangible in the sweet little Babe, who from the manger holds out His arms to us. Today's Preface solemnly declares it : "O eternal God, because of the mystery of the Word made flesh, the light of Thy glory hath shone anew upon the eyes of our mind : that while we acknowledge Him to be God visible, He may draw us to the love of things invisible." Yes, this "Child, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger" is our God, who, for us, has made Himself visible : our God, who shows us in the most concrete way His infinite charity. One cannot contemplate little Jesus without being captivated and enraptured by the infinite love which has given Him to us. The Infant Jesus reveals to us God's love, He manifests it in the clearest, most touching way. St. Paul says in the Epistle of the Third Mass (*Heb* 1,1-12) : "God, in these days hath spoken

to us by His Son...the brightness of His glory, and the figure of His substance." Jesus, the Incarnate Word, in His silence as a helpless Child, speaks to us and reveals to us the substance of God : His charity.

COLLOQUY

"O all-powerful and eternal Trinity! O sweet, ineffable charity! Who would not be inflamed by such love? What heart could keep itself from being consumed by You?

"O abyss of charity! You have so closely bound Yourself to Your creatures that it seems that You cannot live without them! Nevertheless You are our God! You have no need of us. Our good adds nothing to Your greatness, for You are immutable. Our misfortune cannot harm You, O God, sovereign, eternal Goodness! Then what urges You to such mercy? Love—for You have no obligation toward us and no need of us. Then, O infinite God, who brings You to me, a little creature? No one but Yourself, O Fire of Love! Love alone has always urged You, and love still urges You!

"O sovereign sweetness, You have deigned to unite Yourself to our bitterness; You, brilliance, with our darkness; You, wisdom, with our stupidity; You, life, with death; You, who are infinite, with us who are finite!" (St. Catherine of Siena).

O sweet Incarnate Word, O most amiable Infant Jesus, behold me at last at Your feet; let me contemplate You; permit me to delight in Your beauty, Your goodness, Your immense charity! In this little Child who smiles, and holds out His baby arms to me, I find Your infinite love, living, breathing—for this Babe is You, O my God! How can I ever thank You for Your exceeding love? How can I ever make You a return of love?

"You, who are so great and rich, have made Yourself little and poor for us! You chose to be born far from home, in a stable, to be wrapped in swaddling clothes, to be nourished at Your Virgin Mother's breast, to be laid in a manger between an ox and an ass. Today is the dawn of the new redemption, of the old restoration, of eternal happiness; today, the heavens have distilled honey throughout the whole world! Then, O my soul, kiss this divine manger,

press your lips to the Infant's feet and embrace them. Meditate on the shepherds watching their flocks, contemplate the angelic hosts, prepare to join in the heavenly melody, singing with your lips and with your heart : ' Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good will ' " (St. Bonaventure) !

30

BELIEVING IN LOVE

DECEMBER TWENTY-SIXTH

PRESENCE OF GOD - O most sweet Infant Jesus, permit me to enter into the abyss of Your infinite love, so that I may believe in it with all my strength.

MEDITATION

1. When creating us, God loved us so much that He made us to His own image and likeness; when redeeming us, He loved us so much that He made Himself to our image! Christmas is pre-eminently the feast of love—the love which was revealed, not in the sufferings of the Cross, but in the loveliness of a little Child, our God, stretching out His arms to make us understand that He loves us.

If the consideration of God's infinite justice can rouse us to greater fidelity in His service, how much more does the consideration of His infinite love incite us! St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus used to say, " Fear makes me shrink, while under love's sweet rule I not only advance, I fly " (T.C.J. *St*, 8). Jesus, the divine Infant, is here in the midst of us, to replace the old law of fear with the new law of love.

To run in the path of God's commandments, we must be thoroughly convinced of God's infinite love for us, and precisely in order to reach this conviction, we immerse ourselves in contemplation of the mystery of the Nativity. In fact, when we see Jesus, the eternal Word, become a child for us, and from the very first moment of His earthly life, gladly taking on all our miseries, even to the point

of having nothing but a manger for a cradle, with a little hay for bedding, and poor swaddling clothes for covering... Oh, we can no longer doubt His love. God loves us! Jesus loves us! Yes, let us repeat it again and again, "We have known and have believed the charity which God hath to us" (*I Jn 4,16*). Lord, I believe in Your love for me! Lord, increase my faith!

2. God is Love! An immense treasure is contained in these words, and it is the treasure which God discloses to souls who devoutly contemplate the Incarnate Word. Until we comprehend that God is infinite love and infinite benevolence, who gives Himself and extends Himself to all men in order to communicate to them His goodness and His happiness, our spiritual life has still just begun; it has not yet developed or deepened. Only when the soul, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, has penetrated the mystery of divine charity, only then does its spiritual life attain to full maturity.

We cannot better understand the infinite love of our God, than by drawing near to the humble manger where He lies, made flesh for us. "The virtues and attributes of God are known in God, through the mysteries of God made man," says St. John of the Cross (cf. *SC*, 37,2); and among these attributes the first is charity, which constitutes the very essence of God. From the silent, loving contemplation of the Infant Jesus, there is easily aroused in us a more profound and penetrating *sense* of His infinite love: we no longer merely believe, but in a certain way, we know by experience God's love for us. Then our will fully accepts what faith teaches; it accepts it with love, with all its strength, and our soul believes unreservedly in God's infinite love. God is Love; this truth, fundamental for all Christian life, has penetrated to the depths of the soul; it feels it, it lives it, because it has, so to say, almost touched it in its Incarnate God. One who so believes in infinite love will know how to give itself to Him without measure: to give itself totally.

COLLOQUY

Lord, I believe in Your love for me! How could I still doubt it?

" You have come down from the great height of Your divinity to the mire of our humanity, because the lowness of my intellect could neither understand nor behold such height. In order that my littleness might see Your greatness, You became a little child, concealing the greatness of Your Deity in the littleness of our humanity. And so You manifest Yourself to us in the Word, Your only-begotten Son; thus have I known You, O abyss of charity! O blush with shame, blind creature, so exalted and honored by your God, not to know that God, in His inestimable charity, came down from the height of His infinite Deity to the lowness of your humanity! O inestimable love! What do you say, O my soul? I say to You, eternal Father, I beseech You, most benign God, that You give us and all Your servants a share in the fire of Your charity " (St. Catherine of Siena).

O God, how great is my need to know Your infinite love! To know in order to believe, to believe in order to love, to love in order to give myself entirely to You, with no reservation, just as You have given Yourself entirely to me.

O my God, how much I want to repay You for this inestimable gift! Alas! You who are all, have given me all, whereas I, who am nothing, can give You only this nothing! Yet how slow, indolent, and miserly I am in giving You this nothing, how much I try to spare myself, to give myself with measure, with prudence.... Oh, Your love knew no measure; it did not calculate the infinite distance between the Creator and the creature, but surpassed, exceeded, and engulfed this distance by uniting indissolubly human nature with the divine Person of the Word. How true it is that love knows no obstacles, overcomes everything, and adapts itself to everything in order to attain its end! O loving Infant Jesus, my God, my Savior, give me the grace of an ever-increasing understanding of the greatness and depth of Your love; make me penetrate this boundless abyss, whose bottom no creature can ever touch! The more I enter into it, the more I feel new strength born in me, a new impulse which urges me irresistibly to give myself wholly to you. You know how necessary it is for this strength to grow and become established in me, so as to make me truly generous, ready for every sacrifice, every gift of myself. O Lord, grant that I may understand Your

infinite charity! Give me a firm faith in it, and never let me refuse anything to Your love : this is the gift I beg of You on the day of Your Nativity!

31

RETURNING LOVE FOR LOVE

DECEMBER TWENTY-SEVENTH

PRESENCE OF GOD - I recollect myself before the humble manger : I contemplate the divine Infant, begging Him to teach me how to give Him love for love.

MEDITATION

i. To assume human nature and hence unite Himself to it, the eternal Word concealed His divinity, majesty, power, and infinite wisdom : behold the divine Infant who can neither speak nor move by Himself, who in all things depends entirely upon His Mother, His creature, to whom He looks for everything.

Let us try to understand this mystery in order to apply it to our poor lives. True love overcomes every obstacle, accepts every situation, and makes any sacrifice in order to unite itself with Him whom it loves. If we wish to be united to God, we must do exactly what the Word did to become united to human nature; He followed a path of prodigious self-abasement, of infinite humility! Here there opens before us the path of the "nothing," of total abnegation. "All, nothing; all, nothing!" This was the lullaby sung by St. John of the Cross to his God made man. "In order to possess everything, desire to possess nothing" (*AS I*, 13,11). Compared to the infinite humiliations of the eternal Word made flesh, this path should not seem to us too austere and exacting. To repay His infinite love, to prove our love for Him, let us resolve to strip ourselves generously of everything that could hinder our union with Him; above all, let us divest ourselves of self-love, pride, vanity, all our

righteous pretensions. What a striking contrast between these vain pretenses of our "ego" and the touching humility of the Incarnate Word! *Sic nos amantem, quis non redamaret?* Who would not love Him who loves us so much? (*Adeste Fidelis*).

2. Out of love for us, Jesus not only stripped Himself of all His greatness and majesty, but from the very first moment of His earthly life, He embraced every possible privation. Let us also strip ourselves voluntarily for love of Him. Let us strip ourselves of our love of riches, of our attachment to our material well-being, our comforts, and everything that is superfluous. We are already under obligation to do this by our vow or promise of poverty, but even without this obligation, how can we calmly lead a life of ease when our God has voluntarily embraced so much poverty and hardship? Let us consider how the Holy Child Jesus lived : rough straw, insufficient coverings, a stable for His house, a manger for His cradle.... Looking at the manger, one feels that the way of "nothing" does not ask too much : "Strive to seek not the best of temporal things, but the worst. Strive thus to desire to enter into complete detachment and emptiness and poverty, with respect to everything that is in this world, for Christ's sake" (J.C. *AS I*, 13,6).

If we want to repay Jesus' infinite love, let us strip ourselves generously of everything for Him, not only material goods, but also every attachment to creatures, for, as St. John of the Cross teaches, "To love is to labor, to detach and strip oneself for God's sake, of all that is not God" (J.C. *AS II*, 5,7). The way of "nothing" takes us quickly to Bethlehem, where God has united Himself to our human nature in the most intimate, personal way, there where He awaits us to unite our souls to Himself.

COLLOQUY

O my sweet Jesus, grant that I, even in a small way, may be able to repay You for Your infinite love. Out of love for me, my God, You became man; from Lord, a slave; from rich, poor; from omnipotent, a little helpless Babe....

Oh! grant that for love of You, I may courageously and generously follow the path of the "nothing," of total despoliation.

For love of me You are stripped of Your majesty and grandeur. You conceal every sign of Your divinity, You make Yourself little and humble, in order to become "mine," so that I may not only know You, but that I may possess You *entirely*, since You give me—not only in Bethlehem, but every day in the Holy Eucharist—all Your divinity, all Your humanity! I, Your miserable creature, who am so loved and favored by You, shall I not know how, for love of You, to become wholly Yours and strip myself of my self-love?

"O divine Word, become a Child for love of me, teach me to become a child for love of You. Oh! what great love and power You show me by becoming a little Babe, willing to keep silence, and to have need of everything, like other children! You were like unto us in all things—sin excepted. To show me my misery, the first sound You uttered was a cry, fulfilling the words of Wisdom : *Primam vocem simile omnibus emisi plorans*, like all others I came into the world crying. And what an example You give me! When You place Your tiny limbs on the manger straw and rest Your head on a stone, You teach me the lesson of Your humility and poverty. O most sweet Infant Jesus, grant that I may be like unto You in all things" (cf. St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

O God, infinite, eternal wealth, how You have abased Yourself for love of me! And I, who have promised You poverty, how far I still am from being really poor, from fervently practicing this poverty which You love so much!

O Lord, sweet Incarnate Word, I wish to return by my love Your infinite love. I wish to prove by my actions that I really love You. What shall I do for You, O sweet Jesus? Out of love for You, I will strip myself of everything that is not You, for I desire nothing but You, and I want to become like You, who being God, became man. Make me, who am proud, become humble. You, who are the Ruler and Lord of the whole universe, became poor and needy; make me, who love my comfort, become a sincere lover of true poverty. Humility and poverty will start me on the road of the "nothing," and then, emptied of myself and all things, I shall at last be able to love You with all my strength, and to say with perfect sincerity :

“ Lord, I love You more than myself and above all things. ”

32

GLORY TO GOD

DECEMBER TWENTY-EIGHTH

PRESENCE OF GOD - I unite myself in spirit to the angelic choir singing the glory of the Lord over the fields of Bethlehem.

MEDITATION

1. The Word was made flesh for our salvation and happiness. However, the primary end of the Incarnation is God's glory, which is the end of all His works. He, the one absolute good, cannot will anything apart from His glory. By sending His only Son to save men, He wished to glorify His infinite goodness, to glorify Himself in our salvation, accomplished by means of this supreme act of His infinitely merciful love. The work of creation glorifies God in His wisdom and omnipotence; the work of the Incarnation glorifies Him in His charity. And as God could not manifest greater mercy and charity than by giving His Son for our salvation, so none of His works can give Him greater glory than the Incarnation of the Word. Hence, the angels sang at the birth of the Redeemer, “ Glory to God in the highest! ” The Church takes up this hymn and amplifies it in the Gloria which is sung in every feast-day Mass; “ We praise You, we bless You, we glorify You, we give You thanks for Your great glory. ” At no time more than at Christmas do we feel the need of repeating this song, more with our heart than with our lips. The soul feels more than ever incited to praise its God, so immense, so great, so beautiful, but also so good, so merciful, so full of charity. Song does not suffice : the soul would wish to be transformed into an incessant “ praise of His glory. ”

2. We have been predestinated in Christ "that we may be unto the praise of His glory" (*Eph 1,11.12*). As Christians, we are, of ourselves, proofs of Christ's glory; our elevation to a supernatural state, our sanctification, and eternal happiness have for their supreme end the glory of Him who has redeemed us. Christians, and with greater reason, consecrated souls, must act in such a way that all their works and their whole lives may be a praise of glory to the Trinity and to Christ Our Lord. Today the Church presents to us the "first fruits" of these "true Christians," those who by their works, and even by their death, have sung the glory of the Redeemer. We see them in the retinue of the divine Child, like angels on earth, who unite their hymn to that of the angels in heaven. St. Stephen, the protomartyr, teaches us that a faithful, loving soul must be ready to give up everything, itself and even its life, for the glory of its God. St. John the Evangelist, "the blessed Apostle to whom heavenly secrets were revealed" and who penetrated so deeply into the mystery of God as infinite charity, shows us that love for our neighbor "is the precept of the Lord; if this only be done, it is enough" (*RB*) to give glory to Him who is infinite Love.

The Holy Innocents, "the first tender buds of the Church," demonstrate that the voice of innocence is a hymn of glory to God, resembling that of the angels: "From the mouths of babes and sucklings you have perfected praise, O God!" But this hymn becomes much more powerful and eloquent when it is united to the sacrifice of their blood: "The martyred Innocents confessed God's glory, not in word but by their death" (*RB*). May our life also be a hymn of praise to God, "not by words, but by works."

COLLOQUY

"May my voice loudly resound: with attentive mind may I contemplate You, my God, and with my words sing Your praises; it is right that a creature praise its Creator, for You created and redeemed us that we might praise You, although You do not need our praise. You are incomprehensible Power and have no need of anyone, but are sufficient in Yourself. You are great, O Lord, my God, Your power is great and the works of Your wisdom are

without number. You are great, O Lord, my God, and worthy of all praise. May my soul love You, my tongue praise You, my hand write of You, and may my whole soul be occupied in these holy exercises. Satisfy me ever with this sweet food, so that I may praise You with a mighty voice, with all my heart and all my powers, singing Your praise sweetly, joyfully, and fervently, O God!

“ ‘O my soul, bless the Lord, and let all that is within me bless His holy Name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget His innumerable favors! ’ Let us praise this God whom the angels praise, before whom the Dominations prostrate to adore, who is feared by the Powers and in whose honor the Cherubim and Seraphim continually sing : Holy! Holy! Holy! Let us join our voices to those of the angels and saints, and let us praise the Lord with the fullness of our powers ” (St. Augustine).

Yes, my God, my Redeemer, and my Savior, I desire to praise You eternally, and until I go to praise Your glory with the angels and saints in heaven, I want to begin to praise You here below, not only with my tongue, but with my deeds, with my whole life. “ In order to be a praise of glory, I must love You with a pure, disinterested love, without seeking myself in the sweetness of Your love; I must love You above all Your gifts. Now, how shall I desire and effectively will good to You, except by fulfilling Your will, since this will orders all things for Your greater glory? I ought, therefore, to surrender myself completely, blindly, to that will, so that I cannot possibly will anything but what You will ” (E.T. I, 10). When Your will or Your laws ask me to sacrifice myself for love of You and for Your glory, grant that I may never shrink from it, but be ever ready to give myself wholly, even to the supreme sacrifice of my life.

PEACE TO MEN

DECEMBER TWENTY-NINTH

PRESENCE OF GOD - I place myself at the feet of the Infant Jesus to meditate on the angels' hymn : " Peace on earth to men of good will " (*Lk 2,14*).

MEDITATION

1. At Bethlehem the angels announced two things : glory to God and peace to men; the one corresponds to the other. No one glorifies God as much as that little Babe lying on the straw. He alone, being the eternal Word, can give God the perfect, infinite praise that is worthy of Him. And no one more than Jesus, our Savior, brings peace to men; making reparation for sin, He reconciles man with His Creator and establishes a new covenant between them : the Creator will become Father, and man, His son.

Something similar is verified in our daily life. Those who obey God's law enjoy peace; observing the divine law they also glorify God. The glory of God corresponds perfectly to the peace of men. But we are treating of that peace which comes only from Jesus, from His grace, peace which we will seek in vain elsewhere.

" Peace is the tranquillity of order. " Order is established by the law and will of God. Those who respect this order fully, possess the plenitude of interior peace; those who depart from it, even in a slight degree, lose their peace in proportion to their deviation from it. Peace is the refreshment and repose of the soul in the midst of the struggles and sorrows of life, but this is not the only reason for which we should try to obtain and possess it. We should desire it above all because it gives glory to God.

2. The angels promised peace " to men of good will. " Our will is " good " when it is upright, docile, and resolute. It is *upright* when it is sincerely and entirely oriented toward

good; *docile*, when it is always ready to follow every indication of God's will; *resolute*, when it is prompt to adhere to the will of God, even though difficulties and obstacles arise, and sacrifices are required. The Lord is continually urging us to generosity and abnegation in all the circumstances of life, even the smallest ones. We must give ourselves to God without hesitation, certain that if God asks anything of us He will also give us the strength to carry out His wishes. Such was the conduct of the shepherds; as soon as they heard the message of the angel, they left all, their flocks and their rest, and "came with haste [to Bethlehem] where they found . . . the Infant lying in the manger" (*Lk 2,16*). They were the first to find Jesus and to taste His peace.

St. Teresa of Jesus says, "Holy peace consists in a union with God's will, of such a kind that no dissension arises between the will of God and the soul, but they are both one — not in words or in desires alone but in works. When a soul finds that by doing something it can serve its Spouse better, it listens to no objections raised by its mind, nor to any fears . . . but allows faith to act, and considers not its own profit nor its own tranquillity" (*T.J. Con*, 3). This is perfect "good will." Mary and Joseph are unsurpassable models of it. Despite the obscurity of the mystery and the great sacrifices entailed, they clung to the divine plan in total abandonment, and had the supreme joy of receiving the King of Heaven in their arms. To the greatest good will corresponds the greatest union with God, and the deepest peace and joy.

COLLOQUY

I give You thanks, O Jesus, for the infinite glory which You give to Your divine Father, making up for all the inability and insufficiency of Your poor creatures! You are the perfect praise of glory of the Blessed Trinity, the splendor of Their glory: praise and thanksgiving I render to You, O Lord! You could have glorified Your Father without caring for us who had offended Him. What need did God have of our happiness and welfare? But You, the most merciful, wanted to glorify Your Father precisely by obtaining salvation for us and giving us peace. Oh! how much I long for that peace which You came to bring into the world!

You alone can give it to me, You alone can wholly pacify my poor heart, which is too often torn between the demands of Your divine love and the violence of my passions or the attractions of the world.

O Lord, give me Your peace; let it establish Your kingdom in me and make me a praise of glory of Your Holy Name. But it is Your will that, while I hope for everything from Your grace and mercy, I should not fail to labor assiduously to obtain this Your great gift.

You will give me peace if I have "good will": a sincere will, which clings strictly to the good, without duplicity or artifice, without secondary ends or compromises. O Lord, give me this upright will which never wanders from the good and true; even when the truth stings, and discloses all my weaknesses, give me courage to love it, to accept it wholly, just as it is, and to act accordingly. O Lord, I also want my will to be submissive to the smallest sign from You, like a light sailboat which follows every breath of wind with docility. Alas, my will is still so tenacious, so obstinate and hard to bend, so firm in its stand! Make it supple, O sweetest Jesus, who came down from heaven to earth to carry out Your Father's will.

Strengthen my will also, so that I may be enabled to conquer every repugnance, every vacillation and hesitation, especially when I have to overcome difficulties and face sacrifice. O Lord, I desire to have an upright, resolute will, that I may go straight to You, with the swiftness of an arrow; a will as supple as a wave which obeys the wind, that I may follow every indication of Your will. Then there will be no division between my will and Yours; there will be perfect union, perfect peace. O Jesus, what a high ideal You have given man, whom You have redeemed! Man was living in sin, and was therefore as far away from God as sin is from infinite perfection. By your precious merits You not only raised him from the abyss in which he lay, but called him to union with God. By Your mediation, the Master and Judge becomes the Father, Friend, and Spouse of the soul of good will!

O Jesus, how much You have given us, how much You have given me! Eternal praise be to You!

A SIGN OF CONTRADICTION

SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

PRESENCE OF GOD - The world is made up of friends and enemies of Jesus. O Lord, grant that I may be one of the former, and one of the most loving of them.

MEDITATION

1. Today's Mass is an echo of Christmas, but while it speaks of peace and joy, it also has a note of deep sadness. The Gospel (*Lk* 2,33-40) suddenly transports us to the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, forty days after His birth, and repeats Simeon's prophecy, "Behold this Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted."

The Son of God became man for all men; He brings and offers salvation to all, but many will not receive it. This is the great mystery of human freedom. God has made man intelligent and free; He offers him all the treasures of salvation and sanctity contained in the infinite merits of Jesus Christ; man is free to accept or refuse. This is our tremendous responsibility. Jesus came to save us, to sanctify us, to give Himself entirely to our souls. He is ready to do it, He wants to do it, and yet He will not do it until we *freely* accept His infinite gift, until we correspond to His loving solicitation with the *free* gift of our will. "God never forces anyone; He takes what we give Him, but does not give Himself wholly until He sees that we are giving ourselves wholly to Him" (*T.J. Way*, 28).

The prophecy of Simeon was addressed directly to the Virgin Mother. "And thy own soul a sword shall pierce." The bloody vision of the Cross is thus mingled unexpectedly with the charming scene of the Nativity, reminding us that the tender Babe of Bethlehem is the divine Lamb who will one day be immolated for the salvation of the world.

2. Among all those present when the Child Jesus was presented in the Temple, there were only two who recognized

the Savior, the aged Simeon and the prophetess Anna. Of Simeon it is said : " He was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was in him " (*Lk 2,25*); and of Anna : " She departed not from the Temple, by fastings and prayers serving night and day." Behold the characteristics of souls well disposed to accept the redemptive work of Jesus : rectitude of mind and will, sincere longing for God, recollection, prayer, mortification. The more profound these dispositions become, the more the soul opens itself to the divine action. The light of the Holy Spirit enables it to recognize in Jesus its Redeemer and its Sanctifier, and Jesus can wholly accomplish His work in it. St. Paul's magnificent words in today's Epistle (*Gal 4,1-7*) apply to such souls in a special way : " And because you are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying : Abba, Father!" And the Apostle says to every Christian, to every soul redeemed by Jesus' Blood, " Now you are not a servant, but a son. And if a son, an heir also through God." Unfortunately, not ~~all~~ Christians live as true sons of God; in Baptism they have received the " adoption of sons," but they do not make their deeds correspond to this immense, gratuitous gift, the fruit of the merits of Jesus.

When, on the other hand, a soul generously corresponds with God's action, He takes total possession of it, and the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, cries out from the depths of its heart, " Abba, Father."

COLLOQUY

O my God, what responsibility men have when they consider Your great gifts, and especially the Incarnation of Your only-begotten Son, who became man for our salvation!

" Oh, how the very greatness of His favor will condemn those who are ungrateful! Do come to the help of such, my God! O children of men, how long will you be hard of heart and fight against this most gentle Jesus? What is this? Is it possible that our wickedness will prevail against Him? No, for human life is cut short like the flower of the grass, and the Son of the Virgin will come and pass that terrible sentence.... Blessed are they who at that

dread moment shall rejoice with You, O my Lord and my God.

"O my Lord, how shall I ask You for favors, I who have served You so ill and have hardly been able to keep what You have already given? How can You have any confidence in one who has so often betrayed You? What, then, shall I do, Comfort of the comfortless, and Help of all who seek help from You? Can it be better to keep silence about my necessities, hoping that You will relieve them? No, indeed, for You, my Lord and my Joy, knowing how many they are, and how it will alleviate them to speak to You about them, bid us to pray to You and promise that You will not fail to give.

"What, then, can one who is as wretched as I, ask of You? 'That Thou wilt give to me, my God,' as St. Augustine said, 'so that I may give to Thee, to repay Thee some part of all that I owe Thee; that Thou wilt remember that I am Thy handiwork; and that I may know who my Creator is, and so may love Him'" (*T.J. Exc*, 3-5).

But it is I, O Lord, above all, who am forgetful and do not correspond as I should to Your infinite gifts!

O gentle pilgrim of love, You stand at the door and wait! How many doors in Bethlehem were closed to You: there was no room for You except in a wretched stable. And is not my heart still more wretched, more squalid, more unworthy of You than that poor stable? And yet, if I open it to You, You will not disdain to make it Your dwelling and the place of Your repose, as You did the stable where You were born. O my Jesus, give me the grace to open my heart wide to You, to adhere with all the strength of my will to Your grace, to give You all my liberty, because henceforth I desire but one liberty: the liberty to love You with all my strength, to give myself wholly to You. O Lord, how much You have loved us, and how few are those that love You! Grant that at least these few may be truly faithful to You, and that I also may be of their number.

LET US MAKE GOOD USE OF TIME

DECEMBER THIRTY-FIRST

PRESENCE OF GOD - On the last day of the year, I recollect myself in the presence of the Child Jesus, to examine in the light of eternity the value of time.

MEDITATION

1. Time passes and does not return. God has assigned to each of us a definite time in which to fulfill His divine plan for our soul; we have only this time and shall have no more. Time ill spent is lost forever. Our life is made up of this uninterrupted, continual flow of time, which never returns. In eternity, on the contrary, time will be no more; we shall be established forever in the degree of love which we have reached now, in time. If we have attained a high degree of love, we shall be fixed forever in that degree of love and glory; if we possess only a slight degree, that is all we shall have throughout eternity. No further progress will be possible when time has ended. "Therefore, whilst we have time, let us work good to all men" (*Gal 6,10*). "We must give every moment its full amount of love, and make each passing moment eternal, by giving it value for eternity" (Sr. Carmela of the Holy Spirit, O.C.D.).¹ This is the best way to use the time given us by God. Charity allows us to adhere to God's will with submission and love and thus at the close of life we shall

¹ Sr. Carmela of the Holy Spirit, a Discalced Carmelite Nun who died July 23, 1949, was a soul of an exceptional interior life, some of whose writings were published by FATHER GABRIEL OF ST. MARY MAGDALEN, O.C.D. toward the end of 1950 in his *Revista di vita spirituale* (See Nos. 1 and 2). In 1954 her life was published together with more of her writings and some notes of direction from Father Gabriel, who had been her spiritual director in Carmel. Cf. *Sr. Carmela of the Holy Spirit*, Carmel of St. Joseph, Rome.

have realized God's plan for our soul; we shall have reached the degree of love which God expects from each one of us and with which we shall love and glorify Him for all eternity.

2. The growth of charity depends upon meritorious acts, that is, good works done under the influence of charity. Every good act merits an increase of charity, which may be given to the soul at once or withheld until the end of life, according to whether the act had been performed with all the love of which the soul was capable, or whether, on the contrary, it was performed with less vigor, generosity, and carefulness than was possible at that moment. In the first case, the increase of charity comes like interest which is immediately accrued to the capital, and which then bears interest together with it. In the second case, it is like interest which is kept separate from the capital and hence does not increase with it, even though it remains the property of the one who has acquired it.

In order that the merit of our good works, that is, the increase of charity which we have merited by them, be granted immediately, it is necessary that these works be done with all the love possible, that is, with all the good will and generosity of which the soul is capable. Then it is as if the soul opens to receive the increase of love it has merited; and this is added at once to the capital of charity already possessed, immediately increasing its degree and intensity.

We have only the short day of this earthly life in which to grow in love, and if we wish to derive from it the greatest possible profit, we must overcome our natural inertia and carry out our good works "with our whole heart." Then love will increase immeasurably and we shall be able to say to Our Lord like St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus : "Your love has grown with me and now it is an abyss, the depth of which I am unable to sound" (*St*, 12). We must, then, make haste while we still have time, for "the night cometh when no man can work" (*Jn* 9,4).

COLLOQUY

O Lord, as I look back on the year just passed, a year given me by Your divine Providence in which to increase my love of You, I can only grieve over myself and say to

You : " How little I have loved You, my God! How badly I have spent my time!"

" How late have my desires become enkindled, and how early, Lord, did You go in search of me, calling me to spend myself wholly in Your service! Did You perchance, Lord, forsake the wretched or turn from the poor beggar who sought to approach You? Can it be, Lord, that there is any limit to Your wonders or to Your mighty works? O my God and my Mercy! Now will You be able to show Your mercies in Your handmaiden. How powerful You are, great God! Now it will become clear, Lord, if my soul, looking upon the time it has lost, is right in its belief that You, in a moment, can turn its loss to gain. I seem to be talking foolishly, for it is usual to say that time lost can never be recovered.

" Blessed be my God! O Lord, I recognize Your great power. If You are mighty, as indeed You are, what is impossible for You who can do all things?

" Well do You know, my God, that in the midst of all my miseries I have never ceased to recognize Your great power and mercy. May it prove of avail to me that I have not offended You in this. Restore the time I have lost, my God, by granting me Your grace both in the present and in the future, that I may appear before You wearing the wedding garment, for You can do this if You so will " (*T.J. Exc*, 4).

On my part, O Lord, I can think of no better way to make up for the time I have lost than to try with all my might to increase my love. Yes, my love will grow if, for Your sake, I fulfill all my duties and perform all my good works " with all my heart " and " with all my good will. " Alas! I am so weak, so careless, so indolent! I am inclined to flee from exerting myself; I try to avoid making sacrifices. My nature always seeks what is easiest, what is least tiring, and soon falls into negligence and laziness. Help me, O Lord, and strengthen my love by Your almighty power. What I do for You is so little; grant, O my God, that I may at least do it with all the love possible.

THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

JANUARY FIRST

PRESENCE OF GOD - I draw near You, Divine Babe, in order to receive the first drops of Your most Precious Blood in my soul.

MEDITATION

1. The *Magnificat antiphon* of First Vespers of the Feast sums up perfectly the spirit of this day : " For His great love, wherewith God loved us, He sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." This liturgical solemnity unites to the consideration of God's immense charity, which illumines and dominates all the feasts of the Christmas cycle, this vision of the Incarnate Son of God in the likeness of sinful man. In order to transform us from sinners into children of God, the only Son of the Father willed to be clothed in human nature, thereby putting on our sinful flesh and submitting to all its most humiliating consequences. The law of circumcision could in no way affect Jesus, the Son of God, the Most Holy One; but Jesus willed to submit to it as the least of the sons of Abraham, for as St. Paul says, " It behooved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren...that He might be a propitiation for the sins of the people" (*Heb 2,17*). The rite, which Joseph may have performed in the intimacy of the family, caused the first drops of the Precious Blood to be shed from the immaculate flesh of Jesus. Thus eight days after His birth, He is beginning His redemptive mission. He has not yet spoken; the world does not know Him; but He is already shedding His Blood for the salvation of mankind.

Contemplating Him, we shall learn that deeds are better than words, that the greater the sacrifices they require, the greater the proof they give of real love. Furthermore, every undertaking must receive its baptism of blood in order to be fruitful.

2. This Feast coincides with the beginning of the civil year; the first drops of Jesus' Blood seal and consecrate

each new year, making it really the "annus Domini," the year of Our Lord, which it actually is, since time belongs to God. Our life too is God's; it has been redeemed and sanctified by the Blood of Christ.

Let us, then, begin the year by circumcising our hearts, for as St. Ambrose says, "He who has been circumcised of every vice will be judged worthy of the Lord's attention.... See how all the events which followed one another in the Old Testament prefigured what was to happen later, for the circumcision also represents purification from sins" (*RB*).

A new year, a new life! A new life indeed!—for if we circumcise in ourselves the "old man" with his vices and passions, the "Christian" can grow in us: we can become new creatures, purified by the Blood of Christ, vivified and nourished by His grace, so that it may no longer be we who live, but Christ who lives in us. The new year which begins today will acquire value only if lived in this light. Only by this daily circumcision of the heart will grace triumph in us, thus making the Christ-life an ever-increasing reality in our souls.

Jesus' humble submission to His Father's will, manifested by His obedience to the law, is another lesson to be learned from today's Feast. It is an invitation to us to be docile to God's will, whatever it may be. None of us knows what awaits us in this new year, but God knows. His will has already prepared our path; every detail of our life is already determined in His mind. Let us be ready to accept, or rather to embrace with courage and readiness, everything that God wishes or permits, certain that in His holy will we shall find our peace and our sanctification.

COLLOQUY

"O Word Incarnate, You are but eight days old and already You are giving Your Blood for me. What lesson do I draw from this?... Obedience. By Your circumcision You reveal to me Your obedience to God, Your meekness, and Your humility" (St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi).

O Jesus, permit the first drops of Your most pure Blood to purify and inebriate my poor soul! I understand that from the very first days of Your life You hastened to shed

Your Blood because You wanted to show us at once that You are our Savior and Redeemer. This shedding of Blood was not necessary for You, O Son of God, who art holy with the holiness of Your Father; but it was necessary for me, a poor creature born in sin. You wished to humble Yourself, even to submitting Yourself to a law which was made for sinners. O my Lord, teach me to be humble and obedient. You did not refuse circumcision, You the innocent Lamb, who taketh away the sins of the world... and I, a sinner, want to be considered just? I resent it when I am considered imperfect; I try to conceal my faults under a cloak of false excuses. Oh! teach me that I can neither follow You, nor become like You, if I do not welcome opportunities of humbling myself with You!

You also teach me to obey and to submit to my heavenly Father's will, no matter what it demands or what sacrifice it requires. "I think of this new year as a white page given to me by Your Father, on which He will write, day by day, whatever His divine good pleasure has planned. I shall now write at the top of the page, with complete confidence : *Domine, fac de me sicut vis*, Lord, do with me what You will, and at the bottom I already write my *Amen* to all the proposals of Your divine will. *Yes* Lord, *yes* to all the joys, the sorrows, the graces, the hardships prepared for me, which You will reveal to me day by day. Grant that my *Amen* may be the Paschal *Amen*, always followed by the *Alleluia*, uttered wholeheartedly, in the joy of a complete gift. Give me Your love and Your grace, and I shall be rich enough" (Sr. Carmela of the Holy Spirit, O.C.D.).

FEAST OF THE MOST HOLY NAME OF JESUS

SUNDAY FROM JANUARY SECOND TO FIFTH
OTHERWISE, JANUARY SECOND

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, make me understand the mysteries and the treasures contained in Your most sweet Name.

MEDITATION

1. This Feast complements the circumcision mystery, since it was during the rite of circumcision that the name Jesus was given to the Child. On the first day, the Church directed our attention to the humility of the Son of God; today she invites us to meditate upon and celebrate the glories of His Name.

That these glories flow especially from His prodigious humiliations is clearly affirmed by St. Paul : "Brethren, Christ humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross. For which cause God also hath exalted Him and hath given Him a Name which is above all names : that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow" (*Phil 2, 8-10*). The Church, by placing on our lips this theme from today's Office, invites us, her children, to render grateful, pious homage to Him who humbled Himself so profoundly for us.

The heart of every Christian should respond to this invitation and exalt the most Holy Name of Our Savior, that is, His very Person, for the Name of Jesus expresses what He is : Savior, Redeemer. This sacred Name, announced by the Angel to both Mary and Joseph, was given to Our Lord by God Himself. "Thou shalt call His Name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins" (*Mt 1,21*). This Name expresses and synthesizes the great mysteries of the Incarnation and the Redemption; it is at the center of the universe like a point of contact, like a bridge between God and all mankind. Man can reach God only by means of Jesus and in the Name of Jesus : "for there is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved" (*Ep : Acts 4,8-12*).

2. Today's Mass, continuing St. Paul's thought, offers us a majestic picture of the glory which is due the holy Name of Jesus : " That at the Name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father " (Introit). The entire Church—triumphant, militant, and suffering—is prostrate in adoration; the whole of creation seems to be silent, having stopped in its course for a moment to hear this most holy Name which gives glory to God and salvation to mankind. Truly, " neither tongue can tell, nor pen express " the inestimable treasures contained in the Name of Jesus. " Nothing sweeter can be sung, nothing more agreeable can be heard, nothing more delightful can be imagined than Jesus, the Son of God " (RB). " Thy name is as oil poured out " (Ct 1,2), says Holy Scripture, and St. Bernard comments, " Oil gives light, it nourishes, it anoints.... See how well this applies to the Name of the true Bridegroom. It is light when it is preached; it is food in meditation; it is balm and healing when it is invoked for aid.... All food is as dry husks to the soul unless it is steeped in this oil; insipid unless seasoned with this salt. If you write, it has no savor for me, unless I read there the Name of Jesus. If you discourse or converse, it has no taste unless the Name of Jesus shall sound. The Name of Jesus is honey to the mouth, music to the ear, gladness to the heart. It is healing " (RB). Let us lovingly bless and invoke this most sweet Name which contains all our hope and our salvation, all our life and our glory. Only he who loves can penetrate the mysterious sweetness contained in it; only he who loves can praise it suitably, not by words alone but by deeds; only he who loves can bear witness to it by his entire life. " May Thy Name, O Jesus, resound in our voices! May our actions express Thy life and our hearts love Thee now and forever! " (*ibid.*).

COLLOQUY

" O glorious Name! Gracious Name! Name full of love and virtue! Through You, sins are forgiven, enemies overcome, the sick healed, and sufferers strengthened in adversity! You are the honor of believers, the master of

preachers, the comfort of those who toil, the support of the weak. Holy desires are nourished by the ardor of Your fire; and by it, necessary suffrages are obtained, contemplative souls are inebriated, and the triumphant are glorified in heavenly glory! By Your most Holy Name, O sweet Jesus, You make us reign with the Blessed, You, their glory, You who triumph gloriously with the Father and the Holy Spirit, in perfect Unity and Trinity, forever and ever.

"O Name of Jesus, exalted above every other Name! O triumphant Name! O joy of Angels! O terror of hell! All hope of pardon, of grace and of glory is found in You! O sweetest Name, You pardon the guilty, You reform evil habits, You fill the timid with divine sweetness and drive away terrifying visions! O glorious Name! By You, the mysteries of eternal life are revealed, souls are inflamed with divine love, strengthened in time of struggle, and freed from all dangers. O desirable Name! Delightful Name! Admirable Name! Venerable Name! Little by little You raise the souls of the faithful by Your gifts and graces to the heights of heaven. All to whom You communicate Your ineffable grandeur, by Your power attain to salvation and glory!" (St. Bernardine of Siena).

How good is Your Name, O Lord! Grant that its goodness may make me, unworthy creature that I am, capable of loving and praising You with all my heart.

I want to begin and end all my works by invoking Your Name, and to mark all my affections, desires, undertakings, joys, and sorrows with this sacred seal. But O Lord, I beg You, above all, imprint Your Name on my heart and mind, so that I may always love You and think of You.

JESUS OUR MEDIATOR

PRESENCE OF GOD - Grant, O Jesus, that I may enter still further into the great mystery of Your Incarnation.

MEDITATION

1. During the Christmas days our thoughts, centered on Jesus, have revealed to us a little of the great "mystery which hath been hidden from eternity in God" (*Eph 3,9*), the mystery we now wish to consider in synthesis, in order to arouse in ourselves greater admiration for its "unfathomable riches."

The infinite distance between God and man, the impassable abyss, the breaking of every bond of friendship—all this was the tremendous consequence of sin. Then between God and man appeared the sweet Babe of Bethlehem; suddenly and completely the whole situation changes: distance is overcome, and across the abyss a wonderful bridge is erected which unites earth with heaven and re-establishes relations of intimacy between God and men. This bridge is Jesus, the "only Mediator between God and man," who "joins earth to heaven in a truly remarkable manner" (*Mystici Corporis*). In His office as Mediator, Jesus is really "at the center": He is the point of union between divinity and humanity. His mediation has all the qualifications necessary for perfectly pleasing God, since He Himself is true God; at the same time, because He is true man and, as such, represents the whole human race, Jesus can make worthy satisfaction to God for the entire debt of sinful mankind.

The divinity possessed by Jesus as the Word is united in His Person with the humanity He possesses as man. These two natures are not merely in juxtaposition, but they embrace each other; even more, they are united in one Person, the Person of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, Our Lord. In Him and through Him, all mankind is readmitted to friendship with the heavenly Father. In

Him all can find again the way to reach union with the Trinity.

The eternal Father deigned to reveal this wonderful mystery to St. Catherine of Siena : " It is My wish that you consider the bridge I have built in the Person of my only-begotten Son, and that you notice that it reaches from earth to heaven, because in Him the majesty of the divinity is united with the lowness of your human nature. It was necessary to construct this bridge in order to repair the road which had become impassable and to open a passage across the trials of this world to eternal life " (Dialogue).

2. " For it hath well pleased *the Father* that in [Jesus] all fullness should dwell, and that through Him He should reconcile all things unto Himself, making peace through the blood of His Cross, both as to the things that are on earth, and the things that are in heaven " (*Col 1,19.20*). Jesus accomplished His work as Mediator on Calvary, where He shed all His Blood as the price of our redemption. But His work began at Bethlehem, where the Word took, so to speak, that ineffable " giant's step " which brought Him from heaven to earth, which made Him true Man as well as true God.

The terrible abyss which sin had produced between God and man has been filled up by the Child who opens His arms to us from the manger. All that sin had spoiled and destroyed is now, by the will of God, saved, " re-established in Christ " (cf. *Eph 1,10*). Oh! how spontaneous is the need to praise and adore when the Child Jesus is contemplated in this light! Here, tenderness and admiration are one!

The grace which Adam had received directly from God, we now receive only through Jesus, our Mediator; our whole supernatural life always comes through Him. If we wish to be united to God, we have no other means than to attach ourselves to Jesus, to pass through Him, our Mediator, our Bridge, our Way. Jesus has said, " I am the way " (*Jn 14,6*); " I am the door. By Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved " (*ibid. 10,9*). Behold the only condition, the only way of salvation, of sanctity.

COLLOQUY

"O eternal God, O high eternal Father, in You I find inestimable love, the love which made You cast a glance of pity on Your poor creatures. It made You send us the Word, Your only Son, the Incarnate Word, veiled in flesh and clothed in our mortality. And You, O Jesus Christ, our Peacemaker, Reformer, and Redeemer, You, the Word, Love, became our Mediator, and signed the peace treaty of the great battle which man had been waging against God. He punished our iniquity and Adam's disobedience in Your Body, when You were obedient even unto Your ignominious death on the Cross.

"Whatever way I turn, I meet nothing but ineffable love. I cannot excuse myself for not loving You, because it is You alone, God and man, who loved me without any return of love on my part, because when I did not exist, You created me. In You I find all that I want to love.... If I want to love God, I have Your ineffable Deity; if I want to love man, You are man.... If I want to love the Lord, You paid my ransom with Your Blood, and lifted me up from the slavery of sin. You are our Lord, Father, and Brother by Your benignity and Your incommensurable charity.... You are God, supreme wisdom, I am only a poor ignorant creature. You are sovereign, eternal goodness. I am death, You are life; I am darkness, You are light; I am stupidity, You are wisdom; You are infinite, I am finite. I am sick, You are the physician; I am a weak sinner that has never loved You; You are purest beauty, and I a most vile creature. In Your ineffable love, You have drawn me to You; You draw us all to You by grace, not by force, and this, only if we are willing to be drawn to You, that is, if our will does not rebel against Yours" (St. Catherine of Siena).

"O Christ, O God, sweet Lover of mankind, I implore You; I beg and beseech You to be my Way, to let me reach You, and rest in You, the Way, the Truth, and the Life; without whom no one reaches the Father" (St. Augustine).

JESUS THE FIRST-BORN OF ALL CREATURES

PRESENCE OF GOD - Give me light, O Lord Jesus, to see in the lowliness of the Child, the indescribable Majesty of the Son of God.

MEDITATION

1. Jesus "is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature; for in Him were all things created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created by Him and in Him. And He is before all, and by Him all things consist" (*Col 1,15-17*). This text from St. Paul summarizes the infinite greatness of Jesus. As the Word, He is the perfect, substantial image of the Father, having the same divine nature as the Father and proceeding from Him by eternal generation. As the Word He is the first-born of all creatures, begotten of the Father before all creation; furthermore, the Father created everything through Him, His Word, His eternal Wisdom. St. John of the Cross teaches, "God looked at all things in this image of His Son alone, which was to give them their natural being and to communicate to them many natural gifts and graces.... To behold them...was to make them very good in the Word, His Son" (*J.C. SC, 5,4*). But the Word is not only the first-born of all creatures. Possessing the same divine nature as the Father, He is also their Creator, for "without Him was made nothing that was made" (*Jn 1,3*).

All these splendors, which belong by nature to the Word, became the splendors of Jesus, the Man-God, by reason of His Incarnation and His hypostatic union. In fact, St. Paul declares that "in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead corporeally" (*Col 2,9*).

Jesus was pleased to conceal all the infinite riches of His divinity in the obscurity of the manger; yet, guided by faith and love, we shall not be slow to recognize and praise Him in this lowly guise.

2. Jesus, the first-born, is the source of our being, not only in the natural order, the order of creation, but also

and especially in the supernatural order, the order of grace. In fact, " . . . in this image of His Son alone He left them clothed with beauty, communicating to them supernatural being. This was when He became man, and thus exalted man in the beauty of God " (J.C. SC, 5,4).

The Word became incarnate in order to give us supernatural being; Jesus came precisely to make us children of God. He, God's only Son by nature, became thus the first-born of many brethren who, in Him and through Him, become children of God by grace. This is the wonderful, mysterious plan of our elevation to the supernatural state : " Blessed be the God and Father . . . who hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places, in Christ . . . who hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ " (*Eph* 1,3.5).

From all eternity, God the Father willed to raise men to the dignity of sons; therefore, He gave our first parents, not merely natural life, but also supernatural life, which they lost by sin. God, however, had foreknown their fall, had even permitted it in view of a still more wonderful plan than the first, a plan which would manifest in an incomparable manner His infinite charity and mercy toward man : the Incarnation of His Son, that through Him " we might receive the adoption of sons " (*Gal* 4,5).

In this marvelous plan we contemplate two sublime mysteries : Jesus, the first-born of every creature in the order of nature as well as in the order of grace; we, the children of sin, becoming in Him and through Him the adopted sons of God.

COLLOQUY

" Thou hast multiplied Thy wonderful works, O Lord, my God; and in Thy thoughts there is no one like to Thee " (*Ps* 39,6). " It is good to give praise to the Lord : and to sing to Thy Name, O Most High, to show forth Thy mercy in the morning, and Thy truth in the night. For Thou hast given me, O Lord, a delight in Thy doings; and in the works of Thy hands I shall rejoice. O Lord, how great are Thy works! Thy thoughts are exceeding deep " (*ibid.* 91, 2.3.5.6).

What work could be more wonderful than the Incarnation of Your only-begotten Son? Is there any masterpiece more sublime than Jesus Christ, true God and true man, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (*Col 2,3*)?

O Jesus, You make me understand that You are really God made man and You manifest Yourself to my soul with such majesty that I can no longer doubt Your infinite greatness. O Lord, who can comprehend the depths of Your great Majesty, You who are the absolute Ruler of heaven and earth?

"O Christ, my God, my hope, lover of mankind, the light, the way, the life; the salvation, honor, and glory of all Your servants, You live eternally, reigning now and for all eternity.... You are my living and true God, my holy Father, my loving Lord, the great King, the good Shepherd, my only Teacher, my incomparable helper, my guide to heaven, my straight path...my immaculate Victim, my holy Redeemer, my firm hope, my perfect charity, my true resurrection, my eternal life. I long for You, my sweetest, most beautiful Lord!..."

"O splendor of the Father's glory, who sit above the Cherubim and scrutinize the abyss, true light, shining light, unfailing light, on whom the angels desire to gaze, behold my heart before You; drive away the darkness from it that it may be more abundantly inundated with the splendors of Your holy love.

"Give me Yourself, O my God, give me Yourself, that I may love You; and if my love is not very fervent, make me love You more ardently.

"I cannot measure what is wanting in my love to make it what it ought to be, to make it run to meet Your embrace, and not to leave it until my life is hidden in the light of Your face; this I know, that all is a source of evil for me except You, O Lord, and not only what is outside of me, but also what is within me. All wealth which is not my God is poverty and misery for me" (St. Augustine).

JESUS THE UNIVERSAL KING

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, Your greatness is unfathomable; enable me to adore and love You in a manner worthy of Your infinite Majesty.

MEDITATION

1. Since Jesus is all things to us, it is fitting that we honor Him as our King. He Himself proclaimed, "I am a king" (*Jn* 18,37). "All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth" (*Mt* 28,18).

In the Encyclical *Quas Primas*, Pius XI teaches that "Jesus is King by right of nature and by conquest." By right of nature, "He possesses...power over all creatures, not that He seized it by violence, nor received it from another, but He possesses it by His own nature and essence; His power comes from that wonderful union which is called by theologians *hypostatic*. For this reason Christ is to be adored not only as God by angels and men, but these angels and men owe submission and obedience to Him also as man." In fact, Christ as man participates fully in the royalty and sovereign majesty of Christ as God; since, as man and as God, Christ is one Person, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity. He is at the summit of all creation : the beginning and the end, the King of all things; He holds "the primacy in all things" (cf. *Col* 1,18).

"What could be more pleasing and agreeable than the thought that Christ is our Ruler, not only by right of nature, but by a right of conquest, which He acquired when He became our Redeemer! O that ungrateful men would remember how much we have cost our Savior! We were not redeemed at the price of gold or silver...but by Christ's precious Blood. We no longer belong to ourselves, because Christ has paid a precious ransom for us" (*Quas Primas*). Jesus has every right to rule over us; He *must* reign; *oportet Illum regnare!* (*1 Cor* 15,25).

2. From all eternity, God the Father beheld in Christ —His only-begotten Son, made man for the redemption

of sinful humanity—the masterpiece of His hands, and therefore He decreed that *all* should be created by Him, given to Him as His royal allotment. St. Paul states that God the Father has set Christ “on His right hand in the heavenly places, above all principality and power, and virtue and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (*Eph 1,20.21*). Behold Christ the King set above the angels, above those pure spirits who also were created for His glory.

As for mankind, we must repeat with the Apostle that we have been chosen and predestined in Christ, “that we may be unto the praise of His glory” (*ibid. 1,12*). Like the angels, we have been created for the glory of Christ, the universal King. By glorifying Him on earth, we unite our praise with that of the angels in heaven.

To glorify Jesus as our King is to acknowledge His sovereign rights over us, that is to say, to live in docile submission to His gentle rule.

His reign is one of love : out of love for us and to save us, He came down from heaven and became one of us. He died on the Cross for the same reason, shedding all His sacred Blood for us. Jesus reigns in the crib; He reigns from the height of the Cross. Behold the price He paid to win our poor hearts, He who by His very nature was already our absolute ruler. Let us not resist the gentle violence of His infinite love; let us give ourselves entirely to Him, allowing Him to reign in our minds, in our wills, and in our hearts.

COLLOQUY

“ O my Lord and my King! If one could but picture Your Majesty! It is impossible not to see that in Yourself, You are a great Emperor, for to behold Your Majesty strikes terror. But my terror is greater, my Lord, when together with Your Majesty I behold Your humility and the love that You bestow on such a creature as I.

“ When I have overcome the first feeling of terror which is aroused at the sight of Your great Majesty, I can converse with You, and speak freely about my interests.... Although You are God, I can talk with You as with a friend, for You are not like those whom we call lords on earth, all of whose

power rests upon an authority conferred on them by others. Your Kingdom, O Lord of glory and King of kings, is without end. How little we need any intermediaries to reach You. I have only to see You to realize that You alone deserve the name of Lord; Your Majesty is so great that You need neither guard nor escort to convince us that You are King " (T.J. *Life*, 37).

O Lord, grant that I may always acknowledge You as the King and sovereign Ruler of my soul. Everything I have I have received from You; how, then, could I fail to understand that You hold all rights over me? Yet You are a King who seems to take no account of His sovereign rights. Why did You have to abase Yourself to the obscurity of Bethlehem, to humiliate Yourself even to dying on the Cross, even to shedding all Your Blood in order to win my heart? My heart, my whole life, and all my being already belonged to You, because You are my Creator and because I was created for Your glory. But You willed to forget all Your rights and You came to me like a beggar, seeking my poor heart.

O Jesus, how can I still resist Your infinite love? Take my heart; take my whole being; and make me a living praise of Your glory.

41

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

JANUARY SIXTH

PRESENCE OF GOD - I recognize in You, O little Jesus, the King of heaven and earth; grant that I may adore You with the faith and love of the Magi.

MEDITATION

1. "He whom the Virgin bore is acknowledged today by the whole world.... Today is the glorious Feast of His *Manifestation*" (*RB*). Today Jesus shows Himself to the world as God.

The Introit of the Mass brings us at once into this spirit, presenting Jesus to us in the full majesty of His divinity. "Behold the sovereign Lord is come; in His hands He holds the kingdom, the power, and the empire." The Epistle (*Is 60,1-6*) breaks forth in a hymn of joy, announcing the vocation of the Gentiles to the faith; they too will acknowledge and adore Jesus as their God : "Arise, be enlightened, O Jerusalem : for thy light is come.... And the Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brightness of thy rising.... All they from Saba shall come, bringing gold and frankincense, and showing forth praise to the Lord." We no longer gaze upon the lowly picture of the shepherds at the manger; passing before us now is the resplendent procession of the Wise Men from the East, representing the pagan nations and all the kings of the earth, who come to pay homage to the Child-God.

Epiphany, or *Theophany*, means the *Manifestation of God*; today it is realized in Jesus who manifests Himself as God and Lord of the world. Already a prodigy has revealed His divinity—the extraordinary star which appeared in the East. To the commemoration of this miracle, which holds the primary place in the day's liturgy, the Church adds two others : the changing of water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana, and the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, when a voice from heaven announced, "This is My beloved Son." The Magnificat Antiphon says, "Three miracles adorn this holy day"—three miracles which should lead us to recognize the Child Jesus as our God and King, and to adore Him with lively faith.

2. The verse at the Gradual of the Mass continues the story of the Magi : "We have seen His star in the East and are come with gifts to adore Him." They saw the star and immediately set out. They had no doubts : their unbounded faith was strong and sure. They did not hesitate at the prospect of the trials of a long journey : they had generous hearts. They did not postpone the journey : their souls were ready.

A star often appears in the heaven of our souls; it is an inspiration from God, clear and intimate, urging us to greater generosity and calling us to a life of closer union with Him. Like the Magi, we too must always follow our star with faith, promptness, and selfless generosity. If we

allow it to guide us, it will certainly lead us to God; it will bring us to the One whom we are seeking.

The Magi did not give up their quest, although the star—at one point—disappeared from their sight. We should follow their example and their perseverance, even when we are in interior darkness. This is a trial of faith which is overcome only by the exercise of pure, naked faith. I know that He wills it, I know that God is calling, and this suffices for me : *Scio cui credidi et certus sum* (2 Tm 1,12); I know whom I have believed. No matter what happens, I shall trust Him.

In this spirit let us accompany the Magi to adore the new-born King. “And as they brought forth from among their treasures mystical gifts, let us *from our hearts* bring forth something fit to offer Him” (RB).

COLLOQUY

O Jesus, I adore You, for You are the Lord my God. “For You, my Lord, are a great God, and a great King above all kings. For in Your hand are all the ends of the earth, and the heights of the mountains are Yours. For the sea is Yours, and You made it; and Your hands formed the dry land.... We are the people of Your pasture and the sheep of Your hand” (cf. Ps 94). Yes, O Jesus, I am one of Your lambs, one of Your creatures; and I am happy to acknowledge my nothingness in Your presence, and still happier to adore You, O lovely Infant, as my God and my Redeemer. O that all nations would acknowledge You for what You are, that all might prostrate before You, adoring You as their Lord and God!

O Lord, You can do this. Reveal Your divinity to all mankind, and just as once You drew the Magi from the East to You, now in like manner unite all peoples and all nations around Your manger.

You have shown me that You want my poor cooperation in order to bring about the coming of Your Kingdom. You wish me to pray, suffer, and work for the conversion of those who are near and of those who are far away. You wish that I, too, place before the manger the gifts of the Wise Men : the incense of prayer, the myrrh of mortification and of suffering borne with generosity out of love for You,

and finally, the gold of charity, charity which will make my heart wholly and exclusively Yours, charity which will spur me on to work, to spend myself for the conversion of sinners and infidels, and for the greater sanctification of Your elect.

O my loving King, create in me the heart of an apostle. If only I could lay at Your feet today the praise and adoration of everyone on earth!

O my Jesus, while I beg You to reveal Yourself to the world, I also beseech You to reveal Yourself more and more to my poor soul. Let Your star shine for me today, and point out to me the road which leads directly to You! May this day be a real Epiphany for me, a new manifestation to my mind and heart of Your great Majesty. He who knows You more, loves You more, O Lord; and I want to know You solely in order to love You, to give myself to You with ever greater generosity.

42

*FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY, JESUS,
MARY, AND JOSEPH*

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

PRESENCE OF GOD - I beg the Blessed Virgin Mary to allow me to enter in spirit the humble home at Nazareth, to contemplate Jesus' most admirable life there.

MEDITATION

1. On this day for the last time in the cycle of the liturgical year, the Church invites us to contemplate the mystery of Jesus' humble, hidden life. A feeling of close intimacy and tenderness characterizes this Feast and is expressed in the liturgy of the day : "...it is good for us to recall the little home at Nazareth and the humble life of those who lived there.... In it, Jesus learned Joseph's humble trade, and grew in age, and was happy sharing the work of a

carpenter : ‘ Let the sweat,’ He seemed to say, ‘ trickle over My limbs before they are drenched with the torrent of My Blood, and the pain of this labor shall go to atone for the sins of men! ’ ” (*RB*). Let us enter the little house; in the presence of such humility, which conceals Jesus’ infinite Majesty, let us repeat the words of the sacred text : “ Thou art indeed a hidden King, O God the Savior, King of Israel ” (*ibid.*).

Today’s liturgy particularly emphasizes one typical aspect of the humble life of this hidden God : obedience. “ Although He was the Son of God...He learned to obey; He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death ” (*ibid.*). From Bethlehem to Calvary obedience was His companion. The Gospel (*Lk 2, 42-52*) stresses this obedience of Jesus at Nazareth in words which carry for all time the strength of their first utterance, “ He was subject to them. ” Let us ask ourselves with St. Bernard, “ Who obeyed? Whom did He obey? ” The Saint replies, “ God obeyed man! Yes, the God to whom the angels are subject...was subject to Mary, and not only to Mary, but also to Joseph. For God to obey a woman is humility without parallel.... Learn then, man, to obey; learn, O earth, to be submissive. God subjected Himself to men; and do you, desiring to rule others, place yourself above your Creator? ”

2. “ Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business? ” Jesus, who was so humble and submissive, did not hesitate to make this reply to Mary when she gently questioned Him about having remained behind in the Temple without her or Joseph’s knowledge, while they in anguish had been seeking Him for three days.

These are the first words of Jesus which we find recorded in the Gospel. He spoke them in order to declare His mission and to affirm the primacy of the rights of God. When hardly an adolescent, Jesus taught us that God and the things of God must always come first. He must hold the first place in our lives, and we must obey Him regardless of all other considerations, even if it means sacrificing the rights of nature and of blood. Yielding to relatives and friends is no longer a virtue—and may even be sinful—if it leads us away from the will of God or hinders its fulfillment.

Giving precedence to the rights of God does not imply that we neglect our duties toward our neighbor. Today’s

Feast calls our attention to these obligations, and especially to those concerning our family, natural or religious, inviting us to follow the example of the Holy Family of Nazareth. To this end, the Epistle (*Col 3,12-17*) shows us the virtues we should practice : " Clothe yourself... with mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, and patience, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another. "

COLLOQUY

O Jesus, how I love to contemplate You as a Child, in the poor house at Nazareth, with Mary and Joseph! Your simple, humble life was just like that of any other child of Your age. You, the splendor of the Father, did not wish anything to distinguish You from the children of men; You, uncreated wisdom, wished to learn from Mary and Joseph, Your creatures, the ordinary little details of life. Joseph showed You how to handle his tools and You watched Him attentively, You learned, You obeyed. Mary taught You holy hymns and recounted tales from the Sacred Scriptures; You listened to her like a humble disciple, You who are the one true Teacher, You who are Truth itself. No one, neither Your relatives nor Your fellow townspeople, knew who You really were. Everyone believed You to be the carpenter's son and paid no more attention to You than they would have paid to an ordinary apprentice.

Only Mary and Joseph knew; they knew by divine revelation that You were the Son of the Most High, the Savior of the world, and yet they knew it more by faith than by experience. Your ordinary way of life concealed Your majesty and divinity from them so completely that when, without their knowledge, You remained among the doctors in the Temple, they could not understand the reason for Your unusual behavior.

That incident, however, was an isolated one; immediately afterward, You wished to return to the hiddenness of Your most humble life. You went back with them, and were subject to them. And this, day by day, until You were thirty years old.

O most sweet Jesus, grant that I may imitate, at least to some degree, Your infinite humility! You, the Creator, were obedient to Your creatures. Teach me to bow my

proud head and willingly obey my superiors. You came down from heaven to earth. Give me the grace to humble myself, to come down, once and for all, from the pedestal of my pride! How can I bear the sight of Your humility and self-effacement, O my God and my Creator, when I, who am nothingness and sin, use the gifts I have received to set myself above others, to prefer myself even to my superiors?

43

JESUS THE TRUE VINE

PRESENCE OF GOD - O my Lord and Redeemer, grant that I may understand the deep intimate ties that bind You to us, whom You have redeemed.

MEDITATION

1. Jesus is the "one Mediator between God and men" (1 *Tm* 2,5); however, He did not will to effect the work of our redemption independently of us, but used it as a means of strengthening the bond between Himself and us. This is the wonderful mystery of our incorporation in Christ, the mystery which Our Lord Himself revealed to His apostles the night before His Passion. "I am the true vine; and My Father is the husbandman.... Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (*Jn* 15,1-4).

Jesus strongly affirms that there is no redemption, no supernatural life, no grace-life for one who does not live in Him, who is not grafted onto Him. He points to the vine: the shoots will not live and bear fruit unless they remain attached to the trunk. Jesus wishes to actualize this close connection between Himself and us, a connection which is necessary for our salvation and sanctification. We cannot receive the least degree of grace except through

Christ's mediation, even as the smallest drop of sap cannot reach a branch which is detached from the tree.

Moreover, Jesus declares that, if we abide in Him, we shall not only have supernatural life, but we shall become the recipients of special attention from our heavenly Father, the "Husbandman" of the mystical vine. In fact, our heavenly Father acknowledges us as His adopted children, loves us as such, and takes care of us, precisely to the degree in which He sees in us Christ, His only-begotten, His well-beloved Son. The grace of adoption, then, is wholly dependent upon our union with Christ, a union so close that we form, as it were, a "living part" of Him, as the branch forms a living part of the vine.

2. "Abide in Me." We can only abide in a place where we are already. Jesus tells us to "abide" in Him because we have been grafted onto Him. This spiritual engrafting, an accomplished fact, was made possible for all men by Christ's death on the Cross, and it became effective for each one of us at the time of our Baptism. Christ grafted us into Himself at the cost of His precious Blood. Therefore, we "are" in Him, but He insists further that we "abide" in Him and bring forth fruit.

Baptism is sufficient to graft us into Christ, and one degree of grace will permit us to abide in Him like living branches, but we should not be content with this union only. We must show our gratitude for the immense gift we have received by endeavoring to become more and more firmly grafted into Christ. We must "live" this union with Christ, making Him the center, the sun of our interior life. "Abide in Me" is not a chance expression. Christ wished to show us that our life in Him requires our personal collaboration with Him, that we are to employ all our strength, our mind, our will, and our heart that we may live in Him and by Him. The more we try to abide in Christ, the deeper our little branch will grow into Him, because it will be nourished more abundantly by the sap of grace.

"Abide in Me and I in you." The more closely we are united to Christ by faith, charity, and good works done with the intention of pleasing God, the more intensely will He live in us and bestow on us continually a new life of grace. Thus we shall become, not merely living branches,

but branches laden with fruit, the fruit of sanctity destined to bring joy to the Heart of God, for Jesus has said : " In this is My Father glorified, that you bring forth very much fruit " (*Jn* 15,8).

COLLOQUY

" O most high and eternal Trinity, Deity, Love, we are trees of death, and You are the tree of Life. O infinite God! How beautiful was Your creature when a pure tree in Your light! O supreme purity, You endowed it with branches, that is, with the faculties of the soul, memory, intellect, and will.... The memory, to recall You; the intellect, to know You; the will, to love You.... But this tree fell, because by disobeying it lost its innocence. Instead of a tree of life, it became a tree of death and brought forth only fruits of death.

" This is why, O eternal, most high Trinity, in a sublime transport of love for Your creature, seeing that this tree could produce only fruits of death because it was separated from You, who are Life, You gave it a remedy with that very same love by which You had created it, grafting Your Deity into the dead tree of our humanity. O sweet, gentle grafting!... Who constrained You to do this, to give back life to it, You who have been offended so many times by Your creature? Love alone, whence by this grafting death is dissolved.

" Was Your charity content, having made this union? No, eternal Word, You watered this tree with Your Blood. This Blood by its warmth makes it grow, if man with his free will grafts himself onto You, and unites and binds his heart and affections to You, tying and binding this graft with the bond of charity and following Your doctrine. Since it is through You, O Life, that we bring forth fruits of life, we wish to be grafted onto You. When we are grafted onto You, then the branches which You have given to our tree bear fruit " (St. Catherine of Siena).

How encouraging it is to think, O Jesus, that my longing to be united to You is not a vain fantasy, but is already a reality! It is a reality because You have willed to graft me onto You as a shoot is grafted onto the vine, so that I live wholly by this union with You. Oh! grant that my

soul may become always more closely united to You, and may always be ready to receive the vital sap of grace which You produce in me, Your branch!

44

THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Holy Spirit, grant that I may be rich with the "fullness of understanding, unto the knowledge of the mystery... of Christ Jesus" (*Col 2,2*).

MEDITATION

1. "I am the vine; you, the branches." On these words of Jesus, which describe our union with Him, the whole doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ is founded. Only the figure is changed: instead of the vine, we speak of the Body of which Christ is the Head and we are the members. In explaining this doctrine, St. Paul aptly paraphrases what Jesus had previously said. "As the body is one, and hath many members; and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also is Christ.... Now you are the Body of Christ, and members of member" (*1 Cor 12,12.27*).

The thought in both descriptions is evidently identical: as the branches are part of the vine on which they grow and from which they are nourished with one sap; as the parts of the human body form one body and have a single life; so we, being incorporated in Christ, make but one body with Him and live of His Life. This is the Mystical Body of Christ "which," St. Paul teaches, "is the Church" (*Col 1,24*).

Christ is the Head of this Body. "Christ is the Head of the Church.... He is the Savior of the Body" (*Eph 5,23*). The Father "hath made Him Head over all the Church, which is His Body...and His fullness" (cf. *ibid.* 1,22.23). One Body, one life which comes to each of its members from the Head. "Christ Our Lord vivifies the Church

with His own supernatural life; by His divine power He permeates the whole Body and nourishes and sustains each of the members...very much as the vine nourishes and makes fruitful the branches which are joined to it" (*Mystici Corporis*). The fact that every Christian has life in Christ and lives of the very life of Christ is reaffirmed in these words.

2. Our union with Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body, is certainly not to be understood as being identical with the union that exists among the various members of a physical body. In fact, although we are incorporated in Him, each one of us preserves "intact his own personality" (*ibid.*). But neither should we understand this union to be a mere moral union, such as exists, for example, among members of the same organization. No, it is something much more profound, it is a mysterious union, and in this sense is called *mystical*, but it is no less *real* and *vital*. It is a union which comes from there being present in all the parts of the Body of the Church "a distinct internal principle, which exists effectively in the whole and in each of its parts, and whose excellence is such, that of itself it is vastly superior to whatever bonds of union may be found in a physical or moral body. This principle is...not of the natural but of the supernatural order. Essentially it is something infinite, uncreated : it is the Spirit of God, who, as the Angelic Doctor says, 'one and the same for all, fills and unifies the whole Church'" (*ibid.*).

The Holy Spirit, "the soul of the Church" (*ibid.*), is the bond which intimately and really unites and vivifies all the members of Christ, diffusing grace and charity in them. He has been "given to the Church with most copious effusion, so that its members from day to day might become always more like the Redeemer" (*ibid.*) Therefore, it is not a question of a symbolical, metaphorical union, but of a real union, so real that it surpasses all the others "as grace surpasses nature, and immortal realities surpass perishable realities" (*ibid.*). It is a reality so great that it embraces not only our earthly life but, provided we preserve it, it continues to be the source of our happiness for all eternity. Indeed, "grace is the seed of glory."

We are members of Christ. This is our greatness and our glory, infinitely surpassing all earthly dignity and glory.

COLLOQUY

"O my beloved Spouse and loving Word, You engender the Body of the Holy Church in a way which You alone know and understand.... By means of Your Blood, You make a well-organized, well-formed Body of which You are the Head. The angels delight in its beauty, the archangels admire it, the seraphim are enraptured by it, all the angelic spirits marvel at it, and all the souls of the blessed in heaven rejoice in it. The Blessed Trinity takes delight in it in a manner beyond our comprehension" (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

Behold at Your feet, O Lord, a very poor creature : weak, feeble, inclined to evil, and capable of every sin, a worthless creature, like the grass of the field, which is today and tomorrow is not, a wretched creature, who has nothing good in itself and is unable to do anything that is good. Yet, O Jesus, true Son of God, image of the Father, the beginning and the end of all things, Ruler of the universe, Savior of the world, You bend down to me, miserable as I am. You take me, and unite me to Yourself, so closely that I become one of Your members. Then you give me Your life, You make me live Your very life. O Lord, O infinite beauty and holiness, how can You bear to have as one of Your members such a wretched, unworthy creature? You not only do this, but You want to do so, for You have said, "Abide in Me."

Can I refuse to accept Your invitation and Your command, O Lord, when I know that You Yourself wish to make me an integral part of Your Mystical Body? O Lord, if I could only realize the greatness, the value of this infinite gift which You offer me, and understand the meaning of this sublime reality—to live in You and by You, as the branch lives in the vine, as the member in the body! What do I lack, O Lord, for my sanctification, for my life of union with You? You have already given me much more than I ever could have desired.

O Lord, make me sense the profound reality of this great mystery which brings me into such close union with You. Let it dominate, illumine, and direct my whole life; let everything else fade before it. Grant that I may never seek or desire anything except this reality, and let the deceptive vanities of the world have no attraction for me. Make

me have a deep, lively sense of the duty and sweet necessity of being a member worthy of You, and grant that my actions and my life may be such as to do honor to You.

45

"I AM THE LIFE"

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, Fount of life, may Your life ever increase in my soul.

MEDITATION

1. Jesus explained His mission in these words : " I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly " (*Jn 10,10*). What is this life which He gives us? It is the life of grace, which is a participation in His divine life.

Jesus is the Incarnate Word; in His divine nature as the Word, He possesses divine life in the same way and to the same degree that His Father possesses it. " As the Father hath life in Himself, so He hath given to the Son also to have life in Himself " (*ibid. 5,26*).

This plenitude of divine life reverberates in Christ's humanity by reason of the hypostatic union. His sacred humanity, placed in direct contact with His divinity, to which it is united in one Person, is inundated with divine life; that is, it receives the greatest possible participation in it through " such plenitude of grace that no greater amount can be imagined " (*Mystici Corporis*). The sanctifying grace which fills the soul of Jesus is so plentiful, perfect, intense, and superabundant that theologians do not hesitate to call it " infinite grace. " " Because in Him [Christ], it hath well pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell " (*Col 1,19*), affirms St. Paul; and St. John describes Him as being " full of grace and truth " (*Jn 1,14*). But Jesus does not wish to keep all this immense wealth for Himself alone; He wishes to have brethren with whom He can share it. For this reason He embraced His sorrowful Passion;

by dying on the Cross, He merited for us His members that grace which He possesses in such great plenitude. Thus Christ becomes the one and only source of grace and supernatural life for us. He is so "full of grace and truth" that "of His fullness we have all received" (*ibid.* 1,14.16). Here, then, is how divine life comes to us: from the Father to the Word; from the Word to the humanity which He assumed in His Incarnation, and from this humanity, which is the sacred humanity of Christ, to our souls.

2. Grace, like everything that exists, apart from God, is also created by God. Jesus as God, that is, as the Word, is, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Creator of grace. Let us now contemplate Jesus as our Redeemer, therefore, as Man, and as such, the Mediator of grace, the One who merited grace for us, in virtue of His own infinite treasure of grace, and who also bestows it upon us. He not only merited it for us once for always by His death on the Cross, but He is continually applying it to our souls and producing it in us. Thus grace is infused and made to grow in us by means of His living and ever-present action. In this way, Jesus gives us life; He is Life for us, the one source of our supernatural life. For this reason the grace of Jesus is called "capital grace," that is, grace belonging to the Head, who both merited it and dispenses it to His members.

Two precious, practical consequences follow from this. One who desires to possess grace and supernatural life must go to Christ. He must become incorporated in Him and live in Him. "He that hath the Son hath life. He that hath not the Son, hath not life" (1 *Jn* 5,12).

The grace which sanctifies our souls is, in its essence, identically the same as that which adorns the sacred soul of Jesus (St. Thomas, III^a, q.8, a.5). Of course, they differ immensely in measure and perfection, but the nature of the grace is the very same. Hence grace in us has the same sanctifying power, the same tendencies as it has in the soul of Jesus. Thus it can sanctify us, making us live in union with God and for His glory. By giving us grace, Jesus has truly communicated His life to us; He has planted in us the seed of His sanctity, so that we can live a life similar to His own.

COLLOQUY

O Jesus, how delightful it is to contemplate Your sacred humanity which contains all the treasures of the divine life! I cannot gaze directly at Your divinity, O eternal Word, but it is easy for me to contemplate it in Your humanity; there my thoughts rest, and never cease admiring Your immensity. O Jesus, Your soul is so rich in grace, so luminous, so filled with divine life that Your glory as the only-begotten Son of the Father is fully reflected in it. Your humanity seems to me to be the one mediator and the source of all grace and of all divine life which can be given to mankind. But then I contemplate this sacred humanity as it was lacerated in the bitter torment of the Cross, this humanity which is so glorious and so closely united to God. All its glory is hidden; I see nothing but sorrow, death, and total annihilation. Yet, from those bleeding wounds there gushed forth a marvelous fountain of life : by Your death, O Jesus, You merited grace for us and have become Yourself its one and only source.

I run to You, O Jesus; as one who is thirsty runs toward a spring, I draw near You. Give me, O Lord, of Your water, and I shall thirst no more because "the water You give me will become in me a fountain which will spring up into life everlasting" (*cf. Jn 4,14*). The Apostle, who did not wish to go away from You, once said, "Thou hast the words of eternal life" (*ibid. 6,69*). Oh! You have much more than words of life. You are Life itself, and You give life to us!

But Jesus, let me ask one question. If that sanctifying grace which comes from You and gives life to my soul is, by its very nature, the same kind of grace that fills Your sacred soul, why am I so unlike You, so far from sanctity?

I know the answer. You give me Your grace gratuitously, but You do not make it increase in me without the cooperation of my free will. There is very often a bitter struggle in me between the demands of grace and the claims of my evil nature. Alas! How often nature conquers! O Lord, I beg You, give me the grace to overcome and sacrifice myself, no matter what the cost. Let Your grace and Your life triumph in me for Your glory, and for the glory of Your work of redemption.

"May my mind, my heart, my body, my life, be wholly

animated by You, my sweet Life! I will love You Lord, my strength; I will love You, and will live, no longer through my own efforts, but through You" (St. Augustine).

46

THE INFLUENCE OF JESUS

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, give me the grace to understand that my soul is always under the powerful, sanctifying influence of Your sacred humanity.

MEDITATION

1. "Virtue went out from Him, and healed all" (*Lk 6,19*), the Gospel says in speaking of Jesus and the astonishing miracles which He worked. At the touch of His hand, the blind saw, the deaf heard, the dumb spoke. The power which went forth from Him was so great that the poor woman suffering from the issue of blood had only to touch the hem of His garment to feel herself instantly cured. It was just as easy for Him to purify and sanctify souls and to forgive sins, as it was to heal bodies. "Which is easier to say: Thy sins are forgiven thee, or to say: Arise and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (He saith to the paralytic), I say to thee: Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house" (*ibid. 5,23.24*). To remit sins is the prerogative of God alone. If, then, Jesus, says of Himself, who is visibly a man, that He has the power to forgive sins, He affirms that He is God and that the divinity works in His humanity. Indeed, His sacred humanity, full of grace and power, is precisely the instrument which His divinity uses to bestow all grace and life.

The sacred humanity of Jesus, now glorified in heaven, continues to impart the same power and virtue it once did in the districts of Palestine, and this power, being imparted to our souls, influences them from within, purifies, transforms, and sanctifies them. "The interior influence from which

grace comes to our souls belongs...to Christ, whose humanity, because it is united to His divinity, has the power to justify" (St. Thomas, III^a, q.8, a.6, co.).

2. We distinguish two phases in Jesus' work of redemption and sanctification. The first phase is His sorrowful life on earth, which ended with His death on the Cross; by it He merited grace for us. The second is His glorious life, which began at His resurrection and still continues, since Jesus Himself is always bestowing upon our souls the grace He merited for us on Calvary. "But to every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the giving of Christ" (*Eph* 4,7). Day after day, Jesus applies grace to each of us and He causes it to increase and develop in us, so that we live continually under His influence. "As the head rules the members," says the Council of Trent, "as the vine sends its sap through all its branches, so does Jesus Christ exert His influence at every moment over all the just. This influence precedes, accompanies, and crowns their good works and makes them pleasing to God and meritorious in His sight" (Sess. VI, Can. 16).

Jesus is "always living to make intercession for us," says St. Paul (*Heb* 7,25). He is living in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar and He is living in heaven, where, seated in glory at the right hand of His Father, He shows Him the reddened wounds of His passion, thereby making continual intercession for us. In addition, "He is Himself choosing, determining, and distributing graces to each one according to the measure of His gift" (*Mystici Corporis*). Christ is then—in the fullest sense, in the most actual sense—the source of all our life. "Christ is our life" (cf. *Col* 3,4), St. Paul exclaims, because, as St. Thomas says : "He is the source of our life."

COLLOQUY

O Lord, how much I love Your most sacred humanity! O eternal Word, did You not become man in order to be closer to us, to encourage us to come to You fearlessly, in order to lead us to Your Father? Then, how could I, O Jesus, be willing to depart from You or forget You, even for a short time?

" O Lord of my soul, my only Good, my Crucified Jesus, whence have all good things come to me save from You? With so good a Friend, so good a Captain at my side, who came forward first of all to suffer, I can bear everything. You help and give strength; You never fail; You are a faithful Friend. I see clearly that if we are to please God and He is to grant us great favors, He wills that this should be done through Your most sacred humanity, O Christ, for in You, as the Father has said, He is well pleased. Blessed is the soul who loves You in truth and has You always at its side. When I see You near me, I have seen all blessings " (T.J. *Life*, 22).

O Jesus, my dearest Redeemer, if I could not follow You along the roads of Palestine, if I cannot behold You in heaven where You are seated in glory at the right hand of Your Father, always interceding for me, I can, nevertheless, every time I so desire, find You living in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar. What an immense gift You have bestowed on me by leaving Your sacred humanity in the Holy Eucharist! As God, You are everywhere, it is true, but as man and my Redeemer I find You in the Sacred Host. My poor human nature needs to find You in the integrity of Your Person as God made man; it needs to be able to approach You and possess You, not only spiritually, but even in a physical reality. I am thinking especially of those precious moments after Holy Communion, when Your sacred humanity is in direct physical contact with my soul. At that time I am not merely touching the hem of Your garment, like the poor woman in the Gospel, but my human nature is touching Yours, and not only touching it, but is being nourished by it, for You come to me as Food. O Jesus! if the influence of Your humanity was so powerful that it could heal and justify all who drew near to You, what can it not effect in my soul during those moments of close, profound contact? O Jesus, forgive me my sins; heal, purify, and sanctify my soul; give me those dispositions of profound humility, lively faith, and ardent love which will enable me to receive the fullness of Your divine influence.

THE SOUL OF JESUS

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, permit me to contemplate Your soul, the chosen temple of the Holy Spirit, and grant that, following Your example, I, too, may become a temple worthy of Him.

MEDITATION

1. Although grace was created equally by the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, without any difference or distinction, its diffusion in souls is usually attributed especially to the Third Person, the Holy Spirit, to whom everything that concerns the work of sanctification is referred by appropriation. In this sense the tremendous gift of grace which filled the soul of Jesus must be attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. The soul of Jesus possesses every supernatural gift because "the Holy Spirit dwells in Christ with such plenitude of grace that no greater plenitude can be imagined" (*Mystici Corporis*). This plenitude of grace, which is a created gift, corresponds to the plenitude of the Holy Spirit, who is the uncreated Gift. Jesus, the only One who "received this Spirit in an unlimited degree" (*ibid.*), has received from Him the immense capital of grace which permits Him to merit it for all of us.

The soul of Jesus is uniquely beautiful, holy, intimately united to the divinity, and all this to such a degree that the Holy Spirit "takes delight in abiding in it as His chosen temple" (*ibid.*). He dwells in it with such plenitude and sovereignty that He inspires, directs, and guides all the actions of Jesus, and that is why the Holy Spirit "is correctly called the Spirit of Christ or the Spirit of the Son" (*ibid.*).

The Gospel tells us several times that Jesus "acted under the influence of the Holy Spirit" (cf. *Lk 4,1*). This happened, not under certain special conditions, but always; the sacred soul of Jesus was not moved by any other impulse, by any spirit other than the Holy Spirit.

2. Jesus, by His Passion and death, merited for us, not only grace, but even the very Author of grace, the Holy Spirit, whom He had promised to the Apostles and whom He

had sent to them at Pentecost. We too receive the Holy Spirit through Jesus; it is always He who, together with the Father, sends us the Holy Spirit. This divine Spirit "is bestowed from the fullness of Christ Himself according to the measure of the giving of Christ" (*Mystici Corporis*). We receive the Holy Spirit according to the measure of our union with Christ; the Holy Spirit, in turn, unites us to Christ. In fact, as St. Paul says, "Now if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. And if Christ be in you...the Spirit liveth, because of justification" (*Rom 8,9,10*).

To live in Christ is to live in the Holy Spirit, it is to be a member of His Mystical Body, to be a temple of His Spirit. The grace merited for us by Christ and dispensed to us by Him is diffused in us at the same time by the Holy Spirit. Each increase of grace is caused simultaneously by the creative action of the Holy Spirit and the mediation of Christ. "Christ is in us by His Spirit whom He communicates to us and by means of whom He acts in us in such a way that it may be said that everything that is divine is accomplished in us by the Holy Spirit and also by Christ" (*Mystici Corporis*).

COLLOQUY

O Jesus, You are so rich, so divine, and so all-powerful that Your gifts are not limited to created things, however sublime they may be, but reach their culmination in the uncreated Gift, in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is conformable with Your dignity as God-Man, O Lord Jesus, that the Spirit of Love, the substantial Love which proceeds from the Father and the Son, should be Your Spirit. But that You have wished to give me, a poor creature, this divine Spirit, is a mystery so sublime that I am lost in it. I can only understand, O my dear Redeemer, that I owe this Gift to You!

What return shall I make You, O Jesus, for Your infinite Gift? Oh! if I could at least live and act in such a way that Your Spirit, the Holy Spirit, would find in my soul a temple not too unworthy of Him!

I know that Your Spirit dwells within me, because You have given Him to me. Yet, He cannot fully possess

me, nor lead me swiftly to sanctity, nor hasten my journey to God, because He often finds resistance in me instead of docility. O my Jesus, do not permit me to resist Your Spirit; do not let me grieve Him by my blindness and obduracy!

“O power of the eternal Father, come to my aid! Wisdom of the Son, illumine the eye of my intellect! Sweet clemency of the Holy Spirit, inflame my heart and unite it to Yourself. I confess, O sweet, eternal Goodness of God, that the mercy of the Holy Spirit and Your burning charity are trying to inflame my heart and unite it to You, together with the hearts of all rational creatures.... Burn with the fire of Your Spirit, consume and destroy, down to the very roots, all love and affection of the flesh, in the hearts of the new plants which You have deigned to graft onto the Mystical Body of Holy Church. Deign, O God, to carry us away from worldly affection into the garden of Your love, and create in us a new heart and a clear understanding of Your will, so that, despising the world, ourselves, and our pride, and filled with the true fervor of Your love ...we may follow You for Yourself alone, in chaste purity and fervent charity!...”

“O Holy Spirit, come into my heart; by Your power draw it to You, O God of truth; grant me charity with fear...warm me and inflame me with Your most sweet love” (St. Catherine of Siena).

PRESENCE OF GOD - Grant me, O Lord, to understand the joy and the responsibility You have given me, in communicating Your life to me : that I may die to self and live solely for Thee.

MEDITATION

1. “ Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God ” (*Jn 3,5*). We can attain to God and His kingdom only through Christ,

through our incorporation in Him. This was effected in us by "water and the Holy Spirit," on the day of our holy Baptism. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again"; and this means truly a new birth, because in Baptism we receive the seed of a new life. Before we receive this Sacrament, we have only a human life; afterwards, we participate in divine life. Because we have become incorporated in Christ as His members, we receive the Holy Spirit, who diffuses Christ's grace in us. St. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ" (*Gal 3,27*). On the day of our Baptism, we are born in Christ and in Him we have become that "new creature" born not of the flesh, but of the Spirit, "born not of blood...nor of the will of man," but solely "of God" (*Jn 1,13*).

Being born in Christ, we are to live in Christ and walk in Christ, following the exhortation of the Apostle, "Walk ye in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and confirmed in the faith" (*Col 2,6.7*). Baptism gives us our birth in Christ; the other sacraments are not only to restore, but also to root, invigorate, and build up our life in Christ.

2. "O God...grant that we may be made *partakers of His divinity*, who has condescended to become partaker of our humanity." We may say that this prayer, which the Church repeats at the Offertory of every Mass, has been answered beforehand, because, from the day of our Baptism, we have been made partakers in Christ's divinity. However, this gift, bestowed on us without any merit on our part, requires our cooperation. "Recognize your dignity, O Christian," St. Leo exclaims, "and having become a sharer in the divine nature, beware lest you return to your former baseness by unworthy conduct. Remember the Head and Body to which you belong."

Every sin, fault, or voluntary negligence dishonors Christ, our Head, and grieves the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. A consecrated soul, however, cannot remain content with merely avoiding sin; we must also strive to make Christ's life increase in us. In the life of nature, we grow without the help of our own wills; but this is not true of the life of grace. Without our cooperation, it is possible for this life to remain stationary in us for twenty, thirty, fifty years after our baptism, after hundreds of confessions

and Holy Communions. What a tremendous disproportion! We may be adults, or even aged in years, but children according to grace!

We must grow in Christ; and He must increase in us. The words of St. John the Baptist form our program, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (*Jn* 3,30). See what the development of grace in us exacts—the death of the "old man" with his bad habits, faults, and imperfections, so that the "new man," the Christ-life in us, may grow to perfection.

COLLOQUY

"O Lord, how little we profit from all the blessings Thou hast granted us! Thy Majesty seeks methods and ways and inventions by which to show us Thy love; yet we, inexperienced in loving Thee, set so little store by them that, unpracticed as we are, our thoughts pursue their habitual path and cease pondering on the great mysteries of Thy infinite love.

"How miserable is the wisdom of mortal man! How uncertain is His foresight! Do Thou, who foreseest all, provide the necessary means whereby my soul may serve Thee according to Thy will, and not its own.... May this self of mine die, and may Another, greater than myself and better for me than myself, live in me, so that I may serve Him. May He live and give me life; may He reign and may I be His captive, for my soul desires no other freedom.

"How can one be free who is separated from the Most High? What harder or more miserable captivity is there than for the soul to have escaped from the hand of its Creator? Happy are they who find themselves laden with the strong fetters and chains of the gifts of God's mercy, so that they are unable to gain the power to set themselves free.... O free will, thou art the slave of thine own freedom, unless thou be pierced through with fear and love for Him who created thee!" (*T.J. Con, I - Exc, 17*).

O Lord, when I think that I have the terrible power to paralyze the action of grace, the action of the Holy Spirit within me, I realize that the greatest mercy You can show me is to captivate my freedom by Your love, so that it may

be Your willing prisoner forever. O my Jesus, I beseech You to take away from me the freedom to frustrate Your graces, to live a purely human life, as though no seed of divine life were implanted in me. Oh! I know that I am very distracted, very forgetful; I am superficial, I allow myself to be ensnared by all kinds of attractions and preoccupations with exterior material things, and I forget the supernatural realities which my senses do not perceive, although they are the beautiful realities.

Your love alone, O Lord, can conquer the great inconstancy of my mind and heart, and establish them in You, so that my life may become interior, rather than exterior, centered on You and Your grace instead of on myself and the things of earth.

49

THE FIRST MIRACLE OF JESUS

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, I beg You to transform my soul as You once transformed the water for the bride and bridegroom at Cana.

MEDITATION

1. Now that the cycle of Jesus' childhood has ended, the liturgy begins to speak of His public life. During the days following the Epiphany, it recalled Our Lord's baptism in the Jordan, the event which marked the beginning of His apostolate. Today it tells us about His first miracle, destined, like the Epiphany and His baptism, to manifest to the world His glory as the Son of God.

"And the third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the Mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited...to the marriage" (*Gosp: Jn 2,1-11*). For the first time, we see the Blessed Virgin in her maternal function as mediatrix of all graces. The Cana miracle,

Jesus' first, was worked precisely because of her intercession which was so powerful that it made Jesus anticipate His hour. "My hour is not yet come," the Savior had answered His Mother, and Mary was neither dismayed by this apparent refusal nor did she insist on her request. Secure in the knowledge of her Son and full of loving confidence in Him, she says to the servants, "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye." Her humility, consideration for others, faith, and trustful abandonment win Jesus, and to show us the greatness of her power over His divine heart, He grants her wish; the miracle takes place.

Mary's faith is admirable; and also worthy of admiration is the faith and prompt obedience of the servants who, following Mary's advice, immediately carry out the orders of Jesus; they fill the waterpots with water and then pour from them. Not a moment of doubt, not a protest—they simply obey. May we not learn from them how to believe, how to obey? Shall we not have recourse to Mary's powerful intercession?

2. "The water was made wine." A miracle much more wonderful than the one which Jesus performed at Cana is repeated daily on our altars; a little bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, and given to us as the Food of our souls. The Communion antiphon of today's Mass repeats the passage in the Gospel which speaks of the water made wine. Yes, for us pre-eminently, Jesus has "kept the good wine until now." It is the precious wine of the Holy Eucharist, inebriating our souls with His Body and Blood.

There is another wonderful transformation which Jesus accomplishes in our souls by means of grace; the water of our poor human nature becomes a sharer in God's divine nature; it is transformed into the sacred wine of the life of Christ Himself. Man becomes a member of Christ, the adopted child of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Today our Lady tells us how we can and should foster this precious transformation; she says to us as she once did to the servants at the Cana feast, "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye." In these words, Mary invites us to that complete transformation in Christ which is effected by the generous practice of all that He teaches and commands. Let us,

then, with humble, docile hearts, with lively faith and perfect abandonment, entrust ourselves to Jesus through Mary's hands.

COLLOQUY

How encouraging it is, O Lord, for me to find Your sweet Mother beside You today! Everything becomes simple and easy near Mary, beneath her maternal eye, under the protection of her powerful intercession. How good You were, O Jesus, to give us Your dear Mother to be the Mother of our spiritual life! I will follow Mary's precious advice and do everything You tell me, everything You wish me to do.

I want to imitate the blind, prompt obedience of the servants at the wedding feast : to obey You as they did, always and in everything, Your instructions, counsels, and precepts—to obey You likewise in the person of my superiors, even when I do not see the reason for their orders and arrangements, even when they expect difficult things of me or something which seems to me absurd. Furthermore, I want to imitate Your Mother's complete abandonment when, in her great thoughtfulness, she confided to You her wish to help the bride and bridegroom in their difficulty. Your apparent refusal did not trouble her; she did not persist in her request, but she was sure, absolutely sure, that Your infinitely good and tender heart would provide, and provide abundantly.

O Lord, with a like confidence and trust, I lay my needs before You today. Do You see them? My soul is like the waterpots at the feast : full of water, the cold, insipid water of my frailty and weakness, which I never seem to overcome completely. I can say with the Psalmist : "The waters have come even unto my soul" (*Ps 60,1*), and they submerge me and I am as one drowned in incompetence and weakness. O Lord, I believe that, if You will, You can change all this water into the precious wine of Your love, Your grace, and Your life. You are so powerful, so merciful, that my wretchedness, great as it is, does not astonish You, because in comparison with You, who are infinite, it is always very small. Just as in the Mass the few drops of water which are poured into the chalice are changed

with the wine into Your Blood, O Lord, take my wretchedness, plunge it into Your heart, make it disappear in You.

50

“I AM THE TRUTH”

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, Incarnate Word, splendor and brightness of the Father, instruct and illumine my soul.

MEDITATION

1. Jesus came to give us life and to show us the way which leads to it. He, the Teacher of life, is also its source.

At the beginning of Jesus' apostolate, the heavenly Father presented Him to the world as its divine Teacher. The Holy Spirit, descending upon Jesus in the form of a dove immediately after His baptism, and the voice from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (*Mt 3,17*) are, as it were, the divine credentials guaranteeing His teaching and giving the basic reasons for it. Who could refuse to believe His doctrine if He is the Son of God and the Holy Spirit is with Him? Two years later on Mt. Thabor, the same presentation is renewed : the same voice, the same words, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," but this time an explicit mandate is given us : "Hear ye Him!" (*ibid. 17,5*). By these words an even greater light is cast upon the teaching mission of Christ.

Jesus revealed Himself as Teacher, as the one and only Teacher : "You call Me Master...and you say well, for so I am" (*Jn 13,13*). "Neither be ye called masters; for one is your Master, Christ" (*Mt 23,10*). Strengthening the validity of this claim, Jesus declared that He was the Life and the Truth. He even equates the latter with His origin and mission, as when He declared to Pilate : "For this was I born, and for this I came into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth" (*Jn 18,37*). Those who listen to His word, hear the truth : "If you continue

in my word...you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (*ibid.* 8,31.32).

2. A man may or may not be a teacher; in either case, he remains a man. Jesus, on the other hand, is Teacher by nature, because He is the Incarnate Word. God is Truth; all the truth which is in the Father is communicated to the Word, and comes to us through Christ. Jesus is Teacher because He is the Word, the substantial Word of the Father, and as such, He possesses and manifests all truth, all wisdom, all knowledge; indeed, He Himself is the Truth, the Wisdom, the Splendor, the Light of the Father. It is because of this that Jesus could say that He was the one and only Master. Other teachers know only a part of the truth; Jesus not only knows all truth, but because He is the Word, He is the Truth. Other teachers set forth truths which are superior to them, truths which exist outside themselves, and of which they can have but an imperfect knowledge. Jesus, on the contrary, teaches the truth which He Himself is by nature. His teaching, therefore, is supreme, unique, and infallible. This is why He said, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in Me may not remain in darkness" (*ibid.* 12,46), and even more explicitly, "I am the light of the world" (*ibid.* 8,12). Jesus alone could call Himself the light of the world, because the Word alone is the light.

The teaching of Jesus does not consist then in mere human words, however sublime and elevated they might be, but it is the revelation of God Himself. This is the Word to which He invites us to open our minds and hearts.

COLLOQUY

"O divine Father, You have opened the Book of Life, Jesus Christ, before us, Your children. In Him, the God-Man, we find all that we could wish to know. Reading in Him, we shall be filled with holy knowledge; we shall find all the doctrine we need for ourselves and for others. But, O my soul, if you want to be enlightened and instructed, you must not read this Book of Life hastily or superficially, but slowly and attentively; then you will be inflamed with divine love and you will know the truth."

"Above all, O my soul, try to have a true knowledge of God and yourself; you can obtain this only by reading, meditating, and studying the Book of Life, Christ, Our Lord" (St. Angela of Foligno).

O my Jesus, true light, drive away the clouds of ignorance which come from my evil nature, and give me the grace to seek the truth with a sincere heart and to love it; for You, the Incarnate Word, are the Truth.

Be the only light on my path, the only Master to guide my steps. I need You, eternal Truth, to liberate me from the slavery of my frailty and wretchedness, and from the passions which often blind my conscience and hinder me from complete adherence to the good and the true which You teach me.

Your truth teaches me that You are He who is, and that I am one who is not; that You alone have worth, and that I have no value; that You are All, and I am nothing, and if there is any good in me, it is a wholly gratuitous gift from You.

O Jesus, grant that I may seek Your truth and love it, even when it is painful, or when, like a two-edged sword, it lays bare my miseries, my faults, my sins. Let Your truth penetrate my whole being and all my acts; make me courageously reject every light which does not emanate from You!

O my only Master, make me comprehend the vanity of all knowledge and thought which does not reflect Your truth. O Lord, submerge my soul in Your light, penetrate my mind and heart with Your truth. Unite me to You, O eternal Truth! O Jesus, Incarnate Word, Incarnate utterance of my God, instruct my soul. I wish to learn everything from You, to "spend my life in listening to You" (E.T. III).

THE DOCTRINE OF JESUS

PRESENCE OF GOD - Behold me at Your feet, O Lord, that I may hear Your doctrine, the doctrine of eternal life.

MEDITATION

1. The truths Jesus taught are so important and essential that, to know them or not, to believe them or not, is a matter of life or of death. His doctrine is not optional; rather, it is so essential that we cannot attain eternal life without it. "Whosoever believeth in Him...may have life everlasting....but he that doth not believe is already judged : because he believeth not in the Name of the only-begotten Son of God" (*Jn* 3,16.18). Compared to the truths taught by Jesus, all others are insufficient.

Because the doctrine of Jesus is absolutely indispensable, He proved its truth by miracles in order to help our weak faith to adhere to it. To the blindly obstinate Jews who refused to believe in Him, He said, "The works which the Father hath given Me to perfect; the works themselves which I do, give testimony of Me" (*ibid.* 5,36). When the disciples of John the Baptist asked Him if He were the Messiah in whom they were to believe, He answered simply, "Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen : the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again" (*Mt* 11,4.5). The Gospel almost always concludes a recital of the wonders performed by Jesus with such words as : "and His disciples believed in Him" (*Jn* 2,11); "All wondered and glorified God" (*Mk* 2,12). Jesus is the only Teacher who can guarantee with miracles the truth of His doctrine.

2. Jesus wants everyone, even the simple and the ignorant, to understand His doctrine; He often said that He came especially to evangelize the poor. Jesus is not a teacher seeking glory and praise; He seeks only the good of His disciples. He uses simple language which can be understood

by all, and He illustrates the most sublime truths by very ordinary things. Thus, for example, He uses the water in the well to represent the living water of grace, and the vine to explain the mystery of our union with Him, the true Vine. Further, Jesus does not wait for us to seek Him; He is the Master who goes Himself in search of His disciples, and He seeks them everywhere—in the tax-collectors' office, in the homes and haunts of the publicans, in the streets and squares, in the country. He teaches in the synagogues and from the porch of the Temple as well as in Peter's boat or on the grassy slopes of the hillsides. He welcomes Nicodemus at night and stops at the well of Sichem to wait for the Samaritan woman.

Jesus explains His doctrine in a manner which is adapted, not only to the mentality and needs of the people of Palestine, but also to that of all future generations. His words are always living and timely, suited to the needs of every age and every people.

His hearers were divided into two groups : the proud, obstinate hearts who refused to believe, even when they saw the most astounding miracles, and of whom Jesus said, " If I had not come, and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin" (*Jn* 15,22); and the upright hearts, sincerely eager for the truth, who accepted His words with faith and love. Jesus rejoiced because of them, saying, " I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones" (*Mt* 11,25).

COLLOQUY

" O Lord, my God, Thou hast indeed the words of life, wherein, if we will seek it, we mortals shall all find what we desire. But what wonder is it, my God, that we should forget Thy words, when our evil deeds have made us so infirm and foolish?... What is this, Lord?... How blind of us to seek repose where it cannot possibly be found!... Reflect that we do not understand ourselves, or know what we desire, nor are we able to ask as we should. Give us light, Lord. Behold, we need it more than the man who was blind from his birth, for he wished to see the light

and could not, whereas nowadays, Lord, no one wishes to see it."

" You alone, O Lord, teach us truth and show us the way of salvation. O unhappy are we, for well do we know and believe these truths, yet our inveterate habit of not reflecting upon them makes them so strange to our souls that we neither know them nor seek to know them.

" Grant, then, Lord, that Your words may never be absent from my thoughts " (T.J. *Exc*, 8-13).

O Jesus, do not permit me to allow myself to be attracted by maxims and doctrines which do not come from You.

What will it profit me to possess every kind of knowledge, if I do not know You, O Lord, and the truths which You came to teach us? Do not permit me, O Jesus, to be content with superficial knowledge, but give me the light and the intelligence I need to penetrate the profound meaning of Your teachings. Your words will not be made clear by reasoning and eager studying, but by humility, love, and an ardent desire to possess You. Create in me, O Lord, a heart that is upright, humble, sincere, and able to love and understand the meaning of Your divine words.

O my dear Master, I lay open my soul before You, as I would expose a piece of linen to the rays of the sun. I kneel before the tabernacle, knowing that I shall learn much more from You in prayer and recollection than in perusing learned books. But, O Lord, I shall never leave Your book, the Gospel : " I find in it all that my poor soul needs, and I am always discovering there new lights and hidden, mysterious meanings " (T.C.J. *St*, 8).

O Lord, grant that I may understand the words of Your Gospel, and I shall be sufficiently wise.

JESUS SHOWS US THE FATHER

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, You are the Word who reveals the Father. You alone can teach me who God is. Speak, Lord, for Your servant heareth!

MEDITATION

1. "Now this is eternal life : that they may know Thee, the only true God" (*Jn* 17,3), Jesus tells us; and St. John the Evangelist says, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (*ibid.* 1,18). Only Jesus, the Son of God, can give us knowledge of the Father : He alone, as God's Word, is by nature the Revealer of God.

Our words express our thoughts; likewise, the Word, the substantial utterance of the Father, expresses the Father and reveals the nature of God. When the Word was made flesh, He continued to be what He was, the Word, the Splendor of God, the Revealer of God. Becoming incarnate, He made Himself known to men, and accessible to our human capacity, but that implied no lessening of His divine nature.

Even when Jesus does not speak, His very Person and actions reveal God to us. He often remarked sadly, in the face of misunderstanding, "If you knew Me, you would know My Father also" (cf. *ibid.* 8,19; 14,7). To Philip who, at the Last Supper, asked Him to show them the Father, He replied in a tone of gentle reproach, "Have I been so long a time with you, and have you not known Me? Philip, he that seeth Me seeth the Father also.... Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?" (*ibid.* 14,9,10).

Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" (*Col* 1,15) : it is sufficient to look upon Him with faith and love in order to know God. From no other master, through no other way can we acquire such knowledge, indispensable for eternal life. "Neither doth anyone know the Father, but the Son, and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal Him" (*Mt* 11,27).

2. When by reason we trace creatures back to their first cause, we are able to know that God exists, that He is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. The knowledge obtained thus, however, is always mediate, indirect, and far from perfect. It is arrived at only with great difficulty and often after many errors.

There are other divine truths which cannot be reached by the human intellect alone, for example, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the universal Fatherhood of God, our incorporation in Christ and our elevation to the supernatural state. We would never be able to arrive at these profound truths, which disclose so many things about God and His intimate life, and which at the same time are concerned with our supreme destiny, if Jesus had not come to reveal them to us. He does this with the highest possible authority : "We speak what We know, and We testify what We have seen..." (*Jn* 3,11); "I speak that which I have seen with My Father" (*ibid.* 8,38). "You do not know Him; but I know Him, because I am from Him" (*ibid.* 7,28.29). Jesus made use of the parables of the prodigal son and the lost sheep to describe in touching words the goodness of His heavenly Father, who "maketh His sun to rise upon the good and bad" (*Mt* 5,45), and who "feedeth the birds of the air and giveth raiment to the lilies of the field" (cf. *ibid.* 6,26.28), thus revealing God's infinite mercy toward us, and His fatherly Providence, which receives us and provides for us as His children. The revelation of these great truths is further clarified by the works of Jesus : His concern for material and spiritual misery, His love which keeps Him continually seeking souls to be saved, even to giving His life for them. The good tidings that Jesus brought to the world consist above all in this revelation of God as infinite charity, of God as our loving Father; the New Testament and the whole Christian life are based entirely on this revelation.

COLLOQUY

"O Jesus Christ, Son of God, Word and Wisdom of the Father, You are the Book of Life; You came into the world to teach us, by Your life, Your death, and Your doctrine.... O uncreated God, make me worthy to understand You,

as Your Son revealed You, His Father, to us" (St. Angela of Foligno).

O Jesus, I, too, ask with Philip : "Show me the Father," but I quickly add : Show Him to me in You, for the Father is in You, and You in Him, so that looking at You, I see and find Your Father. Your humanity is a veil which hides and conceals the divinity of the Father, divinity which is also Yours because You are God, like the Father and the Holy Spirit. You are the Word, O Jesus, but the Incarnate Word; and the utterance of the Father is, so to speak, written in Your flesh, so that I can read it in You, the one, true Book of Life. You reveal God to me by Your whole Being, Your Person, Your actions, and Your words. Always and in every way You repeat one great truth to me : God is Love. Eternal life consists in knowing You, O Jesus, and through You knowing God. No one but You can give me this knowledge; I can learn it only from You. How necessary it is, then, and how much I want You to teach me! "O my Lord and true God! He who knows You not, loves You not. Oh, what a great truth is this! But alas, alas, Lord, for those who seek not to know You!" (T.J. *Exc*, 14). O Jesus, it is surely deplorable that the world is not interested in knowing You and Your Father; but the offense would be beyond imagination if a soul who is consecrated to You should act in this way, or should be satisfied to know You only superficially!

O Lord, reveal Yourself to my soul, because I want to know You, to know You in order to love You, to serve You and to regulate my life according to Your wishes. "O God, when a woman in the world is about to marry, she knows beforehand whom she is to marry, what sort of a person he is and what property he possesses. Shall not we, then, who are already betrothed, think about our Spouse...who is His Father, what is the country to which He will take us, what are the riches with which He promises to endow us, what is His character, how we can best make Him happy, what we can do to give Him pleasure, and how we can conform our character to His? O my Spouse, must we, then, make less account of You than is made of men?" (T.J. *Way*, 22).

JESUS THE TEACHER OF SANCTITY

PRESENCE OF GOD - I need You always, my divine Master, because You alone are holy and can show me the true way of holiness.

MEDITATION

i. The knowledge of God in which eternal life consists, as Jesus has said, is not the kind of knowledge which stops at the enlightenment of our intellects, but knowledge which stirs up our wills to love the God whom we know, and which regulates our whole life so that it will be pleasing to Him. Consequently, when Jesus has brought us to the knowledge of the Father, He then teaches us what we must do to please Him : "Be you therefore perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect" (*Mt 5,48*). In this brief formula, the divine Teacher reveals two great truths : God is the model of sanctity, because He alone is the fullness of perfection, free from every shadow of fault or failing; secondly, God's will in our regard is that we also be perfect, which we shall be according to the degree in which we try to imitate God's perfection.

Yet how can a mere creature imitate divine perfection? Jesus, our Life and our Teacher, makes it possible for us. The grace which Jesus merited for us and which He is continually giving us, together with the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, raises us from the human level to the supernatural, divine level; we are made sharers in the divine nature, the divine life. Faith also makes us sharers in God's truth and in the knowledge which He has of Himself and of all things. Charity gives us a participation in the infinite love with which God loves Himself and His creatures.

However, we cannot see God's perfection and holiness, because He "inhabiteth light inaccessible, whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (*I Tm 6,16*). But Jesus reveals God to us : He manifests Him to us in Himself, His works, and His words.

Hence, Jesus is the perfect Teacher of holiness. He teaches us that God wants us to be holy, shows us God as

the supreme, infinite ideal of holiness, and enables us to start out toward this sublime ideal.

2. When Jesus says to us : " Be you perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect," He gives us a model of perfection that we can never exhaust. The perfection of the very greatest saints when compared with God's perfection is nothing. Jesus teaches us, then, not to rest complacent in the degree of perfection we have attained, nor to be satisfied with our progress or even our efforts. Compared with the lofty ideal He sets before us, we are nothing. This is why He tells us never to stop, never to say, " This is enough." No matter how much progress we make, we never advance far enough. Who, indeed, can become as just, as merciful as God? As long as we are on earth, our holiness will always consist in a continual tending toward divine perfection. " Strive for it untiringly and uninterruptedly," says St. Augustine.

Among the perfections of God which Jesus has revealed, charity has first place. It is so important that, when He asks us to imitate God, His first requirement is an intense practice of charity toward God and our neighbor. The precept of charity, like that of striving for perfection, has no limits : however much we love God we shall never succeed in loving Him as much as He is capable of being loved, that is, as much as He deserves; and however much we love our neighbor we shall never love him as God loves him.

Jesus thus invites us to rise to perfection, to a holiness which has no limits and which requires of us a continual advancement, progress and ascension. Although we always do little, a mere nothing compared with so lofty an ideal, Our Lord is satisfied with this little, provided we put all our good will into it.

COLLOQUY

O my divine Master, what a sublime ideal of perfection You set before my soul! With Your help, I shall go on in this way with the one desire of following Your teaching, of doing the will of God, and of pleasing our heavenly Father. If in comparing myself to the saints, I see so many defects, how shall I ever put my misery before the infinite perfection

of God? But, O Jesus, there is no question about it, for Your words resound clearly in my mind : "Be you perfect, as Your heavenly Father is perfect."

I can do nothing better, then, than to imitate St. Thérèse's charming, audacious method. Instead of becoming discouraged, I shall say to You as she did, "O Lord, You would not inspire me with a desire which could not be realized; therefore, in spite of my littleness, I can aim at being a saint. It is impossible for me to become great, so I must bear with myself and my many imperfections; but I will seek out a means of reaching heaven by a little way—very short, very straight, and entirely new. We live in an age of inventions : there are now lifts which save us the trouble of climbing stairs. I will try to find a lift by which I may be raised unto God, for I am too small to climb the steep stairway of perfection.... O Jesus, Your arms, then, are the lift which must raise me even to heaven. To reach heaven I need not become great; on the contrary, I must remain little, I must become even smaller than I am" (*T.C.J. St.*, 9).

These are Your two arms, O Jesus : the Holy Spirit whom You have sent to me, and the grace which You have given me : sanctifying grace and actual grace, by which You continually sustain the steps of those who trust in You. I must admit that if I am often discouraged, finding the path of perfection too difficult and wearisome; if I give up at last, because I think that a certain effort or act of generosity is too much for me, it is simply because I forget to have recourse to You, to cast myself into Your arms and implore You to help me. O my loving Master, You who never abandon us, but are always ready to help us if we have recourse to You, teach me to fly to You for refuge continually, with full confidence, asking Your help in every difficulty.

WHAT JESUS' TEACHING EXACTS

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, I beg You to make me understand all Your instructions and then give me strength to put them into practice.

MEDITATION

In calling us to imitate the holiness of His heavenly Father, Jesus summons us to an unrelenting war against sin, which is in direct opposition to God's infinite perfection and is the greatest offense against Him. In all His teachings He tries to inculcate in us a deep hatred of sin, especially of pride, hypocrisy, and obstinate willful malice, all of which constitutes a state of complete opposition to God. Jesus, who shows such great mercy toward sinners, has scathing words for the Pharisees : "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites : because you are like to whitened sepulchres.... You serpents, generation of vipers, how will you flee from the judgment of hell?" (*Mt 23,27-33*). Again, He describes the ugliness of sin and its disastrous effect on man, lowering him to a state of complete moral degradation, such as that of the prodigal son who, because he had left his father's house, was reduced to "feeding swine" (*Lk 15,15*).

"Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin" (*Jn 8,34*); a slave of sin cannot be a servant of God; hence, the words of the Master : "No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one, and love the other : or he will sustain the one, and despise the other" (*Mt 6,24*).

Jesus, our Savior, came to destroy sin by His death; it is precisely by His death that He shows us most clearly the terrible malice of sin. Sin is such a great enemy of God and has such a destructive power that it brought about the death of the divine Master.

2. Only mortal sin is completely opposed to God; this opposition is so great that it separates the soul from God. However, every sin, even venial sin, and every fault and imperfection, is in opposition to God's infinite holiness.

Our nature, wounded as a consequence of original sin, bears within itself the seed of sin, in the form of evil tendencies or habits. If we desire to follow Jesus, who offers us the perfection of His heavenly Father as a norm for our life, we must engage in an intense struggle against sin in order to destroy its deepest roots and even its slightest traces in us. This is just what Jesus teaches us with the brief words : "Deny thyself." We must deny "self" with all its imperfect habits and inclinations; and we must do so continually. Such a task is fatiguing and painful, but it is indispensable if we wish to attain sanctity. Jesus says : "How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it!" (*Mt 7,14*). We approach the infinite perfection of God only in the measure in which we take upon ourselves the work of complete self-denial. Hence, all the masters of the spiritual life insist so strongly on detachment and self-renunciation as the indispensable foundation of the spiritual life. St. John of the Cross offers a soul who is desirous of attaining union with God the harsh way of the "nothing."

But, first and foremost, Jesus, the divine Teacher, has pointed out to us the absolute necessity of passing through this way : "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself" (*ibid. 16,24*).

COLLOQUY

O Jesus, I beseech You to fill my soul with a sincere and profound hatred of sin, of every kind of sin, so that I shall always be ready to prefer any suffering, even death, to offending God. Make me see, O divine Master, that the only real evil which can befall me and from which I must always pray to be delivered, is sin; for sin is such an enemy of Yours that it caused You to be scourged, crowned with thorns, and nailed to the Cross. Sin made You shed all Your Blood and die in terrible torment. O Jesus, You taught us to ask our heavenly Father to "deliver us from evil"; make use of Your power of intercession; show Your Father, who is ours, too, the still-bleeding wounds of Your Passion, and obtain for me and for all faithful souls, the grace to be freed from the terrible evil of sin. O Jesus,

must one make a distinction between serious sin and venial sin, between sin and imperfection?

"From any sin, however slight, committed with full knowledge, may God deliver us, especially since we are sinning against so great a Sovereign and realizing that He is watching us! That seems to me a sin committed of malice aforethought: it is as though one were to say: 'Lord, although this displeases You, I shall do it. I know that You see it and I know that You would not have me do it; but, though I understand this, I would rather follow my own whim and desire than Your will'" (*T.J. Way*, 41).

With Your help, O Jesus, I want to fight more strongly against sin and try to overcome all my evil tendencies, inclinations, and habits. This exacts constant self-denial, but with Your help, I am ready to begin. Of course, I shall have to give up my own desires, but I shall do so in order to please God; I shall have to say "No" to my evil nature, and prefer our heavenly Father's will, His inspirations and wishes. It will mean dying to myself in order to live by You, O Jesus! If I really love You, shall I find this total self-denial hard? Oh! grant that I too may say with St. Paul, "I count all things to be but loss...and count them but as dung, that I may gain Christ and may live in Him" (*cf. Phil 3,7.9*).

55

THE POWER OF THE DIVINE TEACHER

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, I beg You, not only to instruct me, but to move my soul to accept Your teaching and to put it into practice.

MEDITATION

1. Jesus not only imparts truth to us, He also helps us to accept it. This is the task of any teacher, but he can work only from the exterior, trying to clear his pupil's mind of the errors which obscure it and to present the truth in

a clear and convincing manner. Jesus, however, does much more than this; His activity is far more intimate and profound. He is the only Teacher capable of acting directly on the souls, the minds and the wills of His pupils. Jesus moves our souls *interiorly* to accept His teachings and to put them into practice.

The truths Jesus teaches are divine mysteries; therefore, we cannot master them by the art of human reasoning. To accept them, our minds must be equipped with a new supernatural light and power, the light and power of faith. Faith comes to us through Jesus; not only did He merit it for us, together with grace, the other infused virtues, and the gifts, but He is continually obtaining it for us and producing it in us. "He is always the author of faith... He infuses the light of faith into the faithful" (*Mystici Corporis*). Therefore, while Jesus is revealing eternal truths to us, He is also filling our souls with the light of faith, until He produces in us, by means of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, a profound, mysterious knowledge giving us an intuition, a *sense* of divine things. He acts on our wills in the same way by the virtue of charity, drawing us to love Him and our heavenly Father, impelling us to put His teachings into practice. While Jesus is teaching us, He is kindling in us the fire of divine love just as He did in the two disciples from Emmaus. After they had heard His explanation of the events that had taken place in Jerusalem, they said to each other : "Was not our heart burning within us, whilst He spoke in the way?" (*Lk 24,32*).

2. "Our Master," writes St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, "has no need of book or teacher to instruct a soul. The Teacher of teachers instructs without sound of words, and though I have never heard Him speak, yet I know He is within me, always guiding and inspiring me; and just when I need them, lights, hitherto unseen, break in upon me" (*St. 8*). Jesus interiorly teaches souls who are willing to listen to Him, and He teaches them above all by His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, thus carrying out His promise to the Apostles : "The Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My Name, He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you" (*Jn 14,26*). Jesus and the Father are always sending the Holy Spirit from heaven into our souls; this Divine Spirit makes us

understand the profound meaning of Our Lord's teaching and suggests practical applications for our daily life. Jesus teaches us through the authority of the Church, to which He has entrusted the task of preserving His doctrine and transmitting it unchanged to all the faithful.

When we accept Jesus as our Teacher, we must also accept all His teachings : the written words of the Gospel, the living word of the Church, and the mysterious, secret word by which He teaches our souls individually, making us perceive intuitively the way He wishes us to live. If His word is to be truly a treasure, it is not enough for us merely to hear it; we must sound its depths. This demands silence and interior recollection. We must imitate Mary, who "kept all these words, pondering them in her heart" (*Lk 2,19*), meditating on everything her divine Son said and did.

COLLOQUY

O Lord Jesus, I need You to exercise all Your power as divine Master over me! I dearly love Your words of instruction, but only too often these divine words fail to bring forth in me the fruit I desire. Why is this, O Lord? Could it be because, after I have listened to You in prayer and made a resolution to put into practice what You have deigned to make me understand, I forget it all at the opportune moment and allow myself to be overcome by my habitual frailty? Perhaps, O Lord, it is because I do not know how to retain and deeply penetrate Your words in interior recollection, but allow them to be stifled by distractions and useless preoccupations, just as the careless farmer allows the good grain to be choked by weeds. Oh! in times of difficulty, when I should be carrying out Your instructions, if I only knew enough to turn to You, my divine Teacher, always present and operating in me by Your grace! Oh! if I would place myself, were it only for an instant, at Your feet and implore Your help, how I should profit! I know You are always ready to receive me and to increase my spirit of faith, so that I may see everything in Your light and regard all circumstances and things according to their value for eternity. You are always eager to kindle in my heart a more ardent

flame of charity and to draw me gently to the practice of what You have taught me.

People weary themselves seeking learned teachers; they spend a great deal of money; they take long journeys and make many sacrifices to consult them even for a few brief moments. And I, who have always at hand the divine Master, do I not know enough to take advantage of His teaching? O Jesus, infinite wisdom and knowledge, You do not hesitate to come down to me to be my Guide and Master; do not permit me to be so foolish as to forget You! May I always listen to Your word and continually seek Your light and strength!

56

JESUS WELCOMES EVERYONE

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

PRESENCE OF GOD - O divine Savior, I, too, am a poor leper; receive me : " If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean!"

MEDITATION

1. Today's Gospel (*Mt 8,1-13*) places before us two miracles of Jesus, two profound lessons in humility, faith, and charity.

Observe the humble faith of the leper : " Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." He is so certain that Jesus can heal him that he feels nothing else is necessary for his cure other than the Lord's will. Christian faith does not wander about in subtle reasonings; its logic is simple : God can do all that He wills; therefore, His will alone is necessary. Yet the leper does not insist; one who lives by faith knows that God always wills whatever is best for him, even if it brings him suffering. Therefore, instead of insisting, he prefers to abandon himself to God's good pleasure.

Next comes the centurion. The strong, proud Roman soldier is not ashamed to personally beg Jesus, a Galilean,

to help his paralyzed servant. Our Lord is touched by this humble, charitable act, and says at once, "I shall go and heal him!" But the centurion continues, "I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed." At this point humility becomes still more profound, and faith reaches its maximum : it is not necessary for the Lord to go; His power is so great that a word spoken from afar suffices to perform any miracle. Jesus Himself "marveled and said : 'Amen I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel!'" Is this not a complaint against those who live so close to Him, who perhaps live in His own house, receiving constant favors from Him, while their faith remains very weak and therefore ineffectual?

2. According to Jewish law, lepers were kept apart from society and no one was allowed to go near them; likewise, the pagans were to be shunned because they did not belong to the chosen people. Jesus goes beyond the old law and in the name of universal charity He welcomes and heals the leper, listens to the foreign centurion and cures his pagan servant. Thus Christ teaches us to make no distinction of persons, not to despise sinners and infidels, but to welcome all with loving kindness. He does not wish the good to enclose themselves in a little circle, but to open the doors to everyone, doing good to all without concerning themselves about the traits and opinions of others. All men are children of God; and our charity, like the mercy of our heavenly Father, should extend to all. This is the dominant thought of today's Epistle (*Rom 12, 16-21*), where St. Paul exhorts us to practice charity, especially toward our enemies. "To no man rendering evil for evil.... If it be possible, as much as in you, have peace with all men. Revenge not yourselves ... but if thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat.... Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good."

Jesus conquered evil, both physical and moral evil, by His mercy and love. This must be our strategy too. Whatever the evil around us, whatever the suffering it may cause us, we shall never overcome it by arguments and discussions or by taking a stand and adhering rigidly to it. This can only be accomplished by a delicate charity which understands intuitively the mentality, the tastes, and the needs of others, and which knows precisely when to

intervene, to condescend and to sacrifice itself for the good of another, even if that other is unfriendly toward us—only such charity can triumph over evil.

COLLOQUY

"Being what we are and having our free will, when we do not receive what pleases us, we sometimes refuse what the Lord gives us, even though the gift might be the best one possible.... But no, my God, no, no more trust in anything which I can desire for myself: do You desire for me that which You are pleased to desire; for that is my desire, since all my good consists in pleasing You. And, if You, my God, should be pleased to please me, by fulfilling all that my desire asks of You, I know that I should not be lost" (*T.J. Way*, 30—*Exc*, 17).

O my Jesus, I trust You, I abandon myself to You, dispose of me, of my health and of all that concerns me, according to what You know is best for my spiritual advancement. I beg but one thing: heal my poor soul. I too, spiritually, am a poor leper, a poor paralytic. My pride and vanity are always ready to impair and vitiate the little good I accomplish. Sloth and inertia seek to paralyze my efforts toward perfection. Behold me at Your feet, O Lord; I need Your help like the leper and the paralytic servant. I too, O Lord, believe that, if You will, You can heal me.

"Miserable though I am, I firmly believe that You can do what You will; and the greater are Your marvels that I hear spoken of, and the more I reflect that You can work others still greater, the stronger grows my faith and the greater is the resolution with which I believe that You will hear my requests" (*T.J. Exc*, 4).

O sweet Jesus, I beg for a little of Your overflowing charity, which is so universal, so kind. You well know the difficulties I sometimes encounter when practicing this virtue, especially toward those whose ways of acting and thinking are so different from mine. O Lord, fill my heart with warm, sincere kindness toward them. Only the charity which comes from You will give me strength to overcome all the conflicts which arise from differences in temperament, education and ideas. Only this charity can enable me to sacrifice myself generously for those who hurt me and to continue to act kindly toward those whom I naturally dislike.

O Jesus, You came on earth to enkindle the fire of charity : enkindle in me an ardent love for my neighbor.

"I AM THE WAY"

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, my beloved Master, take my hand and lead me to the Father : You alone are the way of salvation and sanctity.

MEDITATION

i. Jesus is not only the Master who teaches us how to attain to the perfection of His heavenly Father, but He is also the living model of that perfection. Men, on the other hand, are by their very nature so limited and imperfect that they can never serve as perfect models for us. At the same time, we cannot see God, who is holiness itself. But the Son of God, His living image, by becoming man, has made infinite perfection incarnate in Himself. In Jesus, we see, we know, we touch, so to say, the sanctity of God. The divine perfections, which were beyond our grasp and inaccessible to our senses, we find as a living, concrete, tangible reality in Christ Our Lord. The Father has presented Him to the world as His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased, because He sees in Him His own perfect image and all His own infinite perfections. The Father gives Christ to us, not only as our Master, but as our Model, since from all eternity He predestinated us "to be made conformable to the image of His Son" (*Rom 8,29*).

Jesus Himself has told us that He is our only model : "I am the way.... No man cometh to the Father but by Me" (*Jn 14,6*). By His example, He shows us how we can approach God's perfection, and He says very definitely that we must imitate Him : "I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also" (*ibid. 13,15*). "Learn of Me because I am meek and humble of heart" (*Mt 11,29*).

When we imitate Jesus, we are imitating our heavenly Father; when we endeavor to practice the virtues as He did, we are drawing nearer to God's infinite perfection. When we become conformable to the image of Christ, we become conformable to the image of God.

2. In the Acts of the Apostles we are told that "Jesus began to do and to teach" (1,1). All His acts are the model for ours. All the virtues which Jesus recommended to us, He Himself practiced first, perfectly and in the highest degree. He then told us to do as He had done. His doctrine shows us exactly what our conduct should be in order to resemble His. Therefore, all Christian tradition declares that the way to attain sanctity is to imitate Christ. St. John of the Cross gives the following advice: "First, let us have a habitual desire to imitate Christ in everything that we do, conforming ourselves to His life; upon which life we must meditate, so that we may know how to imitate it and to behave in all things as Christ would behave" (*AS I*, 13,3).

This must not be a merely exterior and material imitation of Jesus' acts; we must endeavor to enter into the interior dispositions of His soul, so as to make these dispositions our own, according to the counsel of St. Paul: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (*Phil 2,5*). In this way, the imitation of Jesus is based on what is most profound and vital, that is, His intimate dispositions, which constitute the interior principle of all His actions. This putting on the "mind" of Christ is within the reach of all, whatever our state or condition of life, whereas the exterior imitation of the life of Jesus can never be complete, since it always varies according to the circumstances in which each one finds himself.

COLLOQUY

"O Christ, eternal Truth, what is Your doctrine? And by what path do You direct us to the Father? I can find no other way but the one which You have marked out in virtue of the fire of Your charity. The path, O eternal Word, which You have marked with Your Blood is the way."

"O loving, tender Word of God, You tell me : ' I have marked the path and opened the gate with My Blood; do not be negligent in following it, but take the same road which I, eternal Truth, have traced out with My Blood.' Arise, my soul, and follow your Redeemer, for no one can go to the Father but by Him. O sweet Christ, Christ-Love, You are the way, and the door through which we must enter in order to reach the Father " (St. Catherine of Siena).

O Jesus, be truly my model, my way! All that You have revealed to us of the Father's infinite holiness, all that You have taught us I see incarnate in Your life, in Your acts. What an excellent Master You are, and how well You adapt Yourself to my weakness, which needs not only to understand, but also to see concretely what it should do! If I find it painful to humble myself, You show Yourself to me as a poor, helpless Babe, lying in a manger, in a poor stable; You also show me the long years You spent in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth, and Your humiliations before the tribunals and on the Cross. Is obedience repugnant to me? I behold You, my God, obeying Mary and Joseph, Your creatures, and submitting, with the meekness of a lamb, to Your judges and executioners. When I find it hard to practice charity toward my neighbor, I have but to contemplate You, showing the most loving solicitude to hardened sinners and to Your bitterest enemies. I can find everything in You, O Jesus : life, teaching, and example. In You, I see and possess my God; You are the Mediator who brings me to the Father, my Master and my model of holiness.

O Jesus, in You alone I find my pleasure. You are all I desire; You alone can captivate me.

Grant, O Lord, that Your image may always be imprinted on my mind and in my heart, that my interior glance may always be directed toward You, so that I may be conformed in everything to You, my Master, my Model, my Way!

"I AM IN THE FATHER"

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, grant that I may enter into the interior dispositions of Your soul, into its continual personal union with the Father.

MEDITATION

1. The intimate dispositions of Jesus toward God and His relations with Him are of the utmost importance to us. Jesus is the Son of God; herein lies all His greatness and holiness. By His very nature, He is the only Son of God; we, who are made to His image, have become children of God by His mediation. This divine sonship, which belongs to Him by nature, is communicated to us by grace; hence, like Him, all our greatness and holiness consist in our living as true children of God. Therefore, as far as is consistent with our human nature, we should try to reproduce in ourselves the interior attitude of Jesus toward His heavenly Father.

First of all, we note an attitude, or rather a state, of intimate union. It is as the Word that Jesus declares. "The Father is in Me, and I in the Father" (*Jn* 10,38)f He is referring, of course, to the substantial, incommunicable union of the Word with the Father, which no one can ever imitate; this union is the prerogative of the Son of God alone. But He also made the statement as Man, because, as Man, all His love is concentrated on the Father and dominated by the Father. His whole mind is directed toward Him in an effort to please Him. This union of Jesus with His divine Father is the model for our union, precisely because it is a union of grace. Grace in Jesus is "infinite," in the language of the theologians, and in this respect it differs from ours; yet even the grace we possess enables us to keep our souls directed toward the Father and our affections centered in Him. Jesus gives us the example Himself, and asks of the Father this close union for us : "As Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us" (*ibid.* 17,21).

2. The soul of Jesus is completely immersed in the Blessed Trinity. His human intellect enjoys the Beatific Vision, in which He sees God, whose nature He possesses; He knows the Person of the Word as the subject of all His human activity. He sees the Father and knows that He is His Son; He sees the Holy Spirit who dwells within Him. His heart is filled with created charity, as infinite as the grace which adorns His soul. This charity continually ascends toward His heavenly Father with a very rapid movement, thence to pour itself out upon our souls. Whether Jesus is busy in the workshop at Nazareth, walking the roads of Palestine, preaching, teaching, debating with the Pharisees, healing the sick, or talking with the multitudes—while giving Himself to all, He never interrupts that life of wonderful union with the three divine Persons which goes on in the depths of His soul.

By means of grace, our souls have become the temples of the Blessed Trinity. The three divine Persons are really present within us, continually offering and giving Themselves to us, so that we, even here on earth, may begin to know, love, and possess Them. It is by faith that we can know Them, by charity that we can love and live in union with Them. It was to enable us to possess this life of close union with God that Jesus merited for us the grace and charity which He is continually bestowing upon us. This grace and charity are identically the same as that which fills the soul of Jesus, although given to us in a lesser degree and with far less perfection. Jesus sees God face to face, in the Beatific Vision; we “see” Him through the obscure, yet certain, knowledge of faith.

In this way we, too, can have a share in Christ’s interior life which is completely immersed in the Blessed Trinity. Did not St. Paul say, “Your life is hid with Christ in God” (*Col 3,3*)? With St. Teresa Margaret, we can aspire to “emulate, by faith, insofar as it is possible for a creature, the hidden, *interior* life and activity of the intellect and will of the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ, hypostatically united to the Word” (*Sp*).

COLLOQUY

O Jesus, what great treasures are hidden in Your words : " As Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us! " It is not enough for us to imitate Your exterior life; You want more than that. You want us to imitate, as far as mere creatures can, Your interior life, Your intimacy and Your unceasing union with the Father! It would be folly and arrogant temerity even to think of doing this, had You not commanded us to do so. But You have commanded it, and these words of Yours are particularly sacred because they form part of Your last prayer to Your Father, a prayer which contains Your spiritual testament.

You, O Jesus, are indissolubly united to the Father by nature, and I may always be united to God by grace. Your most holy soul is always immersed in the Beatific Vision of the Most Blessed Trinity; and I by faith know that the Trinity lives within me. Under the motion of the Holy Spirit, an infinite love of charity is continually rising up from Your heart toward the Father; and in me the fire of charity, kindled and diffused by the divine Paraclete, desires only to grow, to expand, and to be seized by the Holy Spirit and drawn into His flame of love, so as to mount again toward the Father, toward the Blessed Trinity.

Aided by Your grace, O Jesus, I live in You and You live in me. But I do not live in You alone, for wherever You are, O Word, there are the Father and the Holy Spirit also. Thus You, O Christ, draw me to live in the Trinity and my poor human life remains hidden with You in God. O Lord, do not permit me to become so absorbed by exterior activities, even good ones, that I forget or neglect the wonderful life of union with God to which You are calling and inviting me. In the innermost depths of my heart, hidden from all human gaze, dwells the Trinity; help me to dwell with Them! Help me to be silent and recollected, to hide myself with God who is hidden within me! Grant that, like a true child of God, I may always live in union with my Father, always remain at His feet to love and adore Him, and to listen to His divine words.

THE PRAYER OF JESUS

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, grant that I may enter the sanctuary of Your most holy soul where You reveal to me the secrets of Your prayer.

MEDITATION

1. Although Jesus was always indissolubly united to His Father by the Beatific Vision and the plenitude of charity, He willed to consecrate to Him exclusively a part of His human activity : the time of prayer. The long years spent at Nazareth and the forty days in the desert were especially consecrated to prayer, and during His apostolic life Jesus usually prayed during the whole or part of the night. The Gospel clearly notes this prayer of Christ at the more solemn moments of His life : before He chose the twelve Apostles, Jesus "went out into a mountain to pray, and He passed the whole night in the prayer of God" (*Lk 6,12*). He prayed before Peter's confession, before the Transfiguration, at the Last Supper, in Gethsemane, on Calvary. Moreover, He frequently interrupted His apostolic activity to retire into the desert to pray, and St. Matthew tells us that, often, before performing a miracle, He would raise His eyes to heaven and call upon His Father; he also tells us that "having dismissed the multitude, He went into a mountain alone to pray" (*Mt 14,23*).

We cannot imagine a more intimate and profound prayer than the prayer of Jesus. Only in heaven, where it will be given us also to see God face to face, shall we be able to understand it and really participate in it. But even here on earth we can imitate the conduct of Jesus by readily interrupting any activity, even apostolic work, in order to devote to prayer the time assigned to it, leaving everything else to focus our attention on God alone.

2. Only the prayer of Jesus is perfect praise and adoration of the Trinity, perfect thanksgiving and always efficacious supplication; He alone can offer infinite homage to the

Trinity. Our prayer has value only insofar as we unite it to that of Jesus and try to make it an echo and extension of His.

The prayer of Jesus was completed in sacrifice; sacrifice was its logical accompaniment as well as its culmination: the sacrifice of nights spent in vigil; the sacrifice of penance, which for forty days accompanied His prayer in the desert; the sacrifice of a laborious life, without having even a place to lay His head. This rhythm of sacrifice progressively increased, until it reached its maximum in His agony in the Garden and on the Cross. At this point, the prayer of Jesus became the total sacrifice of His life for the glory of the Father and the salvation of souls.

Our prayer must also be impregnated, substantiated with sacrifice; it must be based on a true generous offering of our whole being with Christ, until we become, with Him and in Him, a sacrifice of praise and of propitiation. While we are on earth, prayer, even contemplation itself, cannot consist solely in the enjoyment of God; it must always be united with sacrifice—only thus is it true. Authentic prayer and contemplation incite the soul to generosity, disposing it to accept for God any labor or toil, and to give itself entirely to Him. On this earth, the gift of self is always realized in sacrifice.

St. Teresa of Jesus says that the purpose of the graces of contemplation is "to strengthen our weakness, so that we may be able to imitate our Lord in His great sufferings" (*Int C VII*, 4).

COLLOQUY

O Jesus, how different Your prayer is from mine! Yours is so profound and intense; mine is so superficial, distracted, and hurried. How often, alas, I allow myself to be hurried on account of my work and to become so absorbed in my activity that I cannot put it aside!

But You make me understand that my activity is fruitless and my works sterile unless they are impregnated and imbued with prayer and union with God.

You also teach me by Your example that, if I really wish to live in union with God and to nourish that union, I must frequently pause in my occupations in order to

concentrate all my powers on Him alone. O Lord, I want to follow Your example and to leave everything at the prescribed time to become recollected in prayer. You chose to go up on a mountain to pray, thus teaching me that in order to pray well, I must detach myself from the things of earth and rise above human thoughts and anxieties. When a soul is thus recollected in solitude far from creatures and from self, and desires nothing but to converse with You, O Lord, You do not delay in letting Yourself be found.

O my God, Most Holy Trinity, grant that, at least in time of prayer, I may be aware of Your presence in my soul and may make my union with You real. Grant that, at least in this hour, I may not leave You alone in the depths of my heart, but entering within, "returning home," let me enclose myself in the temple of my soul where You are waiting for me!

O Jesus, teach me and grant me that intense prayer which immerses the soul in God and which, by living contact with Him, inflames and strengthens it. I desire to share in Your prayer, which is the only adoration worthy of God. Therefore, dear Lord, take my poor prayer; unite it to Yours and offer it to the Blessed Trinity. Only in this way can I too become one of those "true adorers ... in spirit and in truth" (*Jn* 4,23) whom the Father seeks and desires.

That my prayer may be really like Yours, teach me how to nourish it by true, generous sacrifice—renouncing some well-earned repose, detaching myself from creatures, being silent and interiorly recollected. Grant that I may be faithful in performing my duties, that I may prove my love by little voluntary mortifications, and may joyfully accept Your will in all the circumstances of my life.

O Lord, grant that each day I may finish my prayer with dispositions of greater generosity and that I may be ready to accept, for love of You, every sacrifice that I find on my way.

JESUS AND HIS FATHER'S WILL

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, teach me to follow You in Your life of total, perfect adherence to the Father's will.

MEDITATION

1. "Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith [to the Father] : 'Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldest not; but a body Thou hast fitted to me.... Behold, I come... that I should do Thy will, O God'" (*Heb 10,5-7*). These words reveal the constant interior disposition of Jesus with regard to His Father's will. When the Apostles begged Him to take a little food, the divine Master replied, "I have meat to eat, which you know not.... My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me" (*Jn 4,32-34*). The only desire of Jesus and the source of His strength is the fulfillment of His Father's will. The human will of Jesus is so perfectly transformed and so completely lost in the will of God, that He acts only under the influence of this will. "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me" (*ibid. 6,38*). "I seek not My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me" (*ibid. 5,30*). In these words Jesus reveals the dispositions of His soul, the profound reason for all His acts and the rule which guided His whole life on earth, even to His sorrowful Passion, when He repeated, in spite of all the repugnance of His human nature, "Father...not My will, but Thine be done" (*Lk 22,42*).

2. For us also, the adopted children of God, the way to sanctity, the rule of our actions must be our heavenly Father's will. Like Jesus we must be nourished by this holy, sanctifying will; we must feed on it at every moment, we must seek it and desire to live by it alone, making it the one great motive for all our actions. "We must fully conform our will to God's," so that, as St. John of the Cross says, "there will be nothing in our thoughts or actions which is contrary to the divine will" (cf. *AS I, 11,2*).

Conformity to God's will and the growth of grace in

us are the two constituent elements of sanctity and of a life of union with God. These two elements are inseparable, for one depends upon the other. Our increase in grace corresponds to our degree of conformity to God's will. Jesus said, "If anyone love Me, he will keep My word...and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him" (*Jn* 14,23). "Keeping His word," that is, obeying God's will as manifested in the commandments, is the condition necessary for living in the state of grace and, hence, for enjoying the presence of the Blessed Trinity in our soul. The more complete our conformity to God's will becomes, embracing not only the grave precepts, but also the smallest details of the divine law, so as to exclude not only mortal sins, but even venial sins and the slightest voluntary imperfection, and the more we try to seek God's good pleasure in everything and accept all the circumstances of our lives as His will, the more the life of grace grows and develops within us. The three divine Persons, on Their part, give Themselves more and more to our souls, establishing their in-dwelling ever more fully and profoundly, thus drawing us to greater union with Themselves.

Then is fulfilled in us the word of Jesus : "He that sent Me is with Me, and He hath not left Me alone, for I do always the things that please Him" (*ibid.* 8,29).

COLLOQUY

O Jesus, would that I could understand, however slightly, Your perfect union with Your Father's will! It is a union, not only profound, but unchangeable, for I know that You, as God, can have no will but Your Father's, and as Man, Your will does not depend on a human ego, but belongs directly to Your divine Person. Such union can exist only in You, the Incarnate Word; yet the more I contemplate it, the more I desire to reproduce in myself at least a few of its characteristics. O Jesus, it is You who fill me with this desire, for You became our Brother and Model, that we might become like You. Did You not teach us to say to the Father : "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?" Just as the divine will is realized perfectly in the heaven of Your holy soul, so may it also be accomplished in the little heaven of mine!

" O good Master, You know that nothing is of more profit to me than to consecrate my will to the Father's. You teach me to do this, knowing that it will win Your Father's heart, and You also teach me how to serve Him. You have made Yourself my intermediary and have even said in my name : ' Thy will be done. '

" O Divine Father, after Your Son has consecrated to You my will, together with the wills of all, it would be unreasonable for me to refuse to give what He has offered.

" O Lord, what power there is in this gift of my will! If made with due determination, it cannot fail to draw You, Almighty God, to become one with our lowliness, to transform us into Yourself, and to unite the creature with the Creator.... O my God, the more You see by our actions that the words we use when speaking to You are not words of mere politeness, the more You draw us to Yourself and raise us above all petty earthly things. Not content with having made our soul one with Yourself, You begin to cherish it and to reveal Your secrets to it....

" At this very moment, O Lord, I consecrate my will to You, freely and unreservedly!" (cf. T.J. Way, 32).

61

THE WORKS OF JESUS

PRESENCE OF GOD - Grant, O good Jesus, that I may learn how to act as You did, with the one purpose of accomplishing the work entrusted to me by the Father, allowing Him to direct me in everything.

MEDITATION

I. " The works which the Father hath given Me to perfect, the works themselves...I do " (*Jn* 5,36). " I must do the works of Him that sent Me " (*ibid.* 9,4). Jesus has no other aim than to accomplish the mission entrusted to Him by the Father, and to accomplish this mission for the glory of the Father Himself and for the redemption of mankind. Burning with desire, " *desiderio desideravi* "

(*Lk* 22,15), to perform this work perfectly, He goes to face His Passion and to embrace the Cross.

God has entrusted to each one of us a share in the great redemptive work of Jesus. As consecrated souls, we are especially called to cooperate in Christ's work. First of all, we must cooperate with grace, so that the fruits of the redemption can be fully applied to our souls. This is the work of our own personal sanctification. It is not limited to this one aspect, however. We are called to sanctify ourselves in order to be able to bring others to sanctity. Each one of us has a mission to fulfill for the good of others and for their sanctification. We must collaborate with Christ in extending the fruits of the Redemption to as many souls as possible. This work is entrusted to us by the heavenly Father, and we must apply ourselves to it with the interior disposition of Christ : a total, generous, exclusive dedication, a dedication capable of making even the greatest sacrifices. All actions are of value only insofar as they help toward the accomplishment of this work. Anything that does not contribute to our own sanctification or to the sanctification of others is useless, a waste of time, and should be courageously eliminated.

Let us repeat with Jesus : "I must do the works which the Father has entrusted to Me."

2. "I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." "My Father worketh...and I work.... I cannot of Myself do anything." "I do nothing of Myself, but as the Father hath taught Me, these things I speak" (*Jn* 16,32 – 5,17.30 – 8,28).

Jesus not only devoted Himself completely to the mission entrusted to Him by the Father, but in accomplishing this mission, and in every detail of it, He always acted in union with the Father and in perfect harmony with Him, always depending upon Him and regulating His whole life according to what He heard and saw in Him. His acts were but the human, tangible expression of the unceasing, invisible work of the Father : "What He seeth the Father doing...these the Son also doth in like manner" (*ibid.* 5,19). "The things...that I speak," affirms Jesus, "even as the Father said unto Me, so do I speak" (*ibid.* 12,50).

Every soul which is in the state of grace can say, "I am not alone, for the Trinity is in me : the Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit." Our attitude should mirror the attitude of Jesus : we must work in continual dependence upon God present within us, listening to His voice, to the interior motion of grace, and acting in accordance with it. We must conform our judgment to God's will, trying to see everything in His light, and working in such a way that our actions will always be in harmony with His views, designs, and good pleasure. In all our actions we, too, should be able to say, "I do nothing by myself, I act according to God's inspiration, in order to do what is most pleasing to Him." Any work, no matter how exalted, which deviates from this line of conduct is, from a supernatural point of view, vain and sterile.

COLLOQUY

O Jesus, I place my poor soul before You. Fill me with the zeal which You had for the Father's works, with Your wholehearted, unconditional dedication to the mission He gave You. Oh, that I could perform with Your zeal and love the small part assigned to me in Your great redemptive work! But I need You to teach me how to make this zeal genuine and fruitful!

You make me understand that I should strive for perfection, correcting my faults, and overcoming my evil tendencies; this is the first field for my zeal. Then You teach me to give myself generously for the good of souls. You offer me the same arms that You Yourself used : prayer and sacrifice. You will not be satisfied with vague dreams of helping souls who are far away; You wish me first of all to do good in a concrete way to those who are near me. O Jesus, give me the zeal and courage to sacrifice myself for my neighbor; give me the strength to renounce my own tastes in order to adapt myself to the tastes of others and place myself at their disposal and service. O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like Yours, for I can do no true apostolic work unless I am meek, humble, and patient.

You also tell me that You do not wish merely human works, undertaken more by natural activity than by the influence of grace. O Jesus, even as You, in all Your works, depended on the Father and acted according to what You

heard and saw in Him, so make me depend on divine light and inspiration in all my works. I receive this light and inspiration from You, who, as the Word, are within me together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Being the Word, the utterance of the Father, You cannot remain silent but You are in me that I may listen to You. "O eternal Word, utterance of my God, I wish to spend my life in listening to You!" (E.T. III), listening to You in order to act according to Your instructions. O Word of God, You are the light in which I should judge all things, consider all things; You are the Word which should direct all my actions. You are the interior Master always ready to instruct me if I but listen to You! Oh! grant that even in the midst of my occupations I may listen to Your voice within me. I am not alone, for You are always with me and in me; do not permit me to act as if I were alone, but help me always to act with You, always depending on Your light and word.

O Jesus, I want to look at You always, to listen to You, and to act according to what I see in You and hear from You, even as You always listened to Your Father and kept Your eyes upon Him.

62

JESUS AND THE GLORY OF THE FATHER

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, increase within me Your love and Your zeal for the glory of the Father; teach me to despise all personal glory and to flee from it.

MEDITATION

I. "I honor My Father.... I seek not My own glory." "I receive not glory from men" (*In 8,49.50 – 5,41*).

Jesus ever sought His Father's glory, and to this end He chose for Himself utter humiliation, even to becoming "the reproach of men and the outcast of the people" (*Ps 21,7*). Bethlehem, Nazareth, Calvary—the three great stages of the

humble, hidden life of Jesus, in which He veiled His glory as the Son of God. Even during His public life, when His divinity was more openly manifested, Jesus tried to flee as much as possible from human glory. Many times after performing a miracle, He imposed silence on those who had witnessed it. He forbade the three Apostles who had been present at the Transfiguration "to tell any man what things they had seen, till the Son of Man shall be risen again from the dead" (*Mk* 9,8). After the first multiplication of the loaves, "when He knew that they would come to take Him by force and make Him king [He] fled again into the mountain Himself alone" (*Jn* 6,15).

The glory of Jesus lies in the fact that He is the Son of God; He desires no other glory. It is as though He would relinquish this essential glory by accepting any other. Therefore He said : "If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father that glorifieth Me" (*ibid.* 8,54). Jesus knows that after His death He will be glorified and acknowledged as the Son of God and the Savior of the world, but He desires that even this glory may be for the glorification of His Father : "Father, the hour is come, glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son may glorify Thee" (*ibid.* 17,1).

2. Following Christ's example, a Christian must seek only the glory of God. He must desire no other glory save that of being a child of God, a brother of Jesus Christ, and a member of His Mystical Body—a singular glory, indeed!

We must be on our guard against that tendency of pride which inclines us to seek a little satisfaction, praise, and personal glory even in our most spiritual actions. If we seek glory for ourselves, though it be only in insignificant matters, this glory is of no value; it elevates us in the eyes of men, but lowers us in God's eyes; it lessens and may even endanger our glory as children of God.

Seeking human glory and taking pleasure in it hinder and blind us on our way to perfection. Jesus said to the proud, haughty Pharisees, "How can you believe, who receive glory one from another, and the glory which is from God alone, you do not seek?" (*ibid.* 5,44). Only profound humility will enable us to overcome the allurements of pride, to silence the interior voices of self-esteem and vain complacency in order to seek always and in everything

the glory of God. St. John of the Cross urges us to fix our eyes on the interior dispositions of Jesus and to renounce everything "which does not lead to the honor and glory of God, and this for the love of Jesus Christ, who sought no satisfaction in this life but the accomplishment of His Father's will" (*J.C. AS I*, 13,4).

COLLOQUY

O Lord, give me Your love for Your Father's glory, so that I too, wretched and poor though I am, may serve my God in some small way and give Him glory.

"May it be Your pleasure, my God, that the time may come when I shall be able to pay at least a small part of the immense debt I owe You; do You ordain it, Lord, according to Your pleasure, that I may in some way serve You. There have been others who have done heroic deeds for love of You; I myself am capable of words only; and therefore, my God, it is not Your good pleasure to test me by actions. All my will to serve You amounts to nothing but words and desires, and even here I have no freedom, for it is always possible that I may fail altogether. Strengthen and prepare my soul, Good of all good, my Jesus, and then ordain means whereby I may do something for You, for no one could bear to receive as much as I have and pay nothing in return. Cost what it may, Lord, permit me not to come into Your presence with such empty hands, since a man's reward must be according to his works! O Lord, here is my life, my honor, and my will! I have given it all to You; I am Yours; dispose of me according to Your desire. Well do I know, Lord, how little I am capable of, but keep me near You. I shall be able to do all things, provided You do not withdraw from me. If You should withdraw, for however short a time, I should go where I have already been—namely, to hell" (*T.J. Life*, 21).

Make me understand, O Lord, that if I wish to work for Your glory and the glory of Your Father, I must be entirely detached from every desire for personal glory; otherwise I shall deceive myself, thinking that I am working for You, whereas in reality I am but serving my own ego.

You know, O Jesus, that herein lies the greatest danger for me, that which I fear most in my good works, especially in the works of my apostolate. Therefore, I beg You, Lord, to use every means to save me from it. And if this requires humiliations, failure, criticism, use them, and use them abundantly. Do not consider my repugnance, pay no attention to my tears, for I do not want to lessen Your glory or ruin Your works by my pride.

63

JESUS CALMS THE TEMPEST

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, I adore You in the little boat of my soul. Since You are with me, I shall not fear.

MEDITATION

1. In today's liturgy, especially the Gospel (*Mt 8,23-27*), Jesus appears in our midst as the ruler of the elements, the conqueror of all tempests. "And behold a great tempest arose in the sea, so that the boat was covered with waves." Let us think of all the persecutions which have beaten against Peter's barque, the Church, down through the ages; or we can think of the trials which God still permits individual souls to undergo. Whatever happens, the spirit of faith tells us that every struggle and tempest is willed, or at least permitted by God: "Everything is grace" (*T.C.J. NV*); everything is the result of His infinite love. God is not a tyrant who crushes us, but a Father, who tests us because He loves us. If He permits sorrow, interior or exterior trials, personal or public vicissitudes, it is only to draw out of them some greater good. Virtue and goodness are strengthened in time of difficulty; the efforts made in bearing trials tend to make us surpass what we would have done had we enjoyed perfect calm.

Jesus was sleeping peacefully in the stern of the boat when the terrified Apostles awakened Him : "Lord, save us, we perish!" He answered them reproachfully, "Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith?"

If we are disturbed and upset by trials, it means that we lack faith. Even when God conceals Himself, when everything seems to fail us and we feel terribly alone, we can be absolutely certain that God will never abandon us if we do not first abandon Him. Instead of becoming bitter or falling into despair, it is the moment to intensify our faith, to make strong acts of faith. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus used to say, "I count on Him. Suffering may go to its limit, but I am sure He will never abandon me" (St.).

2. The Apostles were saved only when they called upon Jesus. As long as they labored and struggled alone, they had no success. Many times we fail to surmount interior difficulties because we work alone. God wants us to experience our own insufficiency; therefore, He lets us struggle until we have recourse to Him with full confidence. Certainly God wants our efforts, but He does not want us to place all our hope in them. This accounts for the small progress so many make on the road to sanctity—too much reliance on their own resources, too little on God's help. We must be firmly convinced that "our sufficiency is from God" (*2 Cor 3,5*). We must have less confidence in ourselves and more in God. Jesus can do all things, and confidence works miracles. "We receive from God as much as we hope for" (*J.C. DN II, 21,8*).

There are other kinds of tempests, too, such as those provoked by the difficulties we sometimes experience in our relations with our neighbor. St. Paul in the Epistle (*Rom 13,8-10*) gives us the remedy : "Owe no man anything, but to love one another." Love conquers all. Our love for God overcomes our interior storms; our love for our neighbor, in whom we love Christ, overcomes the tempests which arise from dissensions, misunderstandings, and clashes of temperaments. If from certain people we receive only pain and trouble, let us follow the precious advice of St. John of the Cross : "Where there is no love, put love, and you will find love" (*L, 22*).

COLLOQUY

"O my Lord, how true a friend You are, and how powerful! For You can do all You will and never do You cease to love! Let all things praise You, Lord of the world! Oh, if someone would but proclaim throughout the world how faithful You are to Your friends! All things fail, but You, Lord of them all, never fail. How little is the suffering that You allow to those who love You! O my Lord, how delicately and skillfully and tenderly do You deal with them! Oh, happy are they who have never loved anyone save You! You seem, Lord, to give severe trials to those who love You, but only that in the excess of their trials they may learn the greater excess of Your love. O my God, had I but understanding and learning to find new words with which to exalt Your works as my soul knows them! These, my Lord, I lack, but if You forsake me not, I shall never fail You. Let all learned men rise up against me, let all created things persecute me, let the devils torment me; but You, Lord, do not fail me; for I have already experienced the benefits which come to him who trusts only in You!" (*T.J. Life*, 25).

Take away from me, O Lord, all trust in my own strength. Make me see that I can do nothing without You. Show it to me in a practical way, even if it causes me sorrow and humiliation. O Lord, I no longer desire to rely on my own strength; in You alone do I place all my trust. With Your help I shall continue to strive to practice virtue and to advance in Your ways, but with my eyes always fixed on You, O divine Sun, who alone can make my feeble efforts bring forth fruits of virtue! When storms arise, I will take refuge in You; I will call upon You with all the strength of my heart and with all my faith, certain that You will give me that peace and that victory which I would seek in vain apart from You.

JESUS AND MANKIND

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, teach me to love others as You love them.

MEDITATION

1. The sacred soul of Jesus always remains in closest union with the Blessed Trinity and therefore in the most profound contemplation, yet He is ever mindful of the needs of mankind. It was for men that Jesus came—to save them and bring them to the Father; and He gives Himself to them with the utmost solicitude and abandon. The same charity which unites Jesus to His Father descends through the Father upon the men whom Jesus loves so tenderly. He wills to redeem them all because they belong to the Father, to whose image and likeness they were created. In a most touching manner Jesus expressed His tender love for men comparing Himself to the Good Shepherd : “I am the Good Shepherd; and I know Mine, and Mine know Me. As the Father knoweth Me and I know the Father : and I lay down My life for My sheep” (*Jn* 10,14.15). Jesus likens His union with us to the union He enjoys with His Father, the terms of comparison being knowledge and love. Certainly it is only a simple similitude and yet Jesus delights to speak of it. He sees and knows the Father in the splendor of His glory, but He also sees and knows each one of us in the reality of our poverty, sorrows, and longings. He loves the Father, and gives Himself totally for His glory, and at the same time He loves each one of us and gives Himself wholly for our salvation; or rather Jesus sees and knows us only in the Father and in relation to Him. This is the very reason for His love and for everything He has done for us; His infinite love for the Father has made Him the Good Shepherd who gives His life for His sheep.

2. Our love and contemplation of God, our desire for intimate union with Him, should not make us strangers to our brethren, should not lessen our sensitivity to their

needs and sufferings; it should not prevent us from giving ourselves to them with true supernatural charity, as far as our state in life permits. No state of life, even the most contemplative, can excuse us from the duty and necessity of caring for our neighbor : if external works are reduced to a minimum, we must devote ourselves to our neighbor by prayer and apostolic immolation.

When love for God is genuine and intense, it does not confine the soul within itself, but in one way or another it always leads it to embrace all those who belong to God because they are His creatures, His children, and the object of His love.

Although Jesus was God, He did not hold Himself aloof from men. He willed to feel and experience all their needs, even their temptations, "without sin" (*Heb 4,15*). He shared with them a life of privation, fatigue, painful poverty, and suffering. Therefore, if we wish to attain to an effective fraternal charity, we must feel the sorrows, the poverty, and the material and spiritual needs of our neighbor; we must feel these in order to sympathize with him, help him, and even share in his trials. We must sacrifice ourselves, our ease and comfort, in order to give ourselves to others. We shall be able to do this only if our love for our neighbor resembles the love of Jesus, that is, if it springs from our love of God. Only one who loves others for the love of God will have that strong, persevering, fraternal charity which never fails.

COLLOQUY

O Jesus, why am I not moved by Your solicitude and tender love for us, Your poor creatures? You enjoy the uninterrupted vision of the Most Holy Trinity, finding in it all Your beatitude and glory, but you do not will that this glory and beatitude should be exclusively Yours; You want to give us a share in it. O Jesus, I see You sharing our poor human life of misery and suffering, so that, making Yourself like to us in sorrow, we might be made like to You in glory.

Men have not understood You; they have not returned Your love...they have crucified You. Yet You still love them because Your love is not for Your own personal

satisfaction, but only for the glory of the Blessed Trinity. O Jesus, out of love for Your Father You have loved us to the point of sacrificing Yourself entirely for us; grant that, out of love for You and for Your glory, I may know how to love my brethren and to give myself to them most generously.

"O my Jesus, how great is the love that Thou hast for the children of men! The greatest service that we can render Thee is to leave Thee for love of them and for their advantage. By doing this, we possess Thee the more completely; for, although the will has less satisfaction in the enjoyment of Thee, the soul is glad that Thou art pleased, and sees that, while we live in this mortal life, earthly joys are unsure, even though they seem to be bestowed by Thee, unless they are accompanied by the love of our neighbor. He who loves not his neighbor, loves not Thee, my Lord; for in all the Blood Thou didst shed, we see the exceeding great love which Thou bear-est for the children of Adam" (*T.J. Exc*, 2).

O Jesus, grant that like You I may live in continual union with God and at the same time give myself to my neighbor. May I lead a life of continual recollection, prayer, and contemplation, yet a life wholly devoted to the service of others.

65

LIVING CHRIST

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, deign to imprint Your likeness on my poor soul, so that my life may be a reflection of Yours.

MEDITATION

1. The imitation of Christ should not be limited to some particular aspect of His life; it means living Christ and becoming completely assimilated to Him. The life-giving principle of our resemblance to Christ is grace: the more grace we possess, the greater our resemblance to Him. The principal characteristic of Christ's soul is the unlimited charity which urges Him to give Himself entirely for the glory

of His Father and the salvation of souls. This same charity increases in our souls in the measure in which we grow in grace and live under the influence of Jesus, who is the source of grace, and to the degree in which our souls are directed by the same divine Spirit that directed the soul of Jesus. Each one of us will be an *alter Christus* (another Christ) in the measure in which he receives Christ's influence, His grace, His virtues, the gifts of the Holy Spirit and, above all, the motion of the Holy Spirit, which urges us to make a complete gift of self for the glory of God and the good of our neighbor. However, in order to accomplish this fully, we must continually die to ourselves, "always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest...in our mortal flesh" (*2 Cor 4,10.11*). Jesus lived a life of total abnegation in order to save us; we too must follow in His footsteps that He may live in us and we in Him. "For to me, to live is Christ" (*Phil 1,21*) is the cry of the Apostle who had so lived Christ that He was able to say, "I live, now not I but Christ liveth in me" (*Gal 2,20*).

2. "My God, I desire to seek but one thing, and that is to become a perfect copy of Yourself. Since Your life was a hidden life of humiliation, love, and sacrifice, such shall henceforth be mine" (T.M. *Sp*). If we truly desire to "live Christ," we must make St. Teresa Margaret's resolution our own. However, the Saint did not intend to be merely a detached copy of Christ, the divine model; rather, she wanted to live His very life : with Him, by Him, and in Him. We are to imitate Jesus by conforming and identifying ourselves with Him by grace and love, until each one of us becomes, as Sr. Elizabeth of the Trinity expresses it, "another humanity, wherein He may renew all His mystery" (E.T. *III*).

As the word *Christian* is an extension of the word *Christ*, so the life of a Christian should be an extension of Christ's life. St. Paul said, "I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh" (*Col 1,24*). The life and Passion of Jesus are perfect in themselves; nothing can be added to His infinite merits. However, it is His will to continue to live and suffer in us, the members of His Mystical Body, so that through us He may continue His redemptive work until the end of time—that work of applying

the fruits of the redemption to every new soul that comes into the world. Yet there are very few souls whom Jesus can freely use to carry out His lofty plans. Therefore, let us give ourselves wholly to Him, that in our humanity He may continue to immolate Himself for the glory of the Father and the salvation of souls, continue to adore His Father, love mankind, and make all souls share in the solicitude of His most merciful heart. Let us give ourselves to Him, "so that the life of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh."

COLLOQUY

"O my Christ, whom I love! Crucified for love! I long to be the bride of Your heart! I long to cover You with glory and love You...even until I die of love! Yet I realize my weakness and beg You to clothe me with Yourself, to identify my soul with all the movements of Your own. Immerse me in Yourself; possess me wholly; substitute Yourself for me, that my life may be but a radiance of Your life. Enter my soul as Adorer, as Restorer, as Savior!"

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

O my Jesus, this is my great desire : to be an extension of Your humanity, so that You can use me with the same freedom with which You used the humanity that You assumed on earth. Now in Your glory in heaven, You continue to adore the Father, implore Him on our behalf, give grace to our souls; You continue to love us and offer the merits of Your passion for us; but You can no longer suffer. Suffering is the only thing that is impossible for You, who are glorious and omnipotent, the only thing which You do not have and which I can give You. O Jesus, I offer You my poor humanity, that You may continue Your passion in me for the glory of the Father and the salvation of mankind. Yes, Jesus, renew in me the mystery of Your love and suffering; continue to live in me by Your grace, by Your charity, by Your Spirit. I want my humble life to be a reflection of Yours, to send forth the perfume of Your virtues, and above all the sweetness of Your charity.

You know O Jesus, that the world needs saints to convert it—saints in whom it will be able to recognize and experience Your love and infinite goodness, saints in whom it will find You again. O Lord, although I am so miserable, I also want to be of the number of these Your faithful followers in order that through me You may continue to win souls for the glory of the Blessed Trinity. O Jesus, give us many saints and grant that many priests may be counted among them.

66

JESUS OUR ALL

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, my God and my Redeemer, make me understand that You are my All and that in You I may find all that my soul needs.

MEDITATION

1. Jesus is both true God and true Man. As Man, He is our *Way* : He came to take us by the hand and lead us back to our Father's house. He is the source of our life because He merited grace for us and still continues to dispense it to us; He is the Master who shows us the way to go to God, the Model who, by His example, teaches us how we should live as children of God. Having merited our participation in the divine life, which He as the Word possesses in its full plenitude, Jesus has made us worthy to be readmitted to the intimacy of the family of God. In His last prayer, as if summing up His work as Redeemer, Jesus said to the Father, "And the glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given to them, that they may be one, as We also are one" (*Jn* 17, 22). Yes, He has given us His grace, His Spirit, and has thus made us sharers in the glory of His divine Sonship, true children of God and temples of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus, the one perfect Mediator between God and man, we find everything we need for our sanctification and our life of union with the Triune God.

We belong to Christ, we live in Him, " who, of God is made unto us wisdom and justice, and sanctification, and redemption " (*1 Cor 1,30*).

2. As God, Jesus is our *End* : He is the Incarnate Word and, as the Word, He is in all things equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit. Equally with the Father and the Holy Spirit He is our Beginning, the Creator of everything in the natural and supernatural order. He is also our last end, the End toward which we must move in this life with faith, love, generosity, and perseverance, in expectation of the joy of eternal union with Him and the Father and the Holy Spirit in heaven. Jesus, as Man, merited grace for us; as the Word He bestows it upon us. He creates it in union with the other two Persons of the Blessed Trinity. If, as Man, Jesus merited the coming of the Holy Spirit, as the Word, He, together with the Father, is continually sending the Spirit into our souls, because the Holy Spirit proceeds from Him as well as from the Father.

In Jesus, therefore, we find our Mediator and our God. When as Mediator He guides us, He is also drawing us to Himself as God; and when we are united to Him as Man we are also united to Him as the Word of God. Whether we fix our gaze on the humanity of Jesus or on His divinity, we shall always behold Him in the Word. To go to Jesus is to go to the Word; and to go to the Word, to the Son, is to go also to the Father, to the Trinity. That is why St. Teresa of Jesus insists so strongly that we must never separate ourselves from Christ : " It is by this door [Jesus] that we must enter.... Let us seek no other way : that way alone is safe. It is through this Lord of ours that all blessings come " (*Life*, 22). St. Paul says the same : " And you are filled in Him " with all good things; " Christ is all, and in all " (*Col 2,10 - 3,11*).

COLLOQUY

O Jesus, my God and my All! You are everything to me, and I want to belong entirely to You, consecrating my whole self to Your love and service.

" Now do I see, my Spouse, that You are mine ; I cannot deny it. For my sake You came into the world ; for my sake You suffered such great trials ; for my sake You endured

to be scourged; for my sake You have remained with us in the Most Holy Sacrament.... I have seen clearly that it is by this door that we must enter if we wish Your sovereign Majesty to show us great secrets. He who loses You will be unable to find his way.

"What am I, Lord, without You? And what am I worth if I am not near You? If once I stray from Your Majesty, where shall I find myself?

"Blessed is he who loves You in truth and has You always at his side. What more do we need than to have at our side so good a Friend who will never leave us? O my Lord, my mercy and my good, what more do I want in this life than to be so near You that there is no division between You and me? In such company what can become difficult? What can one not undertake for You, with You so near? Never, with Your help and favor, will I turn my back on You.

"What can I do for my Spouse? How can I be Yours, my God? What can a person do for You who has contrived such evil things as I? I can only lose the favors You have granted me. From such a one what services could be hoped for? And even if, by Your favor, I should accomplish something, consider how little a miserable worm can do. How can a powerful God have need of it? Only love allows us to think that this true Lover needs us.

"But if You come to me, Lord, can I doubt that I can render You great services? From this moment, Lord, I will forget myself and look solely at the ways in which I can serve You; I will have no will but Yours. But my will is powerless, my God; it is You that are powerful. All I can do is to resolve to serve You, and this resolve I make and will henceforth carry into action" (cf. T.J. *Con*, 4 - *Life*, 22 - *Int C VI*, 7).

THE CHURCH

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, You have given me the Church as my Mother; grant that I may love her with true filial love.

MEDITATION

1. Jesus loves us so much that He wills to remain with us until the end of time. Therefore, He abides with us in the Blessed Sacrament as the Companion of our earthly pilgrimage, as the Food of our souls, but He also remains with us in the Church as our Guide, our Shepherd, and our Teacher. Jesus formed the first nucleus of the Church by His preaching, by choosing and instructing the Apostles; He gave life to her by dying on the Cross. "The Church," as the Holy Father notes, "came forth from the side of our Savior on the Cross like a new Eve, Mother of all the living" (*Mystici Corporis*). Jesus sanctified her by shedding His Blood for her. He gave her His power; He made her His spouse and collaborator, continuing through her His work of sanctifying and directing souls. Today Jesus no longer dwells among us as He did nineteen hundred years ago; His *Physical Body* is gloriously enthroned in Heaven at the right hand of the Father. But He does abide with us in His *Mystical Body*, the Church, His Spouse and our Mother. Jesus is the living Head of the Church; it is always He who rules her invisibly by His Spirit, the Holy Spirit. He sustains and vivifies her unceasingly, gives her life, and distributes graces to each of her members "according to the measure of His giving" (cf. *Eph 4,7*). The Church lives by Christ alone; she is holy with His holiness; she is the Mother of souls through her union with Him. This union of Christ with the Church is so intimate and vital that the Church can be regarded as a prolongation of Christ. Indeed, Pope Pius XII teaches that "Christ sustains the Church in a divine manner; He lives in her to such a degree that she is, as it were, another Christ" (*Mystici Corporis*). Even as it is through the Eucharist that we unite ourselves to Jesus and are nourished with His immaculate Flesh, so it is through His Church that guided and ruled by Him, we are vivified by His grace and

nourished by His doctrine. And as we cannot become more one with Christ in this life than by uniting ourselves to Him in the Eucharist, so we can have no greater assurance of living according to His Spirit, of being directed and taught by Him, than by uniting ourselves to the Church and following her directives.

2. To be a "Child of the Church" is the most glorious title for a Christian and second only to that of "Child of God." These two titles can never be separated — one depends upon the other; for, as St. Cyprian has said, "He who does not have the Church for a Mother, cannot have God for a Father." Jesus wishes to save and sanctify us, but He wishes to do it by means of the Church. He gave His life and shed His Blood for us; He put His most precious merits at our disposal; He gave us the Holy Eucharist and left us the heritage of His doctrine, but He wished the Church to be the sole depository and dispenser of these inestimable benefits, so that all who wish to enjoy them must have recourse to her. Let us go, then, to the Church with the complete confidence of children, certain to find Jesus in her, Jesus who sanctifies, nourishes, teaches, rules, and directs us by means of His representatives. If the thought of being a Child of the Church does not make our hearts vibrate, if our love for the Church is weak, if our recourse to her is not confident, this indicates a lack of the spirit of faith : we have not sufficiently understood that the Church is Christ, continuing to live in our midst to sanctify and sustain us and to lead us to eternal beatitude. "We can think of nothing more glorious, more noble, and more honorable than membership in the Holy Roman Catholic Church, by which we become members of such a holy Body [the Mystical Body of Christ], are guided by one and so sublime a Head [Jesus Christ], are filled with one divine Spirit [the Holy Spirit], and finally, are nourished in this earthly exile with one doctrine and one same heavenly Bread until we are permitted to share the one eternal beatitude in heaven" (*Mystici Corporis*). Let us love the Church, "the most perfect Image of Christ" (*ibid.*); let us love the Church, the most pure Spouse of Christ and our Mother; and as He loved her whom "He hath purchased with His own Blood" (*Acts 20,28*), so let us love her with a true spirit of obedience and filial devotion, offering ourselves completely to serve, glorify and defend her.

COLLOQUY

"O Christ, our Lord, You have transmitted to Your Church the sovereign power which You have received. By virtue of Your dignity, You have made her Queen and Spouse. You have given her supreme power over the entire universe. You have commanded all men to submit to her judgment. She is the Mother of all the living, and her dignity increases with the number of her children.

"Every day she gives birth to new children by the operation of the Holy Spirit. As a vine, her branches cover the whole world. Her boughs are upheld by the wood of the Cross and they reach up to the Kingdom of heaven.

"Your Church, O Christ, is a strong city built on a mountain, visible to all and enlightening all. You are her Founder and foremost Citizen, O Jesus Christ, Son of God and our Lord.

"We beseech You, eternal King of souls, Christ our Lord, stretch Your omnipotent Hands over Your holy Church and the holy people who belong to You; defend them, guard them, preserve them; combat, challenge, subdue all their enemies.

"May Your Church always remain pure and living! May she chant Your praises under the guidance of the holy angels! We pray to You for all her members; grant them pardon and remission of all their sins; grant that they may sin no more. Be their defense; take away from them all temptation. Have pity on men, women, and children; reveal Yourself to all, and let the knowledge of Your Holy Name be written in their hearts" (from an ancient Liturgy).

THE PRIESTHOOD

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, give to Your Church many holy priests.

MEDITATION

1. The Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, is not to be regarded merely as a spiritual institution which can be neither touched nor seen; it is a concrete organism which is visible in its members, the faithful, who are joined together under the leadership of their pastors. "For as in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office" (*Rom 12,4*), so in the Church there are members of diverse importance, having various functions : there are the faithful and there are the shepherds, the priests appointed by Christ to guide souls. To state that Jesus sanctifies and governs us by means of the Church, is to say that He sanctifies and governs us by means of the Bishops and the Pope. Jesus has placed all the powers given to His Church in the hands of the priests, who have been chosen by Him from among the people to become His ministers. "As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you" (*Jn 20,21*) ; "He that heareth you, heareth Me, and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me" (*Lk 10,16*). The priestly dignity depends upon this investiture by Christ, this appointment as His representative and minister. Priests must be thoroughly aware of the great dignity of their call if they wish to live at the height of their vocation. "They must be holy, says St. Pius X, because they are the friends and representatives of a holy God."

The faithful on their part should see and venerate Christ Himself in their priests. St. Paul, writing to the Christians of Corinth, gave them the exact meaning of his priestly authority : "For Christ, therefore, we are ambassadors, God, as it were, exhorting by us" (*2 Cor 5,20*). And St. Catherine of Siena cautioned her disciples to see priests only as "the dispensers of the Blood of the humble, Immaculate Lamb" and to overlook the faults which they might notice in them. A priest is a man, and therefore always remains fallible and capable of making mistakes, but

this does not prevent him from being the Anointed of the Lord, marked forever with an indelible sign and having the power to consecrate the Body of Christ, to administer the sacraments, and to preach to the people in the name of God.

2. Without the priesthood we would be deprived of the Holy Eucharist; we would never have the consolation of hearing, in the name of God, "Thy sins are forgiven thee" (*Mt* 9,2). If there were no priests, the churches would be deserted, schools would become secularized, there would be no nuptial blessings, the dying would be deprived of final consolation, children would be abandoned to evil; all men would become totally immersed in misery, with no one to raise them up and lead them to God, with no one to pray to Him in their name and for their welfare. But Jesus, the sole Mediator between God and man, willed to institute the priesthood to perpetuate among us, in a visible manner, His work of mediation, salvation, and sanctification. The priest accompanies us at every step of our life. Soon after our birth, he welcomes us at the baptismal font; he administers the Sacraments to us, He helps us to understand divine truths, he shows us how to lead a good life, blesses our efforts, sustains our footsteps, and strengthens us in our last agony. He often works unseen and unknown, misunderstood, never sufficiently appreciated; yet his apostolic work is priceless, indispensable. Every Christian ought to be grateful for the gift of the priesthood: in the first place, we should be grateful to Jesus who instituted it, and then to those who perform its sublime duties. We must express this gratitude, not only by showing reverent respect and filial docility to God's ministers, but also by assiduously offering our prayers and good works for priestly vocations. "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He send forth laborers into His harvest" (*ibid.* 9,38). "What prayer," comments Pius XI, "can be more pleasing to the Sacred Heart of the Redeemer?... Ask, and it shall be given to you: ask for good, holy priests, and the Lord will not refuse to send them to His Church" (*Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*). To our prayers we must add good works "to awaken, foster and help vocations to the priesthood" (*ibid.*). Blessed are the families that have had the honor of giving a priest to God; blessed are all those who by their prayers, sacrifices, and good works help in the formation of holy priests!

COLLOQUY

“ Lord, do not look upon my sins, but hear Your servant through the mercy of Your inestimable charity. You did not leave us orphans when You departed from us, but You left us Your Vicar and Your ministers to baptize us in the Holy Spirit. By Your sacred power, they cleanse our souls from sin, not once, but again and again.

“ O eternal Mercy, grant that Your Vicar and Your ministers may hunger for souls, may burn with an ardent desire for glory, and in all things seek You alone, O supreme, eternal Goodness.

“ Sanctify these Your servants, O eternal God, that they may follow You alone, in simplicity of heart and with a perfect will; look not upon my wretchedness, but receive my prayer and establish them in Your will.

“ O eternal God, I know that Your arm is powerful and strong, that it will deliver the Church and Your people, rescue them from the hands of the demon, and put an end to persecution. I know that the Wisdom of Your Son, who is one with You, can illumine our intellects and scatter the clouds which hover around Your dear Spouse, the Church.

“ Then, eternal Father, I beg and implore Your power, the Wisdom of Your only-begotten Son and the clemency of the Holy Spirit, abyss and fire of charity, to show mercy to the world and restore the warmth of charity so that peace and union may reign in the holy Church. Alas, I do not want to wait any longer : I pray that Your infinite goodness may constrain You not to close the eye of Your mercy on Your holy Spouse, O sweet Jesus, Jesus-love ” (St. Catherine of Siena).

THE SACRAMENTS

PRESENCE OF GOD - Grant, O Lord, that the grace You give me so generously may not be given in vain.

MEDITATION

1. Just as the human body is endowed with organs capable of "providing for the life, health, and development of each of its members, so the Savior of the human race... has provided in a marvelous way for His Mystical Body, endowing it with the Sacraments, so that by so many consecutive, graduated graces, as it were, its members should be supported from the cradle to life's last breath" (*Mystici Corporis*). The Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, is a living organism possessing elements which are capable of propagating, conserving, and nourishing life in all her members. This vital force emanates from her divine Head and is the fruit of the grace merited for Her by this most loving Redeemer when He died on the Cross, that grace which He still diffuses in all His members by means of the Sacraments. In fact, "when the Church administers the Sacraments by means of exterior rites, it is He who produces their interior effect" (*ibid.*). Jesus is the author of grace and has complete dominion over it; He created it as God, merited it as Man, and can dispense it as He wills and to whom He wills, even without the medium of the Sacraments. However, He ordinarily communicates grace to us through these sensible signs which He Himself has instituted, thus giving us greater assurance of having received it.

But we must not forget that, if the exterior rite is indispensable for the reception of the corresponding grace, this grace is always produced by Jesus, who, in cooperation with His ministers, intervenes with His sanctifying power each time a Sacrament is administered. This shows the deep, inseparable union between Jesus and His Church. He wills to make use of her exterior acts in sanctifying souls, but He reserves for Himself the power to vivify these acts and make them effective. When we receive a Sacrament, it is not the

priest alone who is attending to the good of our soul, but with him is Jesus, whose all-powerful action penetrates and vivifies the inmost fibers of our spirit. This is why the Sacraments, when administered to those who are capable of receiving them, have of themselves an infallible efficacy : in them is the action of God Himself.

2. The Sacraments act *ex opere operato*, that is, they always give the grace that corresponds to the outward sign, for it is Christ by His all-powerful action who is producing it in them. This is the profound motive for the great esteem and respect which we should have for the Sacraments.

The frequency and ease with which we can receive certain Sacraments often make us approach them with negligence, inattentiveness, or even with that superficiality with which we treat things of little value. This attitude is the result of a lack of right knowledge and appreciation, and a weak spirit of faith. How necessary it is to awaken and revive our faith, to place ourselves actually and sincerely in the presence of God in order to open our souls to His action! When we approach a Sacrament, we are approaching Christ; we are putting ourselves in contact with Him to receive the effusion of His grace, to welcome a renewed communication of His divine life. "It is true," Pius XII teaches, "that the Sacraments have an intrinsic power, inasmuch as they are the acts of Christ Himself who communicates and diffuses grace from the divine Head to the members of the Mystical Body; but to have their due efficacy, they require good dispositions in our souls" (*Mediator Dei*). In other words, every time we approach a Sacrament, Jesus infallibly offers us the gift of His grace, but the Sacrament will produce its sanctifying effect only in proportion to the intensity of our good dispositions. Just as the very best seed, sown in uncultivated ground, brings forth little or no fruit, so divine grace, although in itself sanctifying, fructifies in us only in the measure of our good will. Oh! how Jesus desires that His grace, so generously given by means of the Sacraments, should find our hearts well disposed, open to His coming, docile to His action!

Each Sacrament brings us a gift of sanctifying grace, either an initial grace or an increase of grace; in addition it offers us the sacramental grace which is proper to it alone. Thus God puts at our disposal His immense riches — immea-

surable possibilities of sanctity. Let us endeavor with all our strength that such great gifts may not be given in vain.

COLLOQUY

“ O eternal Word made flesh, You have given us the Sacraments endowed with the virtue of Your Blood and Your Passion. Through them our souls are bathed in Your Blood, nourished by Your Blood.

“ Your Sacred Side is the fount of water and of Blood, from which flow the waters of Baptism and the Blood of the Sacraments. We are bathed in the waters of this fountain when we receive holy Baptism, which enables us to glorify God and receive His gifts. We drink the Blood from this fountain when we receive the sacraments, especially Penance and the Sacrament of the Altar, by which the soul is fed and nourished, taking refuge, O Christ, in the fount of Your Sacred Side.

“ Oh! how great is the dignity of priests! They are the ministers of this fount, they bathe us in the water of Baptism and then nourish us with Your Blood! Oh! how great is their dignity! They are, O Lord, Your secretaries and treasurers, for in transmitting Your word to us, they reveal Your secrets and, in administering the Sacraments, they give us Your treasures ” (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

“ O good, sweet Jesus! Father of lights, from whom every perfect gift proceeds, look upon us with mercy, upon us who know You, who truly understand that we can do nothing without You. You gave Yourself as the price of our redemption. Although we are unworthy of such a precious gift, grant that we may correspond with Your grace entirely, perfectly, and in all things, so that, being conformed to the likeness of Your Passion, we may recover what we have lost by sin, the likeness of Your divinity ” (St. Bonaventure).

THE BOND OF PERFECTION

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

PRESENCE OF GOD - O my God, grant that I may desire and seek above all else the perfection of love.

MEDITATION

1. The Epistle for this Sunday (*Col 3,12-17*) recalls to our mind the fundamental duty of a Christian : charity. All programs and resolutions of the spiritual life are of little value if they are not animated by love and directed to the perfection of love. Detachment, mortification, humility, and all the other virtues are of little worth if they do not incline the heart to a wider, more complete and more expansive charity. "But above all these things," St. Paul recommends, "have charity, which is the bond of perfection"; not only love for God, but also for our neighbor. It is under this aspect that the Apostle speaks of charity in today's Epistle, carefully pointing out that all our relations with our neighbor should be inspired by love. "Put ye on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, the bowels of mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, patience : bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if any have a complaint against another." Fraternal charity is the mark of God's elect. If we do not have this distinctive mark, Jesus does not recognize us as His disciples; our heavenly Father does not love us as His children, nor will He take us into His Kingdom. The spiritual life requires the use of so many means, calls for the exercise of so many virtues that care must be taken lest we become lost in details, forgetting the love which should be the foundation and end of all. Of what value is the spiritual life, consecration to God, or even the vows of religion, if they do not help the soul to tend to the perfection of love?

Consider the perfect love which the Apostle asks us to have for our neighbor : mercy, compassion, mutual forgiveness, and that love which leaves no room for divisions or dissensions, which overcomes strife and forgets offenses. This is long-suffering charity which makes every sacrifice and

overcomes all difficulties in order to be in harmony with all, because we all form "one body" in Christ, because we are all children of the same heavenly Father.

Fraternal charity of this kind is the surest guarantee of a spiritual life that is advancing toward sanctity.

2. The Epistle has presented us with the ideal of the Christian life, an ideal of love which should unite all the faithful in singleness of heart; the Gospel (*Mt* 13,24-30) shows us the practical way to live this ideal.

"The kingdom of heaven is likened to a man that sowed good seed in his field. But...his enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat." God has sown the good seed generously in His field, the world; He has sown grace and love, and the desire for total oblation, the ideals of an apostolic, religious, saintly life. But, in the midst of all this good, the enemy comes to sow evil. Why does God permit this? To sift His servants as we sift grain, to test them.

Sometimes we are scandalized, seeing evil working its way even into the best places, seeing that even among God's friends, among those who should be a source of edification to others, there are some who behave unworthily. Then we are filled with zeal, like the servants in the parable. We want to remedy this evil and root up the cockle. "Wilt Thou that we go and gather it up?" But God answers, "No, lest perhaps gathering up the cockle, you root up the wheat also together with it." The cockle is spared, not because it is good, but in order to save the wheat. In the same way God spares the wicked and does not destroy them, for the sake of the elect. When God asks us to endure with patience certain situations, as inevitable as they are deplorable, He asks for one of the greatest exercises of charity, compassion, and mercy. He does not tell us to fraternize with evil, to make a league with the cockle, but He tells us to endure it with the longanimity with which He Himself endured it. Was there not a traitor among the Apostles? Yet Jesus wanted him among His intimates — and with how much love He treated him! Indeed one of the greatest opportunities for the practice of charity is offered us by those who by their evil conduct give us so many occasions for forgiving them, for returning good for evil, and for suffering injustice for the love of God. Moreover, we should consider that, whereas cockle cannot be changed into wheat, it is always possible

for the wicked to be converted and become good. Were not Magdalen, the good thief, and Peter, who had denied Jesus, converted? This is one of the strongest motives to incite us to do good to all. When our love is perfect, we are able to live among the wicked without being harsh or contentious, without being influenced by them, but rather doing them good.

COLLOQUY

“ O most noble, most beautiful, most innocent Lord Jesus, You have loved me, a vile, ugly creature, deformed by sin; teach me to imitate Your great charity, so that I will love my neighbor with sincere, brotherly love, however imperfect and sinful he may be.

“ Teach me to love all men for love of You, and then I shall never lack motives for benevolence, even if I have to deal with those who are coarse, ill-mannered, and full of imperfections. Only by keeping my eyes fixed on You, my God, who are infinite love, shall I be able to surmount all the annoyances and difficulties I meet in my contacts with my neighbor.

“ O Jesus, who took on my wretchedness in becoming man and in clothing Yourself with my weak nature, teach me how to accommodate myself to my neighbor and to bear with his faults patiently; help me to do my best to correct my own faults and to eliminate from my conduct everything that might be displeasing to others” (Ven. John of Jesus Mary).

“ See, Lord, how far I still am from true charity and humility! You show me that there is nothing wonderful about living in peace with kind, good people; nothing is more natural. We all love peace and prefer those who love peace also. But it takes great virtue to live in peace with obstinate, perverse, intractable people whose ideas are not like our own.

“ I beseech You, Lord, grant me that grace without which I shall never be at peace with my neighbor, but will ever be prompt to take offense. It would be far better for me to correct my own faults than to criticize the actions of others! If I expect others to bear with my defects, I must likewise bear with theirs” (cf. *Imit. II*, 3,2).

BAPTISM

PRESENCE OF GOD - O God, who without any merit on my part, have made me Your child, grant that my life may be worthy of this divine Sonship.

MEDITATION

1. The Church, like a mother anxious for the salvation of her children, and eager to rescue them from the slavery of Satan, to make them living temples of God, does not wait until a child is able to appreciate the value of Baptism, but hastens to confer it upon him in the first days of his life. Thus Baptism is the only Sacrament which is given without the consent of the recipient. However, the Church requires that competent sponsors represent the newborn child in order that God's gift may not be lost through the child's unawareness in receiving it. As soon as the child has attained the age of reason, it is the sacred duty of these sponsors to see that it understands and appreciates this great Sacrament and lives accordingly. Indeed, we are all bound to cultivate during the entire course of our life that knowledge and appreciation which we could not take personally to the baptismal font; we are bound to live in such a way as to place no obstacle to the development of baptismal grace, thus making ourselves more worthy of the sacramental character we have received. We must live up to the pledges of our Baptism, that is, we must conform our lives to the petitions, renuncements, and promises which our godparents made in our name. Through our godparents we asked for faith; we renounced Satan and all his works and pomps; we requested to be baptized, so that we might be received into God's great and holy family.

God, by means of the Church, has delivered us from the bonds of sin; He has taken us into His arms and marked us with an indelible sign as His children. The passing years, the vicissitudes of life, our failures to cooperate with grace, even the most serious sins, if we have been so unfortunate

as to commit any, can never destroy that indelible mark of a child of God. Think what an honor it is, how glorious and blessed, to be for all eternity the child of God! "Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called and should be the sons of God" (*I Jn 3,1*). We are children of God, not through any merit on our part, but only through His infinite goodness anticipating, as it were, our request and desire.

2. Baptism is the seed, the cause of our whole Christian life and of all the graces which we have received and will receive until we die. Furthermore, beyond the limits of this earthly life, Baptism is the cause and beginning of our eternal glory. This was prefigured by the white robe and the lighted candle which the Church presented to us at the sacred fount: "Receive this white garment and wear it without spot until you come to the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ, in order to have eternal life. Receive this burning candle and preserve untarnished the grace of your Baptism...so that, when the Lord comes to conduct you to the eternal nuptials, you may go to meet Him with all the saints of heaven and may have eternal life" (*Roman Ritual*). These profoundly significant words should be engraved upon our hearts, reminding us continually of our duty to preserve our baptismal grace. As the years go by, many obligations and duties will claim our time and attention. These duties are sacred, because they are closely connected with our state in life and are therefore willed by God. Nevertheless, we must never forget that our first duty is always the one imposed by holy Baptism: to preserve intact the garment of grace. Before everything else, we have the great obligation of living our Baptism.

If we had not been baptized, we would be unable to nourish our soul with the Body of the Lord; we would not be an apostle; we would not be consecrated to God as a priest or as a religious. Everything is attached to that first link in the chain of sanctifying grace. If we do not strive to live our Baptism according to the perfection demanded by our state in life, our piety will be vain, our Communions without fruit; our apostolic works and even our consecration to God or our priestly ministry will be futile.

We should often reflect on the words which the Church pronounced over us on that day: "Depart from him, unclean

spirit, and give place to the Holy Spirit, the consoler.... So live that you will indeed be a temple of God" (*Roman Ritual*).

COLLOQUY

"O Lord, I beseech You, keep my faith pure and grant that, until my last sigh, I may feel the testimony of a good conscience. Grant that I, who have been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, may always believe what I professed in the Sacrament of my regeneration. Let me adore You, my Father, and Your Son with You; let me be worthy of the Holy Spirit who proceeds from You and Your only-begotten Son. Truly I have a worthy pledge of faith to guarantee what I believe, and it is He who said, 'Father, all that is Mine is Yours, and all that is Yours is Mine,' Jesus Christ, my Lord, who lives in You and who, remaining God, proceeds from You, is always near You, and is blessed forever and ever" (St. Hilary).

"I renounce satan! O my God, this was my baptismal promise, a solemn promise made in the presence of the Church, a promise so explicit that no one can dispense me from it, a promise recorded by angelic hands, a promise on which I shall be judged at the hour of my death.

"O my God, I desire to renew very fervently that promise today. Therefore, with all my heart and all my strength, I renounce you, O Satan; I renounce you, abominable sin; I renounce you, detestable world!

"O Lord Jesus Christ, I give myself entirely to You forever. I desire to adhere to Your holy doctrine by faith, to Your sacred promises by hope, to Your divine commandments and counsels by love and charity. I desire to follow You by the practice of all the virtues. I desire to follow You as my Head, as a living member of Your Body" (St. John Eudes).

CONFIRMATION

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Holy Spirit, come, work in me again and enable me to live like a true soldier of Christ.

MEDITATION

1. Baptism is the *Sacrament of Christian initiation*. It introduces us into the Church, God's great family, and infuses into our souls the new life of sanctifying grace by which we become children of the Most High and brothers of Jesus Christ. Confirmation *confirms* and strengthens this supernatural life which Baptism has engendered in us. Baptism is our Christian birth; *Confirmation* brings us to Christian maturity. "Confirmation," according to the catechism, "is the Sacrament through which the Holy Spirit comes to us in a special way to enable us to profess our faith as strong and perfect Christians and soldiers of Jesus Christ."

At Baptism we become temples of the Holy Spirit; in Confirmation, this divine Spirit comes to us in greater plenitude and sets us apart as knights of Christ, capable of fighting to defend our faith and the Church. We have very great need of this Sacrament, especially today when God's enemies and the snares and enticements of evil are increasing to such an extent that it often requires great courage, and sometimes even heroism, to stand firm in our Catholic faith and morality. Confirmation imprints an indelible mark on our soul, the glorious character of a "soldier" of Jesus Christ. It endows us with the corresponding strength and confers on us the right to receive, at the opportune moment, the actual graces necessary to remain faithful to God, in spite of the difficulties and obstacles we may encounter. This is the "sacramental grace" of Confirmation.

Therefore we may say that, at least virtually, Confirmation is the Sacrament that consecrates the heroes and the martyrs of duty, for it gives man the strength to live in open profession of his faith, even at the cost of great

sacrifices, not excluding the sacrifice of his life, if this were necessary.

When cowardice or human respect tempts us to waver, we should repeat St. Francis of Assisi's daring words : " Knight of Christ, are you afraid? " And recalling the happy day of our Confirmation when we were solemnly consecrated a soldier of Christ, we shall find the strength to continue the battle and to win.

2. Writing about her confirmation, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus said, " It was with the greatest care that I made ready for the coming of the Holy Ghost, and I could not understand how anyone could do otherwise before receiving this Sacrament of Love.... Like the Apostles, I looked with joy for the promised Comforter, gladdened by the thought that I should soon be a perfect Christian " (T.C.J. *St*, 4). Unfortunately, there are very few who, like this young saint, can say that they prepared themselves for the reception of Confirmation with a true comprehension of it. Very few give any thought to the Holy Spirit, the great uncreated Gift, who gives Himself to the soul as its Paraclete, that is, as its strength, support, and guide; very few think of Him or if they do, it is in passing, and superficially, so that there is little possibility of their coming to a deep understanding of this ineffable mystery. Let us try to make up now for our own lack of preparation for the reception of this Sacrament. Let us meditate on the beautiful prayer recited by the Bishop during the imposition of hands : " Almighty, everlasting God... send forth upon them the Author of Thy sevenfold Gifts, the Paraclete, Thy Holy Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and fortitude, the Spirit of knowledge and piety; fill them with the Spirit of Thy holy fear, and sign them with the sign of the Cross of Christ unto eternal life " (*Roman Ritual*). The Holy Spirit came down upon us with the abundance of His Gifts. He confirmed us in the faith; He gave us the strength we need to live as perfect Christians, in complete accord with the holy requirements of God's law. Jesus said to the Apostles, " You shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem... and even to the uttermost part of the earth " (*Acts 1, 8*). In these words He predicted the coming of the divine Paraclete. We too received this power when we were confirmed, and if our

conduct has not always borne witness to Christ, this is not due to a defect in the Sacrament, but to our lack of correspondence with the grace it conferred. If we are weak in the struggle against our passions, the world, and the devil, it is precisely because we have not made profitable use of the grace of fortitude which the Holy Spirit lavished upon us when we were confirmed.

Let us implore this divine Spirit to pardon our negligence and to help us henceforth to make up for our past deficiencies.

COLLOQUY

“ I recognize You as the one true God, O Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, consubstantial and coeternal with them, the Paraclete and our Advocate, who came down in the form of a dove upon our Lord Jesus Christ and appeared in the form of tongues of fire over the Apostles. From the beginning You have taught all the saints and the elect of God by the gift of Your grace; You opened the mouths of the prophets so that they could speak of the wonders of God’s kingdom. You, together with the Father and the Son, are adored and glorified by all the saints of God. And I too, the child of your handmaid, glorify Your Name with my whole heart because You have enlightened me, You who are the true light, the Fire of God, and the director of souls, teaching us all truth by Your unction. Without Your help, we cannot be pleasing to God, because You are God of God, Light proceeding from Light, that is, proceeding ineffably from the Father of lights and from His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom You are glorified and reign, consubstantial, equal and coeternal with Them, existing in the essence of one indivisible Trinity!

“ O Holy Spirit, quench my thirst at the torrent of Your delights, so that I will no longer wish to taste the poisonous delights of the world ” (St. Augustine).

“ O Holy Spirit, infinite Love, proceeding from the Father and the Son, give me the spirit of adoption; teach me to act always like a true child of God. Abide in me and grant that I may abide in You, that I may love as You love. Without You, I am nothing : *Sine tuo numine nihil est in homine...* I am worth nothing, but keep me united to You;

fill me with Your love, so that, with Your help, I may remain united to the Father and the Son" (Dom Marmion).

73

PENANCE (1)

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Jesus, You who are ever seeking the prodigal son, despise not my contrite and humble heart, but purify it in Your precious Blood.

MEDITATION

1. Grace, which has been given to us so abundantly in Baptism and Confirmation, has of itself the infallible power to sanctify. It does not force us, however, to do good nor does it sanctify us without our voluntary cooperation. Man always remains free to cooperate or not with this divine gift; unfortunately, it is always possible for him to resist grace and condescend to evil, thus failing in his duty as a child of God and a soldier of Christ. Jesus, foreseeing these possible defections and falls, has instituted a special Sacrament for the sole purpose of healing the wounds of sin, of restoring sinners to grace and of providing strength for their weakness. Our Lord said to the Apostles, "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (*Jn* 20,23). By these words Christ conferred on them and on their successors the formidable power of forgiving sins in His Name. This power was not given to the angels nor even to the most Blessed Virgin Mary, but was reserved for His ministers.

Scandalized at seeing Jesus absolve sinners, the scribes asked one another, "Who can forgive sins, but God only?" (*Mk* 2,7). Wavering between unbelief and derision, the world still considers the Sacrament of Penance with a like attitude; it cannot and will not recognize in the priest a minister commissioned by God to remit sin. But for those who believe, there is perhaps no other Sacrament which

(1) Also see Meditation 104.

so rouses our piety, devotion and gratitude. How powerful are the Sacraments by which we are raised to the dignity of children of God and soldiers of Jesus-Christ; how ineffable is the Sacrament by which we are nourished with the immaculate Flesh; yet is it not more touching still that in the Sacrament of Penance Jesus goes in search of the Christian who has betrayed Him, of the soldier who has deserted the camp, of the son who, after having been nourished at His table, has gone far away to eat even the husks of swine? Instead of being indignant or repelling one who has made such poor use of His boundless gifts, Jesus through the Sacrament of Penance offers him pardon and mercy; He heals this soul which, though formerly clothed in the wedding garment of grace and regenerated in His precious Blood, has fallen into sin, making itself His enemy.

2. Although the Sacrament of Penance is necessary only to remit mortal sins, the Church has always recommended and praised the frequent use of it even for those who have only venial sins to confess. "We heartily recommend," says Pius XII, "the pious custom introduced by the Church, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of frequent confession. It gives us a more thorough knowledge of ourselves, stimulates Christian humility, helps us to uproot our evil habits, wages war on spiritual negligence and tepidity, purifies our consciences, strengthens our wills, encourages spiritual direction and, by virtue of the Sacrament itself, increases grace" (*Mystici Corporis*). Frequent confession has always been considered, in authentic Catholic tradition, as a school of perfection, an effective way to correct faults and evil tendencies and to advance in virtue. When a penitent sees Our Lord Jesus Christ in the person of the confessor, and discloses with humble sincerity his sins and weaknesses, accompanying his accusation with true repentance and a firm purpose of amendment, the Sacrament will have most efficacious results. Not only will he be absolved from his infidelities and receive an increase of sanctifying grace, but he will also receive the "sacramental grace," which assures him of divine assistance in correcting his weak points, overcoming the temptations to which he is most often exposed, and surmounting the particular difficulties he encounters in the practice of virtue. There is no better medicine for the ills and wounds of the soul than frequent confession when it is made with a humble, sincere,

and contrite heart. Jesus awaits us in this Sacrament of His merciful love, not only to cleanse our soul in His precious Blood, but also to strengthen it in this salutary bath, fortify it, and guard it against future attacks of temptation and evil. Confession applies to our soul all the merits of the Passion of Jesus, all the infinite value of His Blood; we shall always return from this Sacrament renewed, sanctified, and strengthened in good in the measure in which we have approached it with a contrite and humble heart.

COLLOQUY

“ If you have sinned, my soul, and are wounded, behold your God, your physician, waiting to heal you. His omnipotence permits Him to remit all your sins in one moment; His goodness and mercy urge Him to forgive you.

“ Are you terrified, perhaps, because He is your judge? Have confidence, my soul, because if He is your judge, He is also your defender. He is your defender to excuse you and justify you if you repent; and He is your judge, not to condemn you, but to save you, if you are humble. His mercy is infinitely greater than all your iniquities. And I tell you this, not that you will remain in sin and make yourself unworthy of His pity, but that you will drive away evil, and not despair of His clemency and pardon ” (Bl. Louis de Blois).

“ O fountain of love, most loving Lord Jesus Christ, filled with so much and such ineffable goodness, You always forestall us with Your love; if we seek You, You present Yourself to us and come to meet us. Your love, Your immense charity extends even to Your enemies. You do not refuse to give Yourself to anyone; You despise no one, but You call and welcome all as Your friends. Your superabundant charity is so limitless that You call to repentance those who miserably lie in sin; and often, even though they rebel, You constrain them to return to You.

“ Deign then, to help me, O most merciful Lord Jesus Christ, fire and light of love; enkindle and illumine my cold, rebellious heart by Your charity, so that, for love of You, I may grieve for my sins, do penance, and with a pure, loving, and humble heart give myself to the practice of the works which are pleasing to You. Thus, prevented, aided, and followed by Your grace, I may live the present life in Your

love, and at its close may obtain by your mercy life eternal where I shall love You forever in glory" (Ven. Raymond Jourdain).¹

74

EXTREME UNCTION
(Anointing of the Sick)

PRESENCE OF GOD - May Your grace, O Lord, cleanse me from all my faults, so that I may be without spot when admitted to Your presence.

MEDITATION

1. Extreme Unction (or the anointing of the sick) has been significantly defined by the Council of Trent as the "*sacramentum exequitum*" that is, the Sacrament of those about to leave this world to enter eternity. The life of a Christian, begun at Baptism, perfected by Confirmation, nourished by the Holy Eucharist, restored by Penance, is, at its close, crowned, as it were, by Extreme Unction. This Sacrament completes the work of purifying the soul, giving it strength to face the difficulties of the last hour. It prepares the soul to appear in the sight of God. The special effect of this Sacrament, according to the Council of Trent, is the infusion into the soul of "the grace of the Holy Spirit, whose unction takes away the residue of sin, and animates and revives courage in the sick, arousing great trust in God's mercy, so that the soul bears more calmly the sufferings of illness and resists more easily the temptations of the devil." Undoubtedly, Extreme Unction has also the power to "cancel the venial and mortal sins which the dying person, although he has attrition, may not be able to confess" (*Catechism of Pius X*). However, this is not the special grace of this Sacrament, but is the effect proper to the Sacrament of Penance. Extreme Unction destroys the last

An ancient author, known in ascetical literature under the pseudonym "Idiota."

consequences of sin, curing the soul of the lassitude and weakness which are the natural effects of all the sins committed during life, sins which have already been forgiven in confession. Just as Confirmation strengthens and perfects the grace received in Baptism, so Extreme Unction perfects the purification of the soul already accomplished by the sacrament of Penance. "O our Redeemer," says the Church, in administering Extreme Unction, "by the grace of the Holy Spirit, cure all the ills of this sick person, heal his wounds, pardon his sins, and drive away all his pains of soul and body. In Your mercy restore him to perfect spiritual and bodily health." Perfect spiritual health, that is, the total remission, not only of sin, but also of all its consequences, is the effect of this Sacrament, by which the dying person, relieved of all the weight of his sins, can go serenely to God in peace.

2. St. Thomas teaches that Extreme Unction is the last Sacrament and, in a certain way, the "consummation" of all the work of purifying the soul; it prepares man for participation in glory.

A dying person who receives this Sacrament with the proper dispositions obtains the full remission of all his sins and of the penalty due to them, so that he can go directly from this earthly exile to eternal glory without passing through purgatory. But although this is the normal effect of Extreme Unction, very few actually receive all its fruit because very few have the proper dispositions. There is perhaps no Sacrament which is so little understood, it is often received in haste, without preparation, and in a state of complete or partial unconsciousness. The result is that its precious fruits are lost in great part. How necessary it is, therefore, to do all that is possible to see that the sick receive Extreme Unction in time, with full consciousness and with deep piety, so that they may derive all possible profit from the grace being offered to them. The fear of distressing the sick person or his family should not deter us from fulfilling this pious duty with charity and tact. Some day we ourselves shall have the same need, and how fortunate we shall then be if there is someone who will render us this assistance at the proper moment. Moreover, in order to remove the prejudice which people often have against this Sacrament, it is useful to mention that it is ordered not only

to the health of the soul, but even to that of the body, when this enters into God's designs and would be beneficial to the soul. What is of most importance, however, is to try to procure for the dying person perfect tranquillity of conscience and divine assistance and support in the painful sufferings and bitter struggle of the agony of death, so that he may courageously face the final attacks of the enemy, accept death with resignation, abandon himself with confidence to God's mercy, and at last reach the heavenly country. Then the touching prayer of the Church will become a living reality for him : " Go forth from this world, O Christian soul, in the name of God the Father who created you, in the name of Jesus Christ who died for you, in the name of the Holy Spirit who has been poured forth upon you " (*Roman Ritual*).

COLLOQUY

" You have softened the terrors of death for us, Lord; You have made the end of our life the beginning of true life. You make our body rest for a short time, but only for a short time. Then You will awaken us with the sound of the last trumpet. You commit us to the earth which You have made, that it may preserve us; some day You will restore our mortal remains and make them beautiful forever.

" For us You became malediction and sin to save us from the curse of sin. You prepared our resurrection when you burst the gates of hell and destroyed by Your death the one who had empire over death.

" You have given to the fearful the Sign of the Cross to destroy their enemies; and you have assured us that we will have life, O eternal God, to whom I was offered as a babe and whom I have loved with all my strength.

" O Master, send me an angel of light to conduct me to that place of refreshment, whence flows the spring which quenches our thirst.

" You gave paradise to the man who was crucified with You and who implored pardon. Be mindful also of me in Your kingdom, for I am crucified with You, and the fear of Your judgment has pierced my flesh. Grant that the abyss may not separate me from Your elect! Remember not my sins. If, because of the weakness of my nature, I have failed in thought, word, or deed, pardon me, for You have the

power to forgive sins. May my soul be found without guilt when I lay aside the garment of my body. At that moment, deign to receive it without spot or blemish into Your hands as an offering pleasing to You" (St. Macrina).

VOCATION

PRESENCE OF GOD - Grant, O Lord, that I may accept with a humble and generous heart the honor of Your call.

MEDITATION

1. In a general sense, any invitation of God to the soul may be called a "vocation"; thus we speak of a "vocation to the Christian life." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," exclaims St. Paul, "who chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in His sight, in charity; who hath predestined us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ unto Himself..." (*Eph 1,3-5*). How exalted is the Christian vocation, a vocation for which we can never adequately thank God, and to which we can never fully correspond. Within this universal vocation which is proper to all Christians, there are more specific calls to the various states in life—to matrimony, and to the single and religious states; thus the term "vocation" is often used restrictively. A person is said to *have a vocation* when he is called by God to that higher state of life indicated by the counsels and implying a special relationship with God which sets him apart as one "consecrated," that is, reserved for God alone. This is precisely why God asks these souls to renounce that life in which individuals contract bonds which establish a close union between them, and a mutual belonging to one another. Instead of binding itself to another creature, a consecrated soul binds itself to God by the pure bond of perfect chastity. It therefore belongs neither to itself nor to creatures, but only to God. This total *belonging* to God is the characteristic

mark of a consecrated soul, whether it is sealed by sacramental charismatic consecration to the priesthood, by religious profession, or by a private vow of perfect chastity. It is not only its characteristic mark, but also its glory and the profound reason for its dignity, for just as God is superior to His creatures, so the honor of belonging to Him alone far surpasses that of belonging to a creature.

2. Vocation, or the call to consecrate oneself to God, is a *privilege* : a privilege which does not depend on personal merit, but on God's good pleasure alone. God chooses whom He wills, when He wills, and as He wills. "All men take not this word," said Jesus, speaking of perfect chastity, "but only they to whom it is given" (*Mt* 19,11). This prerogative has been given only because it pleased God and He so willed. "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you" (*Jn* 15,16). God's choice is the basis of every vocation; it is wholly gratuitous, inspired solely by His love. Each one so chosen should justly consider himself as a privileged one of God, privileged without any merit on his own part, privileged only because the Most High has so decreed in the unfathomable designs of His will. Each one so chosen can and should feel that God might have selected others far more deserving, more virtuous, more gifted; and confronted with the mystery of God's choice and his own insufficiency, he should be unable to do otherwise than prostrate himself in gratitude and humility. Together with Mary, the most privileged of all creatures, every consecrated soul can sing its *Magnificat* : "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior, because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid" (*Lk* 1,46-48). The story of every vocation can be summarized by saying that God's glance has rested with special love on one of His creatures. That this creature is poor, weak, and wretched does not matter. God knows what it is made of. He sees its poverty and draws it to Himself : "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee" (*Jer* 31,3). God's choice is absolutely free and cannot be determined either by the merits or by the characteristics of His creatures. On the other hand, because He is infinite Wisdom and Omnipotence, He has no need of the gifts of His creatures, nor does He seek them; rather, His choice often falls on the weakest, on those whom the word

despises. God only seeks hearts capable of corresponding to His love of predilection, hearts capable of giving themselves to Him without reserve and with complete generosity.

COLLOQUY

“ O infinite Goodness, You chose us to be Your creatures even before You gave us being; therefore, You could well say, ‘ You have not chosen Me, for since you are nothing, you had no power to choose, but I have chosen you.’ ”

“ You chose to make us Your creatures and to create us to Your own image and likeness, moved by Your goodness alone. You chose us again at our Baptism, and made us Your children, while we, born in sin, could never have hoped to be Your children if You had not chosen us.

“ Still moved by Your infinite bounty alone, O my God, You chose me and so many others to be consecrated wholly to You, choosing us in so many, many ways, by Your interior inspirations and by other means. You chose us especially to enable us to raise ourselves up to You, so that You could make us know Your Being and permit us to share Your Life.

“ Oh, the grandeur of a creature who has been chosen by You! To what a sublime state it has been raised, and how abject it becomes when it falls into sin, instead of corresponding with Your choice!

“ O my dear Spouse, I ask this grace of You always : grant that all chosen souls may receive perfect light and knowledge of their state, so that they may gladly renounce themselves and devote themselves to Your service.

“ O Lord, how necessary this prayer is! How necessary it is for You to grant us this grace, that Your chosen ones may serve You perfectly! ” (St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi).

“ I come to You, O most loving Jesus, whom I have loved, sought, and always desired. I come because of Your sweetness, Your pity, Your charity. I come with all my heart, all my soul, all my strength. I follow You because You have called me. Do not reject me, but treat me with forbearance, in accordance with Your great mercy ” (St. Gertrude).

CORRESPONDENCE TO VOCATION

PRESENCE OF GOD - O Lord, You call me unceasingly, drawing me to Yourself; grant that I may respond to Your call with ever-increasing generosity.

MEDITATION

i. God calls us but He does not constrain us. He grants man full liberty to accept or to refuse His divine invitation. "If thou wilt be perfect...come, follow Me" (*Mt* 19,21), says the Lord to every soul that He chooses, but as with the young man in the Gospel, He leaves to each soul the responsibility of answering or rejecting His call. However, when God calls us, it would be rash to close our heart to His voice and spurn His invitation. Who would dare turn away from the glance of predilection which the Most High casts on one whom He calls to follow Him?

We ought to answer God's call with great humility and joy, with gratitude and readiness, saying with all our heart, *Ecce venio*, "Behold, I come...that I should do Thy will, O God" (*Heb* 10,7). The creature should respond to God's eternal choice of its soul, by choosing God to be its only good, its only love, by rising above all creatures and earthly affections. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me" (*Mt* 10,37). God, our Creator and absolute Ruler, has the full right to ask of us the renunciation of even the holiest affections and to exact that, for love of Him, we abandon father and mother, brothers and sisters, home, and all our possessions. Furthermore, if God has decreed that "a man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife" (*Gn* 2,24), would it be extravagant to do the same thing when we give ourselves, not to another creature, but to the Creator Himself?

The first duty one who has received the divine call, is therefore to renounce all earthly affections, possessions, and joys, so that freed from all ties, he may follow the Lord. Actually, what is to be given up will not be the same for all; more is required of the religious than of the secular priest, of the nun than of a person consecrated to God in the world.

But from the point of view of affection, the renunciation, or rather the detachment of the heart, must be the same for all; it attains its full measure when it is complete, with no reservation.

2. In order to correspond to one's vocation, it is not enough to leave the world, nor to enter the seminary or the convent, nor even to be ordained a priest or make the vows of religion; we must strive, day by day, to live up to our vocation and to adapt our lives more and more to the exigencies of the divine call. Everything in us, as long as we live, is capable of becoming more perfect. Thus we can say that although our consecration to God becomes stabilized by receiving Holy Orders or by pronouncing vows, it is, nevertheless, subject to the law of growth and should become ever deeper and more perfect. Ordinarily, when we first bind ourselves to God—although we have a sincere intention of giving ourselves definitively to Him—we have not yet realized a full and total consecration. In reality, we are not yet entirely "consecrated"; we still have inclinations, tendencies, and affections not wholly under God's sway. There is still much of "self," much of the purely natural which is not perfectly submissive to God, not entirely sacrificed to Love. Each day should mean progress in the realization of one's vocation, until not a single fiber of the soul remains which does not belong entirely to God.

There is nothing static about vocation, not even on God's part, because, adapting Himself to our nature, He calls us in a progressive way. If we are faithful to His first invitation, others, increasingly pressing and definite, will follow, which will bind us more and more to our divine Master. Basically, there is but one call to the priesthood, the religious life, or consecration to God in the world; but God, through the various circumstances of life, and especially, through new occasions for sacrifice, repeats this invitation more precisely, more definitely, each time letting the soul see how far the gift of self must be extended in order to reach the plenitude of its consecration. If the soul is faithful, and answers these progressive calls generously, God will continue to send new invitations, which will open up wider and more luminous horizons, until the soul lives its consecration in a perpetual renewal of fervor and love.

COLLOQUY

" My love holdeth Thee, O loving Jesus, nor will I let Thee go. O Love, who art Life, Thou art also the living Word of God; kindle anew Thy life within me; make amends for all the losses my love has suffered. O God who art love, who hast created me, create me anew in love. O Love who hast redeemed me, redeem and give back to me all that I have lost of Thy love through my negligence. O Love who hast purchased me for Thyself with Thy precious Blood, sanctify me in charity. O God who art Love, who hast adopted me as Thy child, train and fashion me according to Thine own heart. O Love, who hast chosen me for Thyself, and not for another, grant that I may be wholly Thine, Thine alone. O God who art Love, Thou hast loved me freely, gratuitously; grant that I may love Thee with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my strength.

" O Jesus, my Brother and my Spouse, supreme King, set Thy mark on the face of my soul, and engrave it so deeply, that no creature may attract my choice, nor excite my desire, nor possess my love. Thou art dearer to me than all that is dearest; deign that I may ever be Thy true and faithful spouse in that love which is stronger than death.

" O Love, Thou art dear to me above all things; oh, let Thy love teach me always to be faithful to my promises.

" Grant that I may have a place among the wise virgins. There will I await the heavenly Bridegroom, having my lamp lighted and filled with oil. So I shall not be confounded at the sudden coming of my King; but all peaceful and clothed with light, I shall join with songs of gladness the choirs of virgins who have gone before me. O Lamb without spot, grant that I may not be excluded with the foolish virgins, but in humble confidence, may enter the banquet hall of the great King, where in virtue of my patient and persevering fidelity, I shall dwell forever with the heavenly Lamb" (St. Gertrude).