





**MEDITATIONS AND READINGS**  
**ST. ALPHONSUS LIGOURI**

**Volume II**

**Part I**  
**Sexagesima - Easter**  
**Part II**  
**Easter - Ascension**

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## Sexagesima Sunday

### Morning Meditation

"GLADLY WILL I GLORY IN MY INFIRMITIES." (Epistle of Sunday. 2 Cor. xi. 19, 33).

What greater joy can there be than to suffer some cross and to know that by embracing it we give pleasure to God? St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi felt such consolation in suffering whatever came to her by God's will that she used to be lost in an ecstasy of Divine love.

#### I.

He who is united to the will of God, enjoys a perpetual peace, even in this world: *Whatsoever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad.* (Prov. xii. 21); and it must be so, because a soul cannot have more perfect content than to see its every wish fulfilled; and he who wills nothing but what God wills, has all that he wishes, since whatever happens must be by the will of God. Solinus says, that when resigned souls receive a humiliation, they will it; if they suffer poverty, they wish to be poor; in short, they will whatsoever happens, and therefore they lead a happy life. Be the weather cold or hot, let the rain or the storm come, he who is united to God's will says: "I wish for this cold or heat (etc.), because God so wills it." If loss or persecution, sickness or death, should come, he still says: "I am willing to be poor, persecuted, sick, or even to die, because such is the will of God." He who rests on the Divine will, and is pleased with whatsoever God may do, is as if he were placed above the clouds, and saw tempests raging below, but remained unhurt and undisturbed by them. This is the peace which, as the Apostle says, *surpasseth all understanding* (Phil. iv. 7); which exceeds all the delights of the world, and is so steadfast as to admit of no change: *A holy man continueth in wisdom as the sun; but a fool is changed as the moon.* (Ecclus. xxvii. 12). The fool, that is, the sinner, changes like the moon, which increases today, and wanes tomorrow; one day he laughs, the next he weeps; at one time he is mild and cheerful, at another violent and sad; for he changes according as pleasing or adverse things happen to him. But the just man is like the sun,

even and uniform in his tranquillity whatever may happen; for his peace rests in conformity with the will of God: *And on earth peace to men of good will.* (Luke ii. 14). We cannot help feeling some sting of pain from adversity in the inferior part of our souls; but peace will always reign in the superior part, when our will is united to that of God: *Your joy no man shall take from you.* (John xvi. 22). How foolish are those who resist God's will, since what He appoints must nevertheless be fulfilled! *Who resisteth his will?* (Rom. ix. 19). Those poor creatures must therefore endure their cross, but without fruit, and without peace: *Who hath resisted him, and hath had peace?* (Job ix. 4).

My Divine King, my beloved. Redeemer, come, and from this day forward reign alone in my soul: take complete possession of my will that I may desire and wish nothing but what Thou willest. In whatever shall befall me, I will always say: My God, I will only what Thou dost will. May Thy will be always done in me! Thy will be done!

## II.

And what else does God will but our good? *For this is the will of God, your sanctification.* (1 Thess. iv. 3). He wishes to see us holy by being content in this life, and happy in the next. Let us understand that all the crosses which come to us from God *work together unto good* (Rom. viii. 28). Even punishments are not sent in this life for our destruction, but that we may amend, and thus gain eternal happiness: *Let us believe that these scourges of the Lord... have happened for our amendment, and not for our destruction.* (Judith viii. 27). God so loves us, that He not only wishes, but eagerly desires, the salvation of each one among us: *The Lord is careful for me.* (Ps. xxxix. 18). *He that spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how hath he not also with him given us all things?* (Rom. viii. 32). Let us, then, abandon ourselves always into the hands of that God Who ever desires our good while we are in this life, *casting all your care upon him, for he hath care of you.* (1 Pet. v. 7). "Think of Me," said our Lord to St. Catherine of Sienna, "and I will always think of you." Let us say with the sacred Spouse: *I to my beloved, and my beloved to me.* (Cant. vi. 2). My Beloved thinks of what is good for me, and I will think of nothing but of pleasing Him, and uniting myself to His holy will. And we should never

pray, as the holy Abbot Nilus tells us, that God would do what we wish, but that we may do what He wills.

He who always does this will lead a happy life, and die a holy death; he who expires completely resigned to the Divine will, leaves a moral certainty of his salvation.

O Jesus, my Redeemer, Thou didst give up Thy life in agony on the Cross, that Thou mightest be the cause of my salvation; have pity on me, then, and save me; do not suffer a soul which Thou didst redeem with such anguish and such love to hate Thee for ever in hell. Thou canst do no more to make me love Thee, and Thou didst give me to understand this when, before Thou didst expire on Calvary, Thou didst utter those loving words: *It is consummated*. (Jo. xix. 30). But how have I acknowledged Thy love? For the past, I may truly say that I have done nothing but displease Thee, and force Thee to hate me. I thank Thee for having borne with me with so much patience, and for now giving me time to repair my ingratitude, and to love Thee before I die. Yes, I wish to love Thee, and do whatever is pleasing to Thee. I give Thee my will, my liberty, all that I have. I sacrifice to Thee from this moment my life, and accept that death which Thou shalt send me, with all the pains and circumstances which may accompany it. I unite this sacrifice with that great sacrifice which Thou, my Jesus, didst offer for me upon the Cross. I desire to die, to fulfil Thy will. Grant me, I beseech Thee, by the merits of Thy Passion, the grace to live always in resignation to the disposition of Thy providence; and when death arrives, grant that I may embrace it with the same submission to Thy good pleasure. I wish to die, my Jesus, in order to please Thee. I desire to die, saying: *Thy will be done*. Thus didst thou die, O Mary, my Mother; obtain for me the grace that I also may so die.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### **THE UNHAPPY LIFE OF SINNERS**

*And that which fell among thorns are they who have heard, and, going their way, are choked with the cares and riches of this life, and yield no fruit.* (Gospel of Sunday. Luke viii. 4, 16).

In the Parable of today's Gospel, we are told that part of the seed which the sower went out to sow, fell among thorns. The

Saviour has declared that the seed represents the Divine word, and the thorns, the attachment of men to earthly riches and pleasures, which prevent the word of God bearing fruit for time or eternity. Oh, the misery of poor sinners! By their sins they not only condemn themselves to eternal torments in the next, but to an unhappy life in this world.

The devil deceives sinners, and makes them imagine that, by indulging their sensual appetites they will lead a life of happiness, and enjoy peace. But there is no peace for those who offend God. *There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord.* (Is. xlviii. 22). God declares that all His enemies lead a life of misery, and that they do not even know the way of peace. *Destruction and unhappiness in their ways: and the way of peace they have not known.* (Ps. xiii. 3).

Brute animals, as they have been created for this world, enjoy peace in sensual delights. Give to a dog a bone, and he is perfectly content; give to an ox a bundle of hay, and he desires nothing more. But man, who has been created for God, to love God, and to be united to God, can be made happy only by God, and not by the world, though it should enrich him with all its goods. What are worldly goods? *All that is in the world*, says St. John, *is the concupiscence of the flesh, or sensual delights, and the concupiscence of the eyes, or riches, and the pride of life* -- that is, earthly honours. (1 Jo. 16). St. Bernard says a man may be gluttoned with earthly goods, but can never be made content or happy by them: *Inflari potest, satiari non potest.* And how can earth and wind and filth satisfy the heart of man? In his comment on these words of St. Peter -- *Behold we have left all things* (Matth. xix. 27) -- the same Saint says, that he saw in the world several different classes of fools. All had a great desire of happiness. Some, such as the avaricious, were content with *riches*; others, ambitious of honours and praise, were satisfied with wind; others, seated round a furnace, swallowed the *sparks* that were thrown from it, -- these were the passionate and vindictive; others, in fine, drank *fetid water* from a stagnant pool, -- and these were the voluptuous and unchaste. Oh, fools! adds the Saint, do you not perceive that all these things, from which you seek content, do not satisfy, but, on the contrary, increase the cravings of your heart? Of this

we have a striking example in Alexander the Great, who, after having conquered half the world, burst into tears because he was not master of the whole.

Many expect to find peace in accumulating riches, but how can these satisfy their desires? St. Augustine says: "Great wealth does not close, but rather extends the jaws of avarice." That is, the enjoyment of riches excites, rather than satiates, the desire of wealth. *Thou wast debased even to hell; thou hast been wearied in the multitude of thy ways; yet thou saidst not: I will rest.* (Is. lvii. 9). Poor worldlings! They labour and toil to acquire an increase of wealth and property, but never enjoy repose: the more they accumulate riches, the greater their disquietude and vexation.

*The rich have wanted, and have suffered hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good.* (Ps. xxxiii. 11). The rich of this world are, of all men, the most miserable; because the more they possess, the more they desire to possess. They never succeed in attaining all the objects of their wishes, and therefore they are far poorer than men who have but a competency, and seek God alone. These are truly rich, because they are content with their condition, and find in God every good. *They that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good.* To the Saints, because they possess God, nothing is wanting; to the worldly rich who are deprived of God, all things are wanting, because they want peace. The appellation of fool was, therefore, justly given to the rich man in the Gospel, who, because his lands brought forth plenty of fruits, said to his soul: *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thy rest, eat, drink, make good cheer* (Luke xii. 20). But this man was rightly called a fool. *Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee; and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?* And why was he called a fool? Because he imagined that by these goods -- by eating and drinking -- he could be content, and could enjoy peace. *Rest*, he said, *eat and drink*. Says St. Basil of Seleucia: "Hast thou the soul of a brute, that thou expectest to make it happy by eating and drinking?"

But perhaps sinners who seek after and attain worldly honours are content. All the honours of this earth, are but smoke and wind. *Ephraim feedeth on the wind.* (Os. xii. 1). And how can these content the heart of a Christian? *The pride of them*, says

David, *ascendeth continually*. (Ps. lxxiii. 23). The ambitious are not satisfied by the attainment of certain honours: their ambition and pride continually increase; and thus their inquietude, their envy, and their fears are multiplied.

They who live in the habit of sins of impurity feed on filth. How can this content, or give peace to the soul?

Ah! what peace, what peace can sinners at a distance from God enjoy? They may possess the riches, honours, and delights of this world; but they never shall have peace. No; the word of God cannot fail: He has declared that there is no peace for His enemies. *There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord*. (Is. xlviii. 22). Poor sinners! They, as St. John Chrysostom says, always carry about with them their own executioner -- that is, a guilty conscience, which continually torments them. St. Isidore asserts that there is no pain more excruciating than that of a guilty conscience.

## Evening Meditation

"*MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE*." (Epistle of Sunday).

I.

Man knows not the value of Divine grace, and hence he exchanges it for a mere nothing. It is a treasure of infinite value. *An infinite treasure to men, which they that use, become the friends of God*. (Wis. vii. 14). The Gentiles said it was impossible for a creature to become the friend of God. But, no; Divine grace induces God to call the soul that possesses it, His friend: *You are my friends* (Jo. xv. 14) -- said our Blessed Saviour to His disciples.

When, therefore, O God, my soul was in the state of grace, it was Thy friend; but by sin it became the slave of the devil, and Thine enemy. I give Thee thanks for affording me time to recover Thy grace. I am sorry, O Lord, with my whole heart, for having lost it; in Thy pity, restore it to me, and suffer me not to lose it any more.

How fortunate should that man esteem himself who becomes the friend of his king. It would be presumption for a vassal to expect that his prince should make him his friend; but it is not presumption for the soul to aspire to be the friend of God. "If I would become a friend of Caesar," said a certain courtier, as St.

Augustine relates, "I should have great difficulty in becoming such; but if I would become the friend of God, I am already His friend." An act of Contrition and of Love makes us the friends of God. St. Peter of Alcantara said: "No tongue can express the greatness of the love of Jesus for a soul in the state of grace."

O my God, am I in Thy grace or not? I certainly know that at one time I had lost it, and who knows whether I have regained it? O Lord, I love Thee, and am sorry for having offended Thee; make haste to pardon me.

## II.

Oh, how great, on the contrary, is the misery of a soul that is fallen from the state of grace! It is separated from the Sovereign Good. It belongs no more to God, and God belongs no more to it. It is no longer loved by God, but hated and abhorred by Him. Before, He blessed it as His Child; but now, He curses it as His enemy.

Such is the unhappy state in which I was, O God, when I had forfeited Thy grace. I hope I have arisen from my unhappy condition, but if I have not, hasten, O Jesus, to rescue me from it. Thou hast promised to love those who love Thee: *I love them that love me*. (Ps. viii. 17). I love Thee, my Sovereign Good; do Thou love me; and may I never again be deprived of Thy love. Holy Mary, succour me, thy humble client; I commend myself to thy patronage.

## Monday after Sexagesima

### Morning Meditation

#### *THE WILL OF GOD TO SAVE ALL MEN.*

Our holy Redeemer has ransomed us from eternal death at the price of His own Blood, and He does not wish to see these souls of ours lost which have cost Him so much. When He sees souls that are constraining Him by their sins to sentence them to hell, He, as it were, weeps with compassion for them and says: *And wherefore will ye die, O house of Israel? Return ye and live!* (Ezech. xviii. 31). My children, why will you destroy and damn yourselves when I have died upon a Cross to save you? Return to Me as penitents, and I will restore to you the life you have lost.

The Apostle, St. Paul, teaches that God willeth the salva-

tion of all: *He will have all men to be saved.* (1 Tim. ii. 4). And St. Peter writes: *The Lord dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance.* (2 Peter. 9). For this end the Son of God came down from Heaven, and was made Man, and spent thirty-three years in labours and sufferings, and finally shed His Blood and laid down His life for our salvation. And shall we forfeit our salvation?

Thou, my Saviour, didst spend Thy whole life in securing my salvation, and in what have I spent so many years of my life? What fruit hast Thou hitherto reaped from me? I have deserved to be cut off and cast into hell. But Thou *desirest not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live.* (Ezech. xxxiii. 11). Yes, O God, I leave all and turn myself to Thee. I love Thee, and because I love Thee I am sorry for having offended Thee. Accept of me, and suffer me not to forsake Thee any more.

How much did not the Saints do to secure their eternal salvation! How many nobles and kings have forsaken their kingdoms and estates, and shut themselves up in cloisters! How many young persons have forsaken their country and friends, to dwell in caves and deserts! And how many Martyrs have laid down their lives under the most cruel tortures! And why? -- to save their souls. And what have we done?

Woe to me, who, although I know that death is near at hand, yet think not of it! No, my God, I will no longer live at a distance from Thee. Why do I delay? Is it that death may overtake me in the miserable state in which I now am? No, my God, do Thou assist me to prepare for death.

II.

O God, how many graces has my Saviour bestowed on me to enable me to save my soul! He has caused me to be born in the bosom of the true Church; He has many times pardoned me my transgressions; He has favoured me with many lights in sermons, in prayers, in meditations, in Communions, and spiritual exercises; and often has He called me to His love. In a word, how many means of salvation has He granted me which He has not granted others!

And yet, O God, when shall I detach myself from the world and give myself entirely to Thee? Behold me, O Jesus, I will no



longer resist. Thou hast obliged me to love Thee. I desire to be wholly Thine: do Thou accept of me, and disdain not the love of a sinner who has hitherto so much despised Thee. I love Thee, my God, my Love, and my All. Have pity on me, O Mary, for thou art my hope.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *THE POWER OF THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST TO ENKINDLE DIVINE LOVE IN EVERY HEART.*

Father Balthassar Alvarez, a great servant of God, used to say that we must not think we have made any progress in the way of God until we have come to keep Jesus crucified ever in our heart. And St. Francis de Sales said that "the love which is not the offspring of the Passion is feeble." Yes; because we cannot have a more powerful motive for loving God than the Passion of Jesus Christ, by which we know that the Eternal Father, to manifest His exceeding love for us, was pleased to send His only-begotten Son upon earth to die for us sinners. Hence the Apostle says that God, through the excess of love wherewith He loved us, willed that the death of His Son should convey life to us: *For his exceeding charity wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together in Christ.* (Ephes. ii. 5). And this was precisely the expression used by Moses and Elias on Mount Tabor, in speaking of the Passion of Jesus Christ. They did not know how to give it any other appellation than an excess of love: *And they spoke of his excess, which he should consummate in Jerusalem.* (Luke ix. 31).

When our Saviour came into the world, the shepherds heard the angels singing, *Glory to God in the highest.* (Luke ii. 14). But the humiliation of the Son of God in becoming Man, through His love for man, might have seemed rather to obscure than to manifest His Divine glory: but no; there was no means by which the glory of God could have been better manifested to the world than by Jesus Christ dying for the salvation of mankind, since the Passion of Jesus Christ has made us know the perfection of the Divine attributes. It has made us know how great is the Mercy of God, in that a God was willing to die to save sinners; and to die, moreover, by a death so painful and ignominious. St. John Chrysostom says, that the Passion of Jesus Christ was not

an ordinary suffering, nor His death a simple death like that of other men.

It has made us know the Divine Wisdom. Had our Redeemer been merely God, He could not have made satisfaction for man; for God could not make satisfaction to Himself in place of man; nor could God make satisfaction by means of suffering, for He is impassible. On the other hand, had He been merely man, man could not have made satisfaction for the grievous injury done by him to the Divine Majesty. What, then, did God do? He sent His own very Son, true God with the Father, to take human flesh, that so as man He might by His death pay the debt due to the Divine Justice, and as God might make full satisfaction.

The Passion, moreover, made us know how great is the Divine Justice. St. John Chrysostom says, that God reveals to us the greatness of His Justice, not so much by hell in which He punishes sinners, as by the sight of Jesus on the Cross; since in hell creatures are punished for sins of their own, but on the Cross we behold a God cruelly treated in order to make satisfaction for the sins of men. What obligation had Jesus Christ to die for us? *He was offered because it was his own will.* (Is. liii. 7). He might have justly abandoned man to his perdition; but His love for us would not let Him see us lost: wherefore He chose to give Himself up to so painful a death in order to obtain for us salvation: *He hath loved us and delivered himself up for us.* (Ephes. v. 11). From all eternity He had loved man: *I have loved thee, with an everlasting love.* (Jer. xxxi. 3). But then, seeing that His justice obliged Him to condemn man, and to keep him at a distance, separated eternally from Himself, His mercy urged Him to find a way by which He might be able to save him. But how? By making satisfaction Himself to the Divine Justice by His own death. And consequently He willed that there should be affixed to the Cross whereon He died the sentence of condemnation to eternal death which man had merited, in order that it might remain there, cancelled in His Blood. *Blotting out the writing of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us. He hath taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross.* (Colos. ii. 14). And thus, through the merits of His own Blood, He pardons all our sins: *Forgiving you all offences.* (Colos. ii. 13). And at the same time He spoiled

the devils of the rights they had acquired over us, carrying along with Him in triumph as well our enemies as ourselves, who were their prey. *And despoiling the principalities and powers, he hath exposed them confidently in open show, triumphing over them in himself.* (Colos. ii. 15). On which Theophylact comments: "As a conqueror in triumph, carrying with Him the booty and the enemy."

## Evening Meditation

### FRUITS OF MEDITATION ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST.

#### I.

The Lover of souls, our most loving Redeemer, declared that He had no other motive in coming down upon earth to become man, than to enkindle in the hearts of men the fire of His holy love: *I am come to cast fire on the earth; and what will I but that it be kindled.* (Luke xii. 49). And, oh, what beautiful flames of love has He not enkindled in so many souls, especially by the pains that He chose to suffer in His death, in order to prove to us the immeasurable love which He still bears to us! Oh, how many souls, happy in the Wounds of Jesus, as in burning furnaces of love, have been so inflamed with His love, that they have not refused to consecrate to Him their goods, their lives, and their whole selves, surmounting with great courage all the difficulties which they had to encounter in the observance of the Divine law, for the love of that Lord Who, being God, chose to suffer so much for the love of them! This was just the counsel that the Apostle gave us, in order that we might not fail, but make great advances in the way of salvation: *Think diligently upon him, who endureth such opposition from sinners against himself, that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds.* (Heb. xii. 3).

Wherefore St. Augustine, all inflamed with love at the sight of Jesus nailed on the Cross, prayed thus sweetly: Imprint, O Lord, Thy Wounds in my heart, that I may read therein suffering and love: suffering, that I may endure for Thee all suffering; love, that I may despise for Thee all love. Write, he said, my most loving Saviour, write on my heart Thy Wounds, in order that I may always therein behold Thy sufferings and Thy love. Yes, in order that having before my eyes the great sufferings that Thou, my God, didst endure for me, I may bear in silence all the

sufferings it may fall to my lot to endure; and at the sight of the love which Thou didst exhibit for me on the Cross, I may never love or be able to love any other than Thee.

## II.

O Saviour of the world, O Love of souls, O Lord most lovely of all beings, Thou by Thy Passion didst come to win to Thyself our hearts, by showing us the immense love Thou didst bear us in accomplishing a Redemption which has brought to us a sea of benedictions, and which cost Thee a sea of pains and ignominies. It was principally for this end that Thou didst institute the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, in order that we might have a perpetual memorial of Thy Passion: "That we might have for ever a perpetual memorial of so great a benefit," says St. Thomas, "He gives His body to be the food of the faithful" which St. Paul had already said: *As often as you shall eat this bread, you shall show the death of the Lord.* (1 Cor. xi. 26). Oh, how many holy souls hast Thou persuaded by these prodigies of love, consumed by the flames of Thy love, to renounce all earthly goods, in order to dedicate themselves entirely to loving Thee alone, O most amiable Saviour! O my Jesus, I pray Thee make me always remember Thy Passion; and grant that I also, a miserable sinner, overcome at last by so many loving devices, may return to love Thee, and to show Thee, by my poor love, some mark of gratitude for the excessive love which Thou, my God and my Saviour, hast borne to me. Remember, my Jesus, that I am one of those sheep of Thine, to save which Thou didst come down on the earth, and didst sacrifice Thy Divine life. I know that, after having redeemed me by Thy death, Thou hast not ceased to love me, and that Thou dost still bear to me the same love which Thou hadst for me when Thou didst die for my sake. Oh, permit me not any longer to lead a life of ingratitude towards Thee, my God, Who dost so much deserve to be loved, and hast done so much to be loved by me.

And thou, O most holy Virgin Mary, who didst take so great a part in the Passion of thy Son, obtain for me, I beseech thee, through the merits of thy sorrows, the grace to experience a taste of that compassion which thou didst so sensibly feel at the death of Jesus; and obtain for me also a spark of that love which

wrought all the martyrdom of thy afflicted heart. Amen.

"Let my mind, O Lord Jesus Christ, I beseech Thee, be absorbed in the fiery and honeyed sweetness of Thy love, that I may die for love of the love of Thee, Who wert pleased to die for love of the love of me." (Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi).

## **Tuesday after Sexagesima**

### **Morning Meditation**

#### *THE MERCY OF GOD IN CALLING SINNERS TO REPENTANCE.*

Art thou a sinner, and dost thou desire to be pardoned? "Doubt not," says St. John Chrysostom, "that God has a greater desire to pardon thee than thou hast to be pardoned." God stands at the door of our hearts, and knocks that we may open to Him: Behold, I stand at the door and knock. (Apoc. iii. 20). Again He urges: *Why will ye die, O house of Israel?* (Ezech. xviii. 31). As if He were saying in compassion: "O My child, why wilt thou die?"

I.

*The Lord called Adam, and said to him: Where art thou?* (Gen. iii. 9). These are the words of a father, says a pious author, going in quest of his lost son. Oh, the immense compassion of our God! Adam sins, he turns his back upon God; and yet God does not abandon him, but follows him and calls after him: Adam, where art thou? Thus, my soul, has God frequently done towards thee; thou hast forsaken Him by sin; but He did not hesitate to approach thee, and to call upon thee by many interior lights, by remorse of conscience, and by His holy inspirations; all of which were the effects of His compassion and love.

O God of mercy, O God of love, how could I have so grievously offended Thee! How could I have been so ungrateful to Thee!

As a father, when he beholds his son hastening to cast himself down from the brink of a precipice, presses forward towards him, and with tears endeavours to withhold him from destruction; so, my God, hast Thou done towards me. I was already hastening by my sins to precipitate myself into hell, and Thou didst hold me back. I am now sensible, O Lord, of the love

which Thou hast shown me, and I hope to sing forever in Heaven the praises of Thy mercy: *The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever.* (Ps. lxxxviii. 1). I know, O Jesus, that Thou desirest my salvation; but I do not know whether Thou hast yet pardoned me. Oh! give me intense sorrow for my sins, give me an ardent love for Thee, as signs of Thy merciful forgiveness.

## II.

O my Saviour, how can I doubt of receiving Thy pardon, when Thou Thyself dost offer it to me, and art ready to receive me with open arms on my return to Thee? Wherefore I do return to Thee, sorrowing and overpowered at the consideration that after all my offences against Thee, Thou indeed still lovest me. Oh, that I had never displeased Thee, my sovereign Good! How much am I grieved for having done so! Pardon me, O Jesus, I will never more offend Thee. But I will not rest satisfied with Thy forgiveness only: give me also a great love of Thee. Having so often deserved to burn in the fires of hell, I now desire to burn in the fire of Thy holy love. I love Thee, my only Love, my Life, my Treasure, my All. O Mary, my protectress, pray for me that I may continue faithful to God to the end of my life.

## Spiritual Reading

THE POWER OF THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST  
(continued).

When satisfying the Divine justice on the Cross, Jesus Christ speaks but of mercy. He prays His Father to have mercy on the very Jews who had contrived His death, and on His murderers who were putting Him to death: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* (Luke xxiii. 34). While He was on the Cross, instead of punishing the two thieves who had just before reviled Him, -- *And they that were crucified with him, reviled him* (Mark xv. 82), -- when He heard one of them asking for mercy, -- *Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom.* (Luke xxiii. 42), -- overflowing with mercy, He promises him Paradise that very day: *This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.* (Luke xxiii. 43). Then, before He expired, He gave to us, in the person of John, His own Mother to be our Mother: *He saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother.* (Jo. xix. 27). There upon the Cross He declares Himself content in- having done everything to obtain salvation for us,

and He makes perfect the sacrifice by His death: *Afterwards Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, ...said, It is consummated; and bowing his head he gave up the ghost.* (Jo. xix. 28, 30). And behold, by the death of Jesus Christ, man is set free from sin and from the power of the devil; and, moreover, is raised to grace, and to a greater degree of grace than Adam lost: *And where sin abounded, says St. Paul, grace did more abound.* (Rom. v. 20). It remains therefore for us, writes the Apostle, to have frequent recourse with all confidence to this throne of grace, which Jesus crucified truly is, in order to receive from His mercy the grace of salvation, together with aid to overcome the temptations of the world and of hell: *Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid.* (Heb. iv. 16).

Ah, my Jesus, I love Thee above all things, and whom would I wish to love if I love not Thee Who art Infinite Goodness, and Who hast died for me? Would that I could die of grief every time I think how I have driven Thee away from my soul by my sins, and separated myself from Thee Who art my only Good, and Who hast loved me so much: "Who shall separate me from the charity of Christ?" It is sin only that can separate me from Thee. But I hope in the Blood Thou hast shed for me, that Thou wilt never allow me to separate myself from Thy love, and to lose Thy grace, which I prize more than every other good. I give myself wholly to Thee. Do Thou accept me, draw all my affections to Thyself, that so I may love none but Thee.

Does Jesus Christ perhaps claim too much in wishing us to give ourselves wholly to Him, after He has given to us all His Blood and His life, in dying for us upon the Cross? *The charity of Christ presseth us.* (2 Cor. v. 14). Let us hear what St. Francis de Sales says upon these words: "To know that Jesus has loved us unto death, and that the death of the Cross, is not this to feel our hearts constrained by a violence which is the stronger in proportion to its loveliness?" And then he adds: "My Jesus gives Himself all to me, and I give myself all to Him. On His bosom will I live and die. Neither death nor life shall ever separate me from Him."

Evening Meditation

REFLECTIONS. AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PAS-

## SION OF JESUS CHRIST.

### I.

From what source did the Saints draw courage and strength to suffer torments, martyrdom, and death if not from the sufferings of Jesus crucified? St. Joseph of Leonessa, a Capuchin, on seeing that they were going to bind him with cords for a painful incision that the surgeon was to make in his body, took into his hands his Crucifix and said, "Why these cords? Why these cords? Behold, these are my chains -- my Saviour nailed to the Cross for love of me. He through His sufferings constrains me to bear every trial for His sake." And thus he suffered the amputation without a complaint; looking upon Jesus, Who, *as a lamb before his shearers, was dumb, and did not open his mouth.* (Is. liii. 7). Who, then, can ever complain that he suffers wrongfully, when he considers Jesus, Who was *bruised for our sins?* (Is. liii. 5). Who can refuse to obey, on account of some inconvenience, when Jesus *became obedient unto death?* (Phil. ii. 8). Who can refuse ignominies, when he beholds Jesus, treated as a fool, as a mock king, as a disorderly person; struck, spit upon His Face, and suspended upon an infamous gibbet?

Who could love any other object besides Jesus, when he sees Him dying in the midst of so many sufferings and insults in order to captivate our love? A certain devout solitary prayed to God to teach him what he could do in order to love Him perfectly. Our Lord revealed to him that there was no more efficient way to arrive at the perfect love of Him, than to meditate constantly on His Passion. St. Teresa lamented and complained of certain books which had taught her to leave off meditating on the Passion of Jesus Christ, because this might be an impediment to the contemplation of His Divinity; and the Saint exclaimed: "O Lord of my soul, O my Jesus crucified, my Treasure, I never remember this opinion without thinking that I have been guilty of great treachery. And is it possible that Thou, my Lord, couldst be an obstacle to me in the way of a greater good? Whence, then, do all good things come to me, but from Thee?" And she then added: "I have seen that, in order to please God, and to induce Him to grant us great graces, He wills that they should all pass through the hands of this most Sacred Humanity, in which



His Divine Majesty declared that He took pleasure."

## II.

Father Balthassar Alvarez said that ignorance of the treasures that we possess in Jesus was the ruin of Christians; and therefore his favourite and usual meditation was on the Passion of Jesus Christ. He meditated especially on three of the sufferings of Jesus -- His poverty, contempt, and pain; and he exhorted his penitents to meditate frequently on the Passion of our Redeemer, telling them that they should not consider that they had done any thing at all, until they had arrived at retaining Jesus crucified continually in their hearts.

"He who desires," says St. Bonaventure, "to go on advancing from virtue to virtue, from grace to grace, should meditate continually on the Passion of Jesus." And he adds, that there is no practice more profitable to the entire sanctification of the soul than frequent meditation on the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

St. Augustine also said that a single tear shed at the remembrance of the Passion of Jesus is worth more than a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, or a year of fasting on bread and water. Yes, because it was for this end that our Saviour suffered so much, in order that we should think of His sufferings; because, if we think of them, it is impossible not to be inflamed with Divine love: *The charity of Christ presseth us*, says St. Paul. (2 Con v. 14). Jesus is loved by few, because few consider the pains He has suffered for us; but he that frequently considers them cannot live without loving Jesus. The charity of Christ presseth us. He will feel himself so constrained by His love, that he will not find it possible to refrain from loving a God so full of love Who has suffered so much to make us love Him.

## Wednesday after Sexagesima

### Morning Meditation

*THE TURNING AWAY FROM GOD BY SIN.*

*Who is the Lord that I should hear his voice? I know not the Lord.* (Exod. v. 2). So speaks the sinner. Lord, I do not acknowledge Thee! I will do what I please! He insults God to His face and turns his back upon Him. This turning away from God is mortal sin.

## I.

St. Augustine and St. Thomas define mortal sin as *a turning away from God*: that is, the turning of one's back upon God, leaving the Creator for the sake of the creature. What punishment would that subject deserve who, while his king was giving him a command, contemptuously turned his back upon him to go and transgress his orders? That is what the sinner does; and it is punished in hell with the pain of loss, that is, the loss of God, a punishment richly deserved by him who in this life turns his back upon his Sovereign Good.

Alas! my God, I have frequently turned my back upon Thee; but I see that Thou hast not yet abandoned me; I see that Thou approachest me, and, inviting me to repentance, dost offer me Thy pardon. I am sorry above every evil for having offended Thee, do Thou have pity on me.

*Thou hast forsaken me*, saith the Lord; *thou art gone backward*. (Jer. xv. 6). God complains and says: Ungrateful soul, hast thou forsaken Me! I should never have forsaken thee hadst thou not first turned thy back upon Me: *thou hast gone backward*. O God, with what consternation will these words fill the soul of the sinner when he stands to be judged before Thy Divine tribunal!

Thou makest me hear them now, O my Saviour, not to condemn me, but to bring me to sorrow for the offences I have committed against Thee. Yes, O Jesus, I sincerely repent of all the displeasure I have given Thee. For my own miserable gratification I have forsaken Thee, my God, my Sovereign, Infinite Good! But behold me a penitent returned to Thee; reject me not.

## II.

*Why will you die, O house of Israel? return ye and live*. (Ezech. xviii. 31). I have died, says Jesus Christ, for the salvation of your souls, and why will you condemn them by your sins to eternal death? Return to Me, and you will recover the life of My grace.

O Jesus, I should not dare to crave Thy pardon, did I not know that Thou hast died to obtain my forgiveness. Alas! how often have I despised Thy grace and Thy love. O that I had died rather than have ever offered Thee so great an injury! But Thou, Who didst come near to me even when I offended Thee, wilt not now reject me, when I love Thee and seek no other but Thee.

My God and my All, suffer me not any more to be ungrateful to Thee. Mary, Queen and Mother, obtain for me the grace of holy perseverance.

## Spiritual Reading

THE POWER OF THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST  
(continued).

It was for this end, says St. Paul, that Jesus Christ died, that each of us should no longer live to the world nor to himself, but to Him alone Who has given Himself wholly to us: *And Christ died for all, that they also who live may not now live to themselves, but unto him who died for them.* (2 Cor. v. 15). He who lives to the world, seeks to please the world; he who lives to himself, seeks to please himself; but he who lives to Jesus Christ, seeks only to please Jesus Christ, and fears only to displease Him. His only joy is to see Him loved; his only sorrow, to see Him despised. This is to live to Jesus Christ; and this is what He claims from each one of us. I repeat, does He claim too much from us, after having given us His blood and His life?

Wherefore, then, O my God, do we employ our affections in loving creatures, relations, friends, the great ones of the world, who have never suffered for us scourges, or thorns, or nails, or shed one drop of blood for us; and not in loving a God Who for love of us came down from Heaven and was made Man, and shed all His blood for us in the midst of torments, and finally died of grief upon a Cross, in order to win to Himself our hearts: and, further, in order to unite Himself more closely with us, has left Himself, after His death, upon our altars, where He makes Himself one with us that we may understand how burning is the love wherewith He loves us? "He hath mingled Himself with us," exclaims St. John Chrysostom, "that we may be one and the same thing; for this is the desire of those who ardently love." And St. Francis de Sales, speaking of Holy Communion, adds: "There is no action in which we can think of our Saviour as more tender or more loving than this, in which He, as it were, annihilates Himself, and reduces Himself to food, in order to unite Himself to the hearts of His faithful."

But how comes it, O Lord, that I, after having been loved by Thee to such an excess, have had the heart to despise Thee,

according to Thy just reproach: *I have brought up children and exalted them, but they have despised me* (Is. i. 2)? I have dared to turn my back upon Thee, in order to gratify my senses: *Thou hast cast me behind thy back.* (Ezech. xxiii. 35). I have dared to drive Thee from my soul: *The wicked have said to God: Depart from us.* (Job xxi. 14). I have dared to afflict that Heart of Thine which has loved me so much. And what, then, am I now to do? Ought I to be distrustful of Thy mercy? I curse the days wherein I dishonoured Thee. Oh, would that I had died a thousand times, O my Saviour, than that I had ever offended Thee! O Lamb of God, Thou didst bleed to death upon the Cross to wash away our sins in Thy Blood. O sinners, what would you not pay on the Day of Judgment for one drop of the Blood of this Lamb? O my Jesus, have pity on me, and pardon me; but Thou knowest my weakness; take, then, my will, that it may never more rebel against Thee. Expel from me all love that is not for Thee. I choose Thee alone for my Treasure and my only Good. Thou art sufficient for me; and I desire no other good apart from Thee: The God of my heart, and God that is my portion for ever.

O little sheep, beloved of God (so used St. Teresa to call the Blessed Virgin), who art the Mother of the Divine Lamb, recommend me to thy Son. Thou, after Jesus, art my hope, for thou art the hope of sinners. To thy hands I intrust my eternal salvation. *Spes nostra, salve!* (Our hope, save us!)

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST.

The Apostle St. Paul said that he desired to know nothing but Jesus, and Jesus crucified; that is, the love that He has shown us on the Cross: *I judged not myself to know anything among you but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* (1 Cor. 2). And, in truth, from what books can we better learn the Science of the Saints -- that is, the Science of loving God than from Jesus crucified? That great servant of God, Brother Bernard of Corlione, the Capuchin, not being able to read, his brother Religious wanted to teach him, upon which he went to consult his Crucifix; but Jesus answered him from the Cross, "What is reading? What are books? Behold, I am the Book wherein thou mayest continually read the love I

have borne thee." O great subject to be considered during our whole life and during all eternity! A God dead for the love of us! a God dead for the love of us! O wonderful subject!

St. Thomas Aquinas was one day paying a visit to St. Bonaventure, and asked him from what book he had drawn all the beautiful lessons he had written. St. Bonaventure showed him the image of the Crucified, which was completely blackened by all the kisses he had given it, and said, " This is my book, whence I receive everything that I write; and it has taught me whatever little I know." In short, all the Saints have learned the art of loving God from the study of the Crucifix. Brother John of Alvernia, every time that he beheld Jesus wounded, could not restrain his tears. Brother James of Tuderto, when he heard the Passion of our Redeemer read, not only wept bitterly, but broke out into loud sobs, overcame with the love with which he was inflamed towards his beloved Lord.

## II.

It was this sweet study of the Crucifix which made St. Francis become a great seraph. He wept so continually in meditating on the sufferings of Jesus Christ, that he almost entirely lost his sight. On one occasion, being found crying out and weeping, he was asked what was the matter with him. "What ails me?" replied the Saint. "I weep over the sorrows and insults inflicted on my Lord; and my sorrow is increased when I think on those ungrateful men who do not love Him, but live without any thought of Him." Every time that he heard the bleating of a lamb, he felt himself touched with compassion at the thought of the death of Jesus, the Immaculate Lamb, drained of every drop of Blood upon the Cross for the sins of the world. And therefore this loving Saint could find no subject on which he exhorted his brethren with greater eagerness than the constant remembrance of the Passion of Jesus.

This, then, is the Book -- Jesus crucified -- which, if we constantly read it, will teach us on the one hand, to have a lively fear of sin, and, on the other hand, will inflame us with love for a God so full of love for us; while we read in these Wounds the great malice of sin, which reduced a God to suffer such a bitter death in order to satisfy the Divine justice, and the love which

our Saviour has shown us in choosing to suffer so much in order to prove to us how much He loved us.

Let us beseech the Divine Mother Mary to obtain for us from her Son the grace that we also may enter into these furnaces of love, in which so many loving hearts are consumed, in order that, our earthly affections being there burnt away, we also may burn with those blessed flames, which render souls holy on earth and blessed in Heaven. Amen.

## Thursday after Sexagesima

### Morning Meditation

PROVOKING GOD BY SIN TO DEPART FROM US.

Thus does the Royal Prophet speak of sinners: *They tempted and provoked the most high God..* (Ps. lxxvii. 65). God is not capable of grief; but were it possible for Him to grieve, every sin that men commit would deeply afflict Him. Our sins were the cause of Jesus sweating Blood, and suffering the agonies of death in the garden of Gethsemane, where He declared that His soul was *sorrowful unto death.* (Mark xiv. 34).

I.

Every soul that loves God is loved by Him in return, and God dwells within that soul, and leaves it not till He is expelled by sin. "He forsakes not unless He is forsaken," says the Council of Trent. When a soul deliberately consents to mortal sin it expels God, and, as it were, says to Him: Leave me, O Lord, for I desire to possess Thee no longer. *The wicked have said to God: Depart from us.* (Job xxi. 14).

O my God, I have then had the audacity, when I committed sin, to expel Thee from my soul and to desire to have Thee no longer with me! But Thou wouldst not have me to despair, but repent and love Thee. Yes, my Jesus, I do repent of having offended Thee, and I love Thee above all things.

The sinner must be sensible that God cannot dwell in a soul together with sin. When, therefore, sin enters the soul, God must depart from it. So that the sinner, by admitting sin, says to God: As Thou canst not remain any longer with me, unless I renounce sin, depart from me; it is better to lose Thee than the pleasure of committing sin. At the same time that the soul expels God it

gives possession to the devil. Thus does the sinner eject his God Who loves him, and makes himself the slave of a tyrant who hates him.

This, O Lord, is what I have hitherto done. Oh, give me some share of that abhorrence for my sins which Thou didst experience in the Garden of Gethsemane. Dearest Redeemer, would that I had never offended Thee!

## II.

When a child is being baptized, the priest commands the devil to depart from its soul: *Go forth, unclean spirit, and give place to the Holy Ghost*. On the contrary, when a man falls from the state of grace into mortal sin, he says to God, *Go forth from me, O Lord, and give place to the devil!*

Such is the foul ingratitude, O Lord, with which I have frequently repaid Thy great love towards me. Thou didst come down from Heaven to seek me, the lost sheep; and I have fled from Thee and expelled Thee from my soul. But no, I will now embrace Thy sacred feet and will nevermore leave Thee, my beloved Lord. Help me with Thy holy grace. And, O blessed Mary, most holy Queen, do not abandon me.

## Spiritual Reading

JESUS BY HIS EXAMPLE TEACHES US MORTIFICATION.

St. John says, *All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life*. (1 John ii. 16). Behold the three sinful loves which held dominion over man after the sin of Adam -- the love of pleasures, the love of riches, the love of honours, which generate human pride. The Divine Word, to teach us by His example, the mortification of the senses, by which the love of pleasures is subdued, from being happy became afflicted; to teach us detachment from the goods of this earth, from being rich He became poor; and, finally, to teach us humility, which overcomes the love of honours, from being exalted He became humble.

Jesus came, then, to teach us the love of mortification of the senses more by the example of His life than by the doctrines He preached; and, therefore, from being happy He came to lead a suffering life.

Our Redeemer could, indeed, have rescued us from the hands of our enemies without suffering. He could have come on earth and continued in His happiness, leading here below a pleasant life, receiving the honour justly due to Him as King and Lord of all. It was enough, to offer to God one drop of His Blood, one single tear, to redeem the world and an infinity of worlds: "the least degree of the suffering of Christ" (says the Angelic Doctor) "would have sufficed for Redemption, on account of the infinite dignity of His Person." But no: *Having joy set before him, he endured the cross.* (Heb. xii. 2). He renounced all honours and pleasures and made choice on earth of a life full of toils and ignominies. St. John Chrysostom says that any action whatever of the Incarnate Word sufficed for Redemption; but it did not suffice for the love which He bore to man. "What was sufficient for Redemption was not sufficient for love." And whereas he that loves desires to see himself loved in return, Jesus Christ, in order to be loved by man, was pleased to suffer exceedingly, and to choose for Himself a life of continual suffering, to put man under an obligation of loving Him. Our Lord revealed to St. Margaret of Cortona that in His whole life He never experienced the smallest degree of sensible consolation: *Great as the sea is thy destruction.* (Lament. ii. 13).

Yes; because Jesus was born on purpose to suffer, He assumed a body particularly adapted for suffering. On entering the womb of Mary, as the Apostle tells us, He said to His Eternal Father: *Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not; but a body thou hast fitted to me.* (Heb. x. 5). My Father, Thou hast rejected the sacrifices of men, because they were not able to satisfy Thy Divine justice for the offences committed against Thee: Thou hast given Me a body, as I requested of Thee; a body delicate, sensitive, and made purposely for suffering; I gladly accept of this body, and I offer it to Thee; because by enduring in this body all the pains which will accompany me through My life, and will finally cause My death upon the Cross, I shall propitiate Thee towards the human race, and thus to gain for Myself the love of mankind.

And behold Him scarcely entered into the world, when He already begins His sacrifice by beginning to suffer; but in a manner far different from that in which men suffer. Other children,



while remaining in the womb of their mothers, do not suffer, because they are only in their natural place; and if they do suffer in some slight degree, at least they are unconscious of what they feel, since they are deprived of understanding; but Jesus, while an Infant, endures for nine months the darkness of that prison, endures the pain of not being able to move, and is perfectly alive to what He endures. St. Bernard says that though yet unborn Jesus was a Man, not in age, but in wisdom.

When Jesus comes forth from the prison of His Mother's womb, was it, perhaps, to lead a pleasant life? He came forth to fresh sufferings, for He chose to be born in the depth of winter, in a cavern where beasts find stabling, and at the midnight hour. He was born in such poverty that He has no fire to warm Him, no clothes to screen Him from the cold. "A grand pulpit is that manger!" exclaims St. Thomas of Villanova. Oh, how well does Jesus teach us the love of suffering in the cave of Bethlehem!

The life of Jesus was one of continual affliction and sorrow -- in Egypt, in Nazareth -- until at last He died at the hands of His executioners on the Cross in a sea of sorrows and infamy. As Bellarmine says, Jesus had His Cross always before His eyes. When He slept His Heart watched; nor was it ever free from the vision of the Cross.

Learn, then, from Christ, how to love Christ, says St. Bernard. Be happy to suffer something for that God Who suffered so much for you. The desire of pleasing Jesus Christ, and of making known to Him the love they bore Him, made the Saints hungry and thirsty, not for honours and pleasures, but for sufferings and contempt. *God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Gal. vi. 14).

## **Evening Meditation**

### **REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST.**

#### **I.**

We read in history of a proof of love so prodigious, that it will be the admiration of all ages. There was once a king, lord of many kingdoms, who had one only son, so beautiful, so holy, so amiable, that he was the delight of his father, who loved him as he loved himself. This young prince had a great affection for

one of his slaves; so much so, that the slave having committed a crime, for which he had been condemned to death, the prince offered himself to die for the slave; the father, being jealous of justice, was satisfied to condemn his beloved son to death, in order that the slave might remain free from the punishment he deserved: and thus the son died a malefactor's death, and the slave was freed from punishment.

This fact, the like of which has never happened in this world and never will happen, is related in the Gospels, where we read that the Son of God, the Lord of the universe, seeing that man was condemned to eternal death in punishment of his sins, chose to take upon Himself human flesh, and thus to pay by His death the penalty due to man: *He was offered because it was his own will.* (Is. liii. 7). And His Eternal Father caused Him to die upon the Cross to save us miserable sinners: *He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us us.* (Rom. viii. 32). What dost thou think, O devout soul, of this love of the Son and of the Father?

Thou didst, then, O my beloved Redeemer, choose by Thy death to sacrifice Thyself in order to obtain the pardon of my sins. And what return of gratitude shall I, then, make to Thee? Thou hast done too much to oblige me to love Thee; I should, indeed, be most ungrateful to Thee if I did not love Thee with my whole heart. Thou hast given for me Thy Divine life; I, miserable sinner that I am, give Thee my own life. Yes, I will at least spend that period of life which remains to me only in loving Thee, obeying Thee, and pleasing Thee.

## II.

O men, men, let us love this our Redeemer, Who, being God, has not disdained to take upon Himself our sins, in order to satisfy by His sufferings for the chastisement which we have deserved: *Surely he hath borne our infirmities, and carried our sorrows.* (Is. liii. 4). St. Augustine says, that our Lord in creating us formed us by virtue of His power, but in redeeming us He hath saved us from death by means of His sufferings "He created us in His strength; He sought us back in His weakness." How much do I not owe Thee, O Jesus my Saviour! Oh, if I were to give my blood a thousand times over, if I were to spend a thousand lives for Thee, -- it would yet be nothing. Oh, how could any one that

meditated much on the love which Thou hast shown him in Thy Passion, love anything else but Thee? Through the love with which Thou didst love us on the Cross, grant me the grace to love Thee with my whole heart. I love Thee, Infinite Goodness; I love Thee above every other good; and I ask nothing more of Thee but Thy holy love.

"But how is this?" continues St. Augustine. How is it possible, O Saviour of the world, that Thy love has arrived at such a height, that when I had committed the crime, Thou shouldst have to pay the penalty? "Whither has Thy love reached? I have sinned; Thou art punished." And what could it then signify to Thee, adds St. Bernard, that we should lose ourselves and be chastised, as we well deserved to be; that Thou shouldst choose to satisfy with Thy innocent flesh for our sins, and to die in order to deliver us from death? "O good Jesus, what doest Thou? We ought to have died, and it is Thou who diest, We have sinned, and Thou sufferest. A deed without precedent, grace without merit, charity without measure!" O deed, which never has had and never will have its match! O grace that we could never merit! O love which can never be understood!

## Friday after Sexagesima

### Morning Meditations

#### THE SINNER DESPISES GOD.

Contemplating the greatness and majesty of God, David cried out: Lord, who is like to thee! But God, seeing sinners compare and prefer a miserable gratification to His friendship, exclaims: To whom have ye likened me or made me equal! The sinner declares that his passion, his vanity, his pleasure, is of greater value than God's friendship. *They violated me among my people, for a handful of barley and a piece of bread.* (Ezech. xiii. 19).

#### I.

The sinner despises God. *By the transgression of the law thou dishonourest God.* (Rom. ii. 23). Yes; because the sinner renounces God's grace, and for the sake of a miserable pleasure he tramples upon His friendship. If a man were to lose the friendship of God to gain a kingdom, or even the whole world, still he would do a great wrong, because the friendship of God is of greater

value than the world -- and a thousand worlds. But for what do we offend God? *Wherefore hath the wicked provoked God?* (Ps. ix. 13). For a little earth, for a fit of anger, for a filthy pleasure, for a mere vapour, for a caprice: *They violated me for a handful of barley and a piece of bread.* (Ezech. xiii. 19). When the sinner deliberates whether he shall consent or not to sin, he then, as it were, takes the balance in his hands, and examines which weighs most--the grace of God, or that fit of rage, that vapour, that pleasure; and when he afterwards consents, he declares, as far as he is concerned, that his passion and his pleasure are of greater value than the friendship of God. Behold God dishonoured by the sinner! David, reflecting upon the greatness and majesty of God, said: *Lord, who is like to thee?* (Ps. xxxiv. 10). But God, on the other hand, when He sees a miserable gratification compared by sinners and preferred to Himself, says to them: *To whom have you likened me, or made me equal?* (Is. xl. 25). Therefore, says the Lord, that vile pleasure was of greater value than My grace: *Thou hast cast me off behind thy back.* (Ezech. xxiii. 35). You would not have committed that sin if you were, in consequence, to lose a hand, or ten ducats, or perhaps even much less. God, then, says Salvian, is so contemptible in thy eyes, that He deserves to be despised for a momentary passion or a miserable gratification: "God alone was esteemed vile by thee in comparison of all things else."

Thou, then, O my God, art an infinite Good; and I have often exchanged Thee for a miserable pleasure, which was hardly obtained ere it vanished. But although despised by me, Thou dost now offer me pardon if I desire it; and dost promise to restore me to Thy grace if I repent of having offended Thee. Yes, O my Lord, I repent with all my heart of having thus insulted Thee; I detest my sin above every evil.

## II.

Moreover, when the sinner for the sake of some pleasure offends God, that pleasure then becomes his god, inasmuch as he makes it his last end. St. Jerome says: "That which each one desires, if he worship it, it is to him a god. A vice in the heart is an idol on the altar." Therefore St. Thomas says: "If thou lovest delights, delights are thy god." And St. Cyprian: "Whatever man

prefers to God, he makes his god." When Jeroboam rebelled against God, he endeavoured to draw the people with him into idolatry, and therefore he presented his idols to them, saying: *Behold thy gods, O Israel.* (3 Kings xii. 28). Thus does the devil present to the sinner some gratification, saying: What hast thou to do with God? Behold thy god in this pleasure, this passion; take this, and leave God. And the sinner, when he consents, adores in his heart that pleasure as his god: "A vice in the heart is an idol on the altar."

If the sinner dishonours God, he will not, at least, do so in His presence? Ah, he insults Him to His Face, because God is present everywhere: *I fill heaven and earth.* (Jer. xxiii. 24). And this the sinner knows, and yet shrinks not from provoking God even before His eyes: *They continually provoke me to anger before my face.* (Is. lxv. 3).

Behold, I now return, as I hope, to Thee, O my God; and Thou dost already receive and embrace me as Thy child. I thank Thee, O Infinite Goodness. But help me now, and do not permit that I ever again banish Thee from me. Hell will not cease to tempt me; but Thou art more powerful than hell. I know that I shall never more separate myself from Thee if I always recommend myself to Thee; this, then, is the grace that Thou must grant me, that I may always recommend myself to Thee, and always pray to Thee, as I now do, saying: O Lord, assist me; give me light, give me strength, give me perseverance, give me paradise; but above all, grant me Thy love, which is the true paradise of souls. I love Thee, O Infinite Goodness, and desire always to love Thee. Hear me, for the love of Jesus Christ. Mary, thou art the refuge of sinners; succour a sinner who desires to love thy God.

### **Spiritual Reading**

EXTERIOR MORTIFICATION: ITS NECESSITY AND ADVANTAGES.

There is no alternative: we poor children of Adam must till death live in continual warfare; *For*, says the Apostle, *the flesh lusteth against the spirit.* (Gal. v. 17). The flesh desires what the spirit dislikes; and the spirit pants for what the flesh abhors. Now, since it is peculiar to irrational creatures to place all their happiness

in sensual enjoyment, and to the Angels to seek only the accomplishment of God's will, surely if we attend to the observance of the Divine commands, we shall, as a learned author justly says, be transformed into Angels; but if we fix our affections on the gratifications of sense, we shall sink to the level of the brute creation.

If the soul do not subdue the body, the flesh will conquer the spirit. To maintain his seat on a furious steed, and to escape danger, the horseman must hold a tight rein; and to avoid the corruption of the flesh, we must keep the body in perpetual restraint. We must treat it as the physician treats a patient, to whom he prescribes nauseous medicine, and to whom he refuses palatable food. Cruel indeed must be the physician who gives to a sick man noxious draughts because they are pleasing to the taste, and who does not administer useful remedies because they are bitter and disgusting. And great is the cruelty of the sensual, when, to escape some trifling corporal pain in this life, they expose their souls and bodies to eternal torments in the next. "Such charity," says St. Bernard, "is destructive of charity: such mercy is full of cruelty; because it so serves the body as to destroy the soul." The false love of the flesh destroys the true charity which we owe to ourselves: inordinate compassion towards the body is full of cruelty, because by indulging the flesh it kills the soul. Speaking of sensualists who deride the mortifications of the Saints, the same Father says: "If we are cruel in crucifying the flesh, you, by sparing it, are more cruel." Yes, for by the pleasures of the body in this life you will merit for soul and body inexpressible torments forever in the next. Father Rodriguez tells us of a solitary who had emaciated his body by very rigorous austerities. Being asked why he treated his body so badly, he replied: "I only chastise what chastises me." I torment the enemy who persecutes my soul, and who seeks my destruction. The Abbot Moses being once censured for severity towards his body, replied: "Let the passions cease, and I will also cease to mortify my flesh." When the flesh ceases to molest me, I shall cease to crucify its appetites.

If, then, we wish to be saved, and to please God, we must take pleasure in what the flesh refuses, and must reject what the flesh demands. Our Lord once said to St. Francis of Assisi: "If

you desire my love, accept the things that are bitter as if they were sweet, and the things that are sweet as if they were bitter."

Some will say that perfection does not consist in the mortification of the body, but in the abnegation of the will. To them I answer with Father Pinamonti, that the fruit of the vineyard does not consist in the surrounding hedge; but still if the hedge be taken away, you will seek in vain for the produce of the vine. *Where there is no hedge*, says the Holy Ghost, *the possession shall be spoiled*. (Ecclus. xxxvi. 27). So ardent was the desire of St. Aloysius to crucify his flesh, that, although weak in health, he sought nothing but mortifications and penitential rigours; and, to a person who once said that sanctity does not consist in corporal works of penance, but in the denial of self-will, he wisely answered in the words of the Redeemer: *These things you ought to have done, and not to leave those undone*. (Matt. xxiii. 23). He meant to say that, to keep the flesh in subjection to reason, the mortification of the body is necessary, as well as the denial of the will. I chastise my body, says St. Paul, and bring it into subjection. (1 Cor. ix. 27). The flesh, when indulged, will be brought with difficulty to obey the Divine law. Hence St. John of the Cross, speaking of certain spiritual directors who despise and discourage external penance, says that "he who inculcates loose doctrines regarding the mortification of the flesh, should not be believed though he confirmed his preaching by miracles."

## Evening Meditation

REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST.

### I.

Isaias had already foretold that our blessed Redeemer would be condemned to death, and as an innocent lamb brought to sacrifice: *He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter*. (Is. liii. 7). What a cause of wonder it must have been to the Angels, O my God, to behold their innocent Lord led as a victim to be sacrificed on the Altar of the Cross for the love of man! And what a cause of horror to Heaven and to hell, the sight of a God extended as an infamous criminal on a shameful gibbet for the sins of His creatures!

*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a*

*curse for us, (for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree) that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.* (Gal. iii. 13). "He was made a curse upon the Cross," says St. Ambrose, "that thou mightest be blessed in the kingdom of God." O my dearest Saviour, Thou wert, then, content, in order to obtain for me the blessing of God, to embrace the dishonour of appearing upon the Cross accursed in the sight of the whole world, and even forsaken in Thy sufferings by Thy Eternal Father, -- a suffering which made Thee cry out with a loud voice, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Yes, observes Simon of Cassia, it was for this end that Jesus was abandoned in His Passion, in order that we might not remain abandoned in the sins which we have committed: "Therefore Christ was abandoned in His sufferings that we might not be abandoned in our guilt." O prodigy of compassion! O excess of love of God towards men! And how can there be a soul who believes this, O my Jesus, and yet loves Thee not?

*He hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood.* (Apoc. i. 5). Behold, O men, how far the love of Jesus for us has carried Him, in order to cleanse us from the filthiness of our sins. He has even shed every drop of His Blood that He might prepare for us in this His own Blood a bath of salvation: "He offers His own Blood," says a learned writer, "speaking better than the blood of Abel: for that cried for justice; the Blood of Christ, for mercy." Whereupon St. Bonaventure exclaims, "O good Jesus, what hast Thou done? O my Saviour, what indeed hast Thou done? How far hath Thy love carried Thee? What hast Thou seen in me which has made Thee love me so much? "Wherefore hast Thou loved me so much? Why, Lord, why? What am I?" Wherefore didst Thou choose to suffer so much for me? Who am I that Thou wouldst win to Thyself my love at so dear a price? Oh, it was entirely the work of infinite love! Be Thou eternally praised and blessed for it.

## II.

*O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow.* (Lament. i. 12). The same Seraphic Doctor, St. Bonaventure, considering these words of Jeremias as spoken of Our Blessed Redeemer while He was hanging on the Cross



dying for the love of us, says: "Yes, Lord, I will attend and see if there be any love like unto Thy love." By which he means, I do indeed see and understand, O my most loving Redeemer, how much Thou didst suffer upon that infamous tree; but what most constrains me to love Thee is the thought of the affection which Thou hast shown me in suffering so much, in order that I may love Thee.

That which most inflamed St. Paul with the love of Jesus was the thought that He chose to die, not only for all men, but for him in particular: *He loved me and delivered himself up for me.* (Gal. ii. 20). Yes, He loved me, said he, and for my sake He gave Himself up to die. And thus ought every one of us to say; for St. John Chrysostom asserts that God has loved every individual man with the same love with which He has loved the world: "He loves each man separately with the same measure of charity with which He loves the whole world." So that each one of us is under as great obligation to Jesus Christ for having suffered for every one, as if He had suffered for him alone. For supposing Jesus Christ had died on the Cross to save you alone, leaving all others to their original ruin, what a debt of gratitude you would owe to Him! But you ought to feel that you owe Him a still greater obligation for having died for the salvation of all. For if He had died for you alone, what sorrow would it not have caused you to think that your neighbours, parents, brothers, and friends would be damned, and that you would, when this life was over, be for ever separated from them? If you and your family had been slaves, and some one came to rescue you alone, how would you not entreat of him to save your parents and brothers together with yourself! And how much would you thank him if he did this to please you! Say, therefore, to Jesus: O my sweetest Redeemer, Thou hast done this for me without my having asked Thee; Thou hast not only saved me from death at the price of Thy Blood, but also my parents and friends, so that I may have a good hope that we may all together enjoy Thy Presence for ever in Paradise. O Lord, I thank Thee, and I love Thee, and I hope to thank Thee for it, and to love Thee for ever in that blessed country.

## Saturday after Sexagesima

### Morning Meditations

#### MARY, THE QUEEN OF MARTYRS.

As Jesus is called the King of Sorrows and the King of Martyrs, because He suffered more than all the Martyrs, so also is Mary with good reason called the Queen of Martyrs, having merited this title by suffering a Martyrdom the most cruel, after that of her Divine Son. Of her can the words of Isaias with all truth be said: *He will crown thee with a crown of tribulation* (Is. xxii. 18) -- that is to say, Mary's sufferings, which exceeded the sufferings of all the other Martyrs united, were the crown by which she was shown to be the Queen of Martyrs.

#### I.

Who can have a heart so hard that it will not melt on hearing the most lamentable event that has ever occurred in the world? There was a noble and holy woman who had an only son. This son was the most amiable that can be imagined -- innocent, virtuous, beautiful, who loved his mother most tenderly; so much so that he had never caused her the least displeasure but had ever shown her all respect, obedience, and affection; hence this mother had placed all her affections on earth in this son. Hear, then, what happened. This son, through envy, was falsely accused by his enemies; and though the judge knew, and himself confessed, that he was innocent, yet, that he might not offend his enemies, he condemned him to the ignominious death that they demanded. This poor mother had to suffer the grief of seeing that amiable and beloved son unjustly snatched from her in the flower of his age by a barbarous death; for, by dint of torments and drained of all his blood, he was made to die on an infamous gibbet in a public place of execution, and this before her own eyes. Devout souls, what say you? Is not this event, and is not this unhappy mother, worthy of compassion?

You already understand of whom I speak. This son, so cruelly executed, was our loving Redeemer, Jesus; and this mother was the Blessed Virgin Mary, who, for the love she bore us, was willing to see Him sacrificed to Divine justice by the barbarity of men. This great torment, then, which Mary endured for us

-- a torment that was more than a thousand deaths -- deserves both our compassion and our gratitude. If we can make no other return for so much love, at least let us give a few moments to consider the greatness of the sufferings by which Mary became the Queen of Martyrs.

O my afflicted Mother, Queen of Martyrs and of Sorrows, thou didst so bitterly weep over thy Son, Who died for my salvation, but what will thy tears avail me if I am lost? By the merits, then, of thy sorrows, obtain for me true contrition for my sins, and a real amendment of life, together with constant and tender compassion for the sufferings of Jesus and thy Dolours.

## II.

As Jesus is called the King of Sorrows and the King of Martyrs, because He suffered during His life more than all other Martyrs, so also is Mary with reason called the Queen of Martyrs, having merited this title by suffering the most cruel Martyrdom possible after that of her Son. Hence with reason was she called by Richard of St. Laurence, "the Martyr of Martyrs"; and of her can the words of Isaias with all truth be said, *He will crown thee with a crown of tribulation* (Is. xxii. 18); that is to say, that Mary's sufferings, which exceeded the sufferings of all the other Martyrs united, were the crown by which she was shown to be the Queen of Martyrs.

That Mary was a true Martyr cannot be doubted, as Denis the Carthusian, Pelbart, Catharinus, and others prove; for it is an undoubted opinion that suffering sufficient to cause death is Martyrdom, even though death does not ensue from it. St. John the Evangelist is revered as a Martyr, though he did not die in the cauldron of boiling oil, but "came out more vigorous than he went in." St. Thomas says, "that to have the glory of Martyrdom, it is sufficient to exercise obedience in its highest degree, that is to say, to be obedient unto death." "Mary was a Martyr," says St. Bernard, "not by the sword of the executioner, but by bitter sorrow of heart." If her body was not wounded by the hand of the executioner, her blessed heart was transfixed by a sword of grief at the Passion of her Son, grief which was sufficient to cause her death not once, but a thousand times. From this we shall see that Mary was not only a real Martyr, but that her Martyrdom

surpassed all others; for it was longer than that of all others, and her whole life may be said to have been a prolonged death.

And if Jesus and thou, O Mary, being so innocent, have suffered so much for love of me, obtain that at least I, who am deserving of hell, may suffer something for your love. "O Lady," will I say with St. Bonaventure, "if I have offended thee, in justice wound my heart; if I have served thee, I now ask wounds for my reward. It is shameful to me to see my Lord Jesus wounded, and thee wounded with Him, and myself without a wound." In fine, O my Mother, by the grief that thou didst experience in seeing thy Son bow down His head and expire on the Cross in the midst of so many torments, I beseech thee to obtain me a good death. Ah, cease not, O advocate of sinners, to assist my afflicted soul in the midst of the combat in which it will have to engage on its great passage from time to eternity. And as it is probable that I may then have lost my speech and strength to invoke thy name and that of Jesus, who are all my hope, I do so now; I invoke thy Son and thee to succour me in that last moment; and I say, Jesus and Mary, to you I recommend my soul. Amen.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### **MORTIFICATION: ITS NECESSITY AND ADVANTAGES.**

The world and the devil are very powerful enemies of our eternal salvation; but our own body, because it is a domestic enemy, is a still more dangerous antagonist. "A domestic enemy," says St. Bernard, "is the worst of foes." A town that is besieged has more to apprehend from the enemies that are within than from those that are without the walls, because it is far more difficult to ward off the attacks of the former than those of the latter. St. Joseph Calasanz used to say that "we should pay no more attention to the body than to the vilest rag." Such, indeed, has been the practice of the Saints. As the indulgence of the body by sensual pleasures is the sole and constant study of worldlings, so the continual mortification of the flesh is to the Saints the only object of their care and of their desires. St. Peter of Alcantara was accustomed to say to his body: O my body, keep your peace; I shall give you no rest here below; pains and torments shall be your portion in this life; when we shall be in Paradise, you

will then enjoy that repose which shall never end. Similar was the practice of St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, who, on the bed of death, stated that she did not remember to have ever taken pleasure in any other object than God alone. If we read the Lives of the Saints and see the works of penance they performed, we shall be ashamed of the delicacy and of the reserve with which we chastise the flesh. In the Lives of the Ancient Fathers we read of a large Community of nuns who never tasted fruit or wine. Some of them took food only once every day; others never ate a meal, except after two or three days of rigorous abstinence: all were clothed and even slept in haircloth. Such austerities are not required of you. But is it too much for you to take the discipline several times in the week? -- to wear a chain round some part of the body till the hour of dinner? -- not to approach the fire in winter on some day in each week, and during novenas of devotion? -- to abstain from fruit and sweetmeats? -- and, in honour of the Mother of God, to fast every Saturday on bread and water, or at least to be content with one dish?

But you will say: I am weak, and my director forbids me to practise any corporal austerity. Obey your confessor, but take care to embrace with peace all the troubles of your infirmities, and all the inconveniences arising from the heat or cold of the seasons. If you cannot chastise your body by positive rigours, abstain at least from some lawful pleasures. St. Francis Borgia, when amusing himself in hawk-hunting, used to cast down his eyes when he saw the hawk about to spring upon its prey. St. Aloysius always turned away his eyes from the objects of curiosity exhibited at the festivities at which he was present. Why cannot you practise similar mortifications? If denied lawful pleasures, the body will not dare to seek forbidden indulgence; but if continually gratified by every innocent enjoyment, it will soon draw the soul into sinful gratifications. Besides, that great servant of God, Father Vincent Carafa, of the Society of Jesus, used to say that the Almighty has given us the goods of the earth, not only that we may enjoy them, but also that we may have the means of pleasing Him by offering Him His own gifts, and by voluntarily renouncing them in order to show our love for Him. It is true, indeed, that certain innocent pleasures assist our weakness,

and prepare us for spiritual exercises; but it is likewise true that earthly pleasures poison the soul, by attaching her to creatures. Hence, like poison, they must be used sparingly. Poisons, when properly prepared and taken with moderation are sometimes conducive to health; and earthly delights, because they are poisonous remedies, must be taken with great caution and reserve, without attachment to them, only through necessity, and to be better able to serve God.

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST.

#### I.

Who could ever, says St. Laurence Justinian, explain the love which the Divine Word bears to each one of us, since it surpasses the love of every son towards his mother, and of every mother for her son. "The intense charity of the Word of God surpasses all maternal and filial love; neither can human words express how great His love is to each one of us!" So much so, that Our Lord revealed to St. Gertrude, that He would be ready to die as many times as there were souls damned, if they were yet capable of redemption: "I would die as many deaths as there are souls in hell." O Jesus, O Treasure more worthy of love than all others, why is it that men love Thee so little? Oh, do Thou make known what Thou hast suffered for each of them, the love that Thou bearest them, the desire Thou hast to be loved by them, and how worthy Thou art of being loved. Make Thyself known, O my Jesus, make Thyself loved.

*I am the good shepherd*, said our Redeemer; *the good shepherd gives his life for his sheep*. (John x. 11). But, O my Lord, where are there in the world shepherds like unto Thee? Other shepherds will slay their sheep in order to preserve their own life. Thou, O too loving Shepherd, didst give Thy Divine life in order to save the life of Thy beloved sheep. And of these sheep, I, O most amiable Shepherd, have the happiness to be one. What obligation, then, am I not under to love Thee, and to spend my life for Thee, since Thou hast died for the love of me in particular! And what confidence ought I not to have in Thy Blood, knowing that it has been shed to pay the debt of my sins! *And thou, shalt*

*say in that day, I will give thanks to thee, O Lord ... Behold, God is my Saviour. I will deal confidently, and will not fear.* (Is. xii. 1, 2). And how can I any longer mistrust Thy mercy, O my Lord, when I behold Thy Wounds? Come, then, O sinners, and let us have recourse to Jesus, Who hangs upon the Cross as it were on a throne of mercy. He has appeased the Divine justice, which we had insulted. If we have offended God, He has done penance for us; all that is required for us is contrition for our sins.

O my dearest Saviour, to what have Thy pity and love for me reduced Thee? The slave sins, and Thou, Lord, payest the penalty for him. If, therefore, I think of my sins, the thought of the punishment I deserve must make me tremble; but when I think of Thy death, I find I have more reason to hope than to fear. O Blood of Jesus, Thou art all my hope.

## II.

But this Blood, as it inspires us with confidence, also obliges us to give ourselves entirely to our Blessed Redeemer. The Apostle exclaims: *Know you not, that you are not your own? For you are bought with a great price.* (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20). Therefore, O my Jesus, I cannot any longer, without injustice, dispose of myself, or of my own concerns, since Thou hast made me Thine by purchasing me through Thy death. My body, my soul, my life are no longer mine; they are Thine, and entirely Thine. In Thee alone, therefore, will I hope. O my God, crucified and dead for me, I have nothing else to offer Thee but this soul, which Thou hast bought with Thy Blood; to Thee do I offer it. Accept of my love, for I desire nothing but Thee, my Saviour, my God, my Love, my All. Hitherto I have shown much gratitude towards men; to Thee alone have I, alas, been ungrateful. But now I love Thee, and I have no greater cause of sorrow than my having offended Thee. O my Jesus, give me confidence in Thy Passion; root out of my heart every affection that belongs not to Thee. I will love Thee alone Who dost deserve all my love, and Who hast given me so much reason to love Thee.

And who, indeed, could refuse to love Thee, when they see Thee, Who art the Beloved of the Eternal Father, dying such a bitter and cruel death for our sakes? O Mary, O Mother of fair love, I pray thee, through the merits of thy burning heart, obtain

for me the grace to live only in order to love thy Son, Who, being in Himself worthy of an infinite love, has chosen at so great a cost to acquire to Himself the love of a miserable sinner like me. O Love of souls, O my Jesus, I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee; but still I love Thee too little. Oh, give me more love, give me flames that may make me live always burning with Thy love. I do not myself deserve it; but Thou dost well deserve it, O Infinite Goodness. Amen. This I hope, so may it be.

## Quinquagesima Sunday

### Morning Meditation

#### *THE LOVE OF JESUS IN LEAVING HIMSELF FOR OUR FOOD BEFORE HIS DEATH*

The Angelic Doctor calls the Most Blessed Sacrament "a Sacrament of love, a token of the greatest love that a God could give us." "The love of loves," says St. Bernard. O Divine Food, O Sacrament of love, when wilt Thou draw me entirely to Thyself?

I.

*Jesus, knowing that his hour was come that he should pass out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end.* (John xiii. 1). Our most loving Redeemer, on the last night of His life, knowing that the much longed-for time had arrived in which He should die for the love of man, had not the heart to leave us alone in this valley of tears; but in order that He might not be separated from us even by death, He would leave us His whole Self as Food in the Sacrament of the Altar; giving us to understand by this, that, having given us this gift of infinite worth, He could give us nothing further to prove to us His love: *He loved them unto the end.* Cornelius a Lapide, with St. John Chrysostom and Theophylact, interprets the words *unto the end* according to the Greek text, and write thus: *He loved them with an excessive and supreme love.* Jesus in this Sacrament made His last effort of love towards men, as the Abbot Gueric says: "He poured out the whole power of His love upon His friends."

This was still better expressed by the Holy Council of Trent, which, in speaking of the Sacrament of the Altar, said that in it our Blessed Saviour "poured out of Himself, as it were, all the



riches of His love towards us." The Angelical St. Thomas was therefore right in calling this Sacrament "a Sacrament of love, and a token of the greatest love that a God could give us." And St. Bernard called it "The Love of loves." And St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi said that a soul, after having communicated, might say, *It is consummated*; that is to say: My God, having given Himself to me in this Holy Communion, has nothing more to give me. This Saint, one day, asked one of her novices what she had been thinking of after Communion; she answered: "*Of the love of Jesus*." "Yes," replied the Saint, "when we think of this love, we cannot pass on to other thoughts, but must stop upon love."

O Saviour of the world, what dost Thou expect from men, that Thou hast been induced even to give them Thyself as Food? And what can there be left for Thee to give us after this Sacrament, in order to oblige us to love Thee? Ah, my most loving God, enlighten me that I may know what an excess of goodness this has been of Thine, to reduce Thyself unto becoming my Food in Holy Communion! If Thou hast, therefore, given Thyself entirely to me, it is just that I also should give myself wholly to Thee. Yes, my Jesus, I give myself entirely to Thee. I love Thee above every good, and I desire to receive Thee in order to love Thee more. Come, therefore, and come often, into my soul, and make it entirely Thine. Oh, that I could truly say to Thee, as the loving St. Philip Neri said to Thee when he received Thee in the Viaticum: "Behold, my Love! Behold my Love! Give me my Love!"

## II.

*He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him.* (John vi. 57). St. Denis, the Areopagite, says that love always tends towards union with the object beloved. And because food becomes one thing with him who eats it, therefore Our Lord would reduce Himself to Food, in order that receiving Him in Holy Communion, we might become of one substance with Him: Take ye and eat, said Jesus, this is my body. As if He had said, remarks St. John Chrysostom: "Eat Me, that the highest union may take place." O man, feed thyself on Me, in order that thou and I may become one substance. In the same way, says St. Cyril of Alexandria, as two pieces of melted wax unite together,

so a soul that communicates is so thoroughly united to Jesus, that Jesus remains in her and she in Jesus. O my beloved Redeemer, exclaims Saint Laurence Justinian, how couldst Thou ever come to love us so much that Thou wouldst unite Thyself to us in such a way that Thy Heart and ours should become but one heart?" Oh, how admirable is Thy love, O Lord Jesus, Who wouldst incorporate us in such a manner with Thy Body, that we should have but one heart with Thee."

## **Spiritual Reading**

### *VISITING JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT*

Frequent visits to Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar are a great help to souls that love Him. The Holy Church has instituted and celebrates the Feast of the Adorable Sacrament with so many solemnities in honour of Jesus, not only in Holy Communion, but also in the loving Presence of Jesus Christ night and day in our churches, in this Sacrament of love. Our Loving Lord, says Nieremberg, has left Himself on earth under the species of bread, principally in order to be the Food of our souls; but He has left Himself also in order to remain with us shut up in our Tabernacles, and thus remind us of the love which He bears us. "No tongue," says St. Peter of Alcantara, "can express the greatness of the love that Jesus bears to all that are in the state of grace."

Hence, that His absence from them might not be an occasion of forgetting Him, this most sweet Spouse of souls, before His departure from this world, left, as a memorial of His love, this most holy Sacrament, in which He Himself remained. He did not wish that between Him and His servants there should be any other pledge than Himself to keep alive the remembrance of Him.

Hence, when our dear Saviour left this world, He did not wish to leave us alone, and hence it was that He devised a means of remaining with us in the Holy Eucharist to the end of time, so that even here below we might enjoy His sweet company. This He declared to His disciples, and through them to us all: *Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.* (Matt. xxviii. 20). St. Peter of Alcantara adds: "The Saviour did not wish to leave His spouse alone at such a distance, and therefore

He has left her this Sacrament, in which He Himself remains, as the best companion He could leave her."

St. Teresa says that all are not permitted to speak to their king; the most that a vassal can expect is, to speak to his sovereign through a third person. She then adds: But to speak to Thee, O King of Glory, the intervention of a third person is not necessary; Thou art always ready to give audience to all in the Sacrament of the Altar. Every one that wishes may find Thee there always, and may speak to Thee with confidence. Oh, how difficult is it to obtain an audience from an earthly monarch! Kings seldom give audience to their subjects. But Thou, O my Redeemer, in this Sacrament, dost give audience to all, whenever they wish. Our Divine King, says the same Saint, in order to animate us to approach His feet with greater confidence, has clothed Himself with the species of bread in this Sacrament, and thus has veiled His majesty that we may not be terrified at the sight of it.

But, O God, how many insults must Jesus Christ suffer from infidels, from heretics, and from sinners in this Sacrament in order to remain with us. Some have trampled on the Sacred Host, others have thrown It into the mire. He foresaw all these injuries; but still He resolved to remain with us on the altar, that we might not be deprived of His amiable Presence.

Many pilgrims make long journeys to visit the Holy House of Loretto, where Jesus Christ once dwelt, or to venerate the places in the Holy Land in which He was born, in which He suffered and died. But Blessed John of Avila had just reason to say, that he knew no sanctuary more amiable, or more apt to inspire devotion, than a church in which the Holy Sacrament is reserved, for there Jesus Christ has not only once dwelt but truly lives and dwells always. Hence, the Saints have experienced no greater delight on earth than that which they enjoyed in the presence of the most Holy Sacrament. St. Francis Xavier, as is related in his *Life*, after having laboured all day for the sanctification of souls, spent the night at the foot of the Tabernacle; when overcome by sleep, he threw himself on the steps of the Altar, and, after a short repose, he began again to converse with his dear Lord. St. John Francis Regis used to do the same; for after

having spent the entire day in preaching and hearing confessions, his repose consisted in remaining during the night before Jesus in the Holy Sacrament, and when he found the church shut he remained outside the door to pay homage, at least at a distance, to his beloved Redeemer. The Venerable Father Balthasar Alvarez, a holy man, when unable to remain in the church, endeavoured at least to keep his eyes turned to the Tabernacle, in which he knew the Blessed Sacrament was reserved. In a word, all the Saints have found their paradise on earth in this Sacrament. St. Teresa said one day from Heaven to one of her Religious: "We who rejoice in Heaven, and you who suffer on earth, should be the same in purity and love. And what we do in Heaven before the Divine Essence you should do on earth before the Most Holy Sacrament." And what greater paradise can he that loves Jesus Christ find on this earth than to remain at His feet, to manifest the love that he bears to Him, to offer to Jesus himself and all that belongs to him, to make known his desire to see Him face to face, in order to love Him with greater ardour!

But this paradise Religious can enjoy in a special manner. It is true that Jesus remains in the Blessed Sacrament for all; but He remains particularly for His spouses who enjoy His society day and night under their very own roof. When Jesus was born, the holy Magi left their country and their homes, and spent a long time travelling through Palestine, inquiring for the birth-place of the Redeemer: *Saying, where is he that is born king of the Jews?* (Matt. ii. 2). To visit Jesus Christ, people living in the world must leave their houses and go to the church, which is closed at night, and in many places is open only in the morning. But those living in convents and monasteries need not leave their own dwelling in order to enjoy the society of Jesus Christ; He remains continually in the house in which they dwell. They can visit Jesus, then, whenever they please, in the morning or evening, by day or by night. As spouses of Jesus they are permitted to dwell in the palace. How highly honoured does the vassal esteem himself to be, when he is invited to dwell in the palace of his king! You, then, are of the number of those happy Christians who have the honour of dwelling on this earth with Jesus Christ, the King of Heaven. You can visit Him, and remain with Him

day and night, whenever you please. The Venerable Mother Mary of Jesus, the Foundress of a Monastery in Toulouse, used to say, that she thanked God in a special manner for two things; first, because by the vow of Obedience, Religious belong entirely to God; secondly, because they have the happiness of dwelling always in the house where Jesus dwells in the Blessed Sacrament.

## **Evening Meditation**

### *THE LOVE OF JESUS IN LEAVING HIMSELF TO US IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT*

#### I.

Well did St. Francis de Sales say, in speaking of Holy Communion: "In no action does our Saviour show Himself more loving or more tender than in this one, in which, as it were, He annihilates Himself and reduces Himself into food in order to penetrate our souls, and unite Himself to the hearts of His faithful ones." So that, says St. John Chrysostom, "to that Lord on whom the Angels even dare not fix their eyes, to Him we unite ourselves, and with Him we are made one body, one flesh." But what shepherd, adds the Saint, feeds the sheep with his own blood? Even mothers give their children to nurses to feed; but Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament feeds us with His own Blood, and unites us to Himself. There are many mothers who give their children to others to nurse; but this He has not done, but feeds us with His own Blood. In short, says the Saint, because He loved us so ardently, He chose to make Himself one with us by becoming our food. "He mingled Himself with us, that we might be one; this they do whose love is ardent."

O infinite Love, worthy of infinite love, when shall I love Thee, my Jesus, as Thou hast loved me. O Divine Food, Sacrament of love, when wilt Thou draw me entirely to Thyself? Thou hast nothing left to do in order to make Thyself loved by me. I am constantly intending to begin to love Thee, I constantly promise Thee to do so; but I never begin. I will from this day begin to love Thee in earnest. Oh, do Thou enable me to do so. Enlighten me, inflame me, detach me from earth, and permit me not any longer to resist so many enticements of Thy love. I love Thee with my whole heart, and I will therefore leave everything in order to please Thee, my Life, my Love, my All. I will con-

stantly unite myself to Thee in this Holy Sacrament, in order to detach myself from everything, and to love Thee only, my God. I hope, through Thy gracious assistance, to be enabled to do so.

## II.

St. Laurence Justinian says: "We have seen the All-wise made foolish by excess of love." We have seen a God Who is Wisdom itself become a fool through the love He has borne to man. And is it not so? Does it not seem, exclaims St. Augustine, a folly of love that a God should give Himself as food to His creatures? "Does it not seem madness to say: *Eat my flesh; drink my blood?*" And what more could a creature have said to his Creator? " Shall I make bold to say, that the Creator of all things was beside Himself through the excess of His loving goodness?" Thus St. Denis speaks, and says, that God through the greatness of His love has almost gone out of Himself; for, being God, He has gone so far as to become Man, and even to make Himself the Food of men. But, O Lord, such an excess was not becoming Thy Majesty. No, but love, answers St. John Chrysostom for Jesus, does not go about looking for reasons when it desires to do good and to make itself known to the object beloved; it goes, not where it is becoming, but where it is carried by its desire. "Love is unreasoning, and goes as it is led, and not as it ought."

O my Jesus, how ought I not to be covered with shame when I consider that, having Thee before me, Who art the Infinite Good and lovely above every good, and so full of love for my soul, I have yet turned back to love vile and contemptible things, and for their sake have forsaken Thee. O my God, I beseech Thee, discover to me every day more and more the greatness of Thy goodness, in order that I may every day be more and more enamoured of Thee, and may labour more and more to please Thee. Ah, my Lord, what object more beautiful, more good, more holy, more amiable can I love beside Thee? I love Thee, Infinite Goodness, I love Thee more than myself, and I desire to live only that I may love Thee, Who dost deserve all my love.

[In many churches it is customary to have the Forty Hours Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, beginning on Sunday morning (Quinquagesima) and closing on Tuesday morning. Suitable Meditations and Readings are arranged here for the

three days. ED.]

## Monday after Quinquagesima

### Morning Meditation

#### *JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT GIVES AUDIENCE TO ALL*

St. Teresa says that all are not allowed to speak to their king; the most that can be hoped for is to communicate with him through a third person. And even if anyone at length succeeds in speaking with a king, how many difficulties has he had to overcome before he could do so! To converse with Thee, O King of Glory, no third person is needed. Thou art always ready in the Sacrament of the Altar to grant audience to all. In this Sacrament Thou grantest audience to all, night and day -- whenever we please.

#### I.

Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament gives audience to all. St. Teresa says, that in this world all cannot speak with their sovereign; the poor can hardly hope to do so, or even to make their wants known through some third person: but with this King of Heaven no third person is necessary, -- all, both high and low, may speak to Him, for He remains face to face with us in this Sacrament. It is for this reason that Jesus is called the *Flower of the field and the lily of the valleys*. (Cant. ii. 1). Garden-flowers are shut in and carefully preserved; but the flowers of the fields are open to all. Cardinal Hugo comments on these words, saying, "because I show Myself to be found by all."

Any one may, then, speak to Jesus in this Sacrament at any hour of the day. St. Peter Chrysologus, describing the birth of our Redeemer in the stable of Bethlehem, says, that kings are not always giving audience; it often happens that a person goes to speak to the prince, and the guards send him away, saying that it is not the hour for admission, and he must come again. But our Lord was pleased to be born in an open cave, without a door, and without guards, that He might receive all, at all hours. There is no attendant to say, "It is not the hour." And it is the same with Jesus in His Most Holy Sacrament: the churches are always open, and everyone may go and speak to the King

of Heaven whenever he pleases; and Jesus wills that we should there address Him with the utmost confidence. It is for this that He has concealed Himself beneath the form of bread. If He were to appear on our Altars on a throne of light, as He will appear at the Last Judgment, which of us would have courage to approach Him? But because Our Lord wishes us to speak to Him, says St. Teresa, and to seek graces of Him with confidence and without fear, He has hidden His majesty under the species of bread: He wishes that we should treat with Him "as one friend with another," as Thomas a Kempis expresses it.

To converse with Thee, O King of Glory, no third person is needed: Thou art always ready in the Sacrament of the Altar to give audience to all. Whoever desires Thee always finds Thee there and converses with Thee face to face. Since, then, my Jesus, Thou art enclosed in this Tabernacle to receive the supplications of miserable creatures who come to seek an audience of Thee, listen this day to the petition addressed to Thee by the most ungrateful sinner on earth. I come repentant to Thy feet. Change me from a great rebel such as I have hitherto been to Thee, into a great lover of Thee. Thou canst do it. I love Thee, my Jesus, above all things. I love Thee more than my life, my God, my Love, my All!

## II.

When the soul remains at the foot of the Altar, Jesus seems to address her in the words of the Canticle: *Arise. my love, my beautiful one, and come.* (Cant. ii. 10). "Soul *arise*," He says, "and fear not; approach, come near to Me. *My friend*: you are not now My enemy for you love Me, and are sorry for having offended Me. *My beautiful one*: you are no longer hideous in My eyes. My grace has made you beautiful. *And come*: come here, tell Me whatever you wish; I am on the altar for this very purpose." How delighted you would be if a king were to call you into his presence, and say to you "Tell me, what do you want, what do you wish? I love you and wish to benefit you." Jesus Christ, the King of Heaven, says this to all who visit Him: *Come to me all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you.* (Matt. xi. 28). Come all you who are poor, sick, or afflicted, I can and will enrich you, hear you, and comfort you. I remain for this purpose on your altars: *I myself*



*that spoke: behold I am here. (Is. lii. 6).*

My beloved Jesus, since Thou remainest on our Altar to hear the petitions of wretched creatures who have recourse to Thee, hear now the prayer which I, miserable sinner, make to Thee. O Lamb of God sacrificed and put to death on the Cross, Thou seest in me a soul redeemed with Thy Blood; forgive me the insults I have offered Thee, and help me by Thy grace to lose Thee no more. Give me, dear Jesus, a share in the grief Thou didst feel in the Garden of Gethsemani for my sins! Oh, that I had never offended Thee, my God! If I were to die in sin, my beloved Lord, I could love Thee no more; but Thou hast waited for me expressly that I may love Thee; I thank Thee for the time Thou grantest me, and since I now can love Thee, I will do so. Grant me the great grace of loving Thee, but of loving Thee so as to make me forget all, to think only of pleasing Thy most loving Heart. My Jesus, Thou hast expended Thy whole life for me; grant that I may use for Thee at least the remainder of my life. I hope for all graces through the merits of Thy Passion. I hope also in thy intercession, O Mary! Thou knowest that I love thee. Have pity upon me.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *VISITING JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT*

Let us be careful to profit by the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Our hearts should remain with Him to burn continually, and with greater splendour than the lights and lamps that adorn the Altar. But, alas! the ingratitude of men towards Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament made Him complain to His servant, St. Margaret Mary Alocque, to whom He showed His Divine Heart burning with flames of love for men. Jesus said to her: "Behold this Heart that has loved men so tenderly, and has reserved nothing, but has consumed itself in order to show its love for men; yet in return I receive nothing but ingratitude and contempt from the greater number of men in this Sacrament. But what displeases Me most is, that some of these ungrateful ones are hearts consecrated to Me." In these last words Jesus spoke of those who dwell in the same house with Him, and yet draw but little profit from His Presence. If He were to come into your church once a year, and to remain only for a single

day, surely all would contend with one another in paying homage to Him, and in remaining in His loving company; and will you leave Him alone, and seldom visit Him because in order to see you more frequently in His Presence, He, in His goodness, remains continually with you?

If you have hitherto been negligent in visiting Jesus in the Tabernacle, I entreat you henceforth to avail yourself of the great treasure that you have in the most Holy Sacrament. Sister Anne of the Cross, who had been Countess of Feria, and a Spanish lady of high rank, after being a widow for twenty-four years entered the Order of St. Clare, in Montilla. She procured a cell, from which she had a view of the Altar of the Blessed Sacrament, and there she generally remained day and night. Being asked how she was employed during so many hours that she spent before the Blessed Sacrament, she replied: "I would remain there for all eternity. How am I employed before Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist? I thank Him, I love Him, I ask His graces." Behold an excellent means of drawing great fruit from your visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

First, thank Jesus Christ. How thankful you are to relatives that come from a distance to visit you! And will you not thank Jesus Christ Who descends from Heaven, not only to visit you, but also to remain always with you? First of all in your Visit, enliven your Faith and adore your Spouse in the Sacrament: thank His great goodness in coming to remain on the Altar for the love of you.

Secondly, love Jesus. St. Philip Neri, when he saw the most holy Viaticum brought into his room, was all on fire with holy love, and exclaimed: "Behold my Love! Behold my Love!" Do you say the same when you remain before the Holy Tabernacle. Consider that your Jesus, shut up in that prison of love, is burning with love for you. To St. Catherine of Sienna He appeared one day in the Blessed Sacrament in the form of a fiery furnace, and the Saint was astonished that the flames that issued from it had not filled the hearts of all men with the fire of Divine love. If, when you remain in His Presence, you wish to please Him, repeat acts of love, offering yourself to Him in a special manner.

Thirdly, ask Jesus for His grace. Blessed Henry Suso used to

say that it is in the Holy Sacrament that Jesus hears most readily the prayers of those who visit Him, and that it is there He dispenses His graces most abundantly. The Venerable Father Balthasar Alvarez once saw Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament with His hands full of graces, but found no one to whom He could impart them, because there was no one to ask them. You say that you cannot remain in the Presence of Jesus Christ, because you know not what to do before Him, or what to say. O God! And why do you not employ yourself in asking the graces of which you stand in need? Beg of Jesus to give you strength to resist temptations, to correct the faults into which you always relapse, to rescue you from the passion that keeps you in chains, and hinders you from giving yourself entirely to God. Entreat Him to give you aid to suffer all insults and contradictions in peace, to increase in your heart His Divine love, and entreat Him particularly to make you live always united with His holy will. When you feel disturbed on account of having committed any fault, go instantly to the Holy Sacrament to ask pardon, and then calm your mind. When you receive any offence, or when you meet a heavy cross, go and offer it to Jesus Christ and ask His aid to embrace it with resignation. Oh! if we all acted in this manner and knew how to avail ourselves of the Presence of Jesus, we should all become Saints. Let it be our care to become Saints by adopting this practice.

## **Evening Meditation**

### *A GIFT SURPASSING ALL GIFTS*

#### I.

St. Paul draws attention to the time Jesus chose to make us this gift of the most Holy Sacrament; a gift which surpasses all the other gifts which an Almighty God could make, as St. Clement says: "A gift surpassing all fulness." And St. Augustine says: "Although omnipotent He could give no more." The Apostle remarks that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread and, giving thanks, broke and said: *Take ye and eat; this is my body which shall be delivered for you.* (1 Cor. xi. 23, 24). In that same night, then, that men were thinking of preparing torments and death for Jesus, our beloved Redeemer thought of leaving them Himself in the Blessed Sacrament; giving us

thereby to understand that His love was so great, that, instead of being cooled by so many injuries, it was then more than ever yearning towards us. O most loving Saviour, how couldst Thou have so great love for men as to choose to remain with them on this earth to be their Food, after their having driven Thee away from it with so much ingratitude!

## II.

Let us also consider the immense desire Jesus has during all His life for the arrival of that night, in which He had determined to leave us this great pledge of His love. For at the moment of His instituting this most sweet Sacrament, He said, *With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you.* (Luke xxii. 15), words which reveal to us the ardent desire that He had to unite Himself with us in Communion through the love which He bore us: "This is the voice of most burning charity," says St. Laurence Justinian. And Jesus still retains at the present time the same desire towards all the souls that love Him.

O Lover, too full of love, there are no greater proofs left for Thee to give me in order to persuade me that Thou dost love me. I bless Thy goodness for it. O my Jesus, I beseech Thee, draw me entirely to Thyself. Make me love Thee henceforth with all the affections and tenderness of which I am capable. Let it suffice to others to love Thee with a love only appreciative and predominant, for I know that Thou wilt be satisfied with it; but I shall not be satisfied until I see that I love Thee also with all the tenderness of my heart, more than friend, more than brother, more than father, and more than spouse. And where, indeed, shall I find a friend, a brother, a father, a spouse, who will love me as much as Thou hast loved me, my Creator, my Redeemer, and my God, Who for the love of me hast spent Thy Blood and Thy life; and, not content with that, dost give Thyself entirely to me in this Sacrament of love. I love Thee, then, O my Jesus, with all the affections of my soul: I love Thee more than myself. Oh, help me to love Thee; I ask nothing more of Thee.

## Tuesday after Quinquagesima

### Morning Meditation

*JESUS DESIRES THAT ALL SHOULD RECEIVE HIM IN HOLY COMMUNION.*

*With desire have I desired to eat this pasch with you.* By these words our Redeemer describes His eagerness to unite Himself with each one of us in the Blessed Sacrament. *With desire have I desired.* This is the expression of most burning love, says St. Laurence Justinian. So that Our Lord said one day to St. Mechtilde: "No bee throws itself with such eagerness on flowers, to suck their honey, as I come to the souls which desire Me."

I.

Let us consider the great desire Jesus Christ has that we should receive Him in Holy Communion: *Jesus, knowing that his hour was come.* (John xiii. 1). How could He call *his hour* that in which His bitter Passion was to begin? He speaks thus, because in that night He was about to leave us this Divine Sacrament, that He might unite Himself perfectly to His beloved souls; and this desire made Him say: *With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you.* (Luke xxii. 15). By these words our Redeemer describes His eagerness to unite with each of us in this Sacrament: *With desire have I desired*; The immense love He bears us makes Him speak thus. St. Laurence Justinian says, "This is the expression of most burning love." And He has been pleased to veil Himself beneath the species of bread, that so all may be able to receive Him. If He had concealed Himself under the appearance of any expensive food, the poor would have been unable to obtain it; and even if He had chosen some other inexpensive food, it might perhaps not have been found in all parts of the world: Jesus has been pleased to remain under the form of bread, because bread costs little, and is to be had everywhere; so that in all places we may find Him and receive Him.

Our Redeemer's great desire to be received by us, makes Him not only exhort us in so many ways to come to Him. *Come, eat my bread, and drink the wine which I have mingled for you.* (Prov. ix. 5). *Eat, O friends, drink and be inebriated, my dearly-beloved.* (Cant. v. 1). But He even imposes it on us as a command to do

so: *Take ye, and eat; this is my body.* (Matt. xxvi. 26). And that we may approach to Him, He allures us by the promise of eternal life: *He that eateth my flesh ... hath everlasting life; he that eateth this bread shall live for ever.* (John vi. 55-59). And He threatens us with being shut out from Heaven if we do not: *Except you eat the flesh of the son of man ... you shall not have life in you.* (John vi. 54). All these invitations, promises, and threats, spring from the desire Jesus has to be united to us in this Sacrament. Now this desire arises from the great love He bears us; for, as St. Francis de Sales says, the end of love is solely to unite itself to the beloved object, and therefore in this Sacrament Jesus unites Himself wholly to our souls: *He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him.* (John vi. 57). And for this reason He so earnestly wishes us to receive Him. Our Lord said one day to St. Mechtilde: "No bee throws itself with such eagerness on flowers, to suck their honey, as I come to those souls which desire Me."

Oh, if the faithful would understand the great Good which Holy Communion brings to their souls! Jesus is the Lord of all riches, since He knows *that his father had given him all things into his hands.* (John xiii. 3). St. Dionysius says that the Most Holy Sacrament "has a special power to sanctify man's soul." And St. Vincent Ferrer writes, that a soul profits more by one Communion than by a week's fast on bread and water. The Council of Trent teaches that Holy Communion is the great "remedy which frees us from daily sins, and preserves us from mortal sin"; and hence St. Ignatius the Martyr calls the ever-blessed Sacrament "the medicine of immortality." Innocent III. says, that Jesus Christ "freed us by the mystery of the Cross from the punishment due to sin; but that by the Sacrament of the Eucharist He frees us from sin itself."

O my Jesus, Lover of souls, Thou hast no further proof of love to give to show us that Thou dost love us; what more canst Thou think of to make us love Thee? O Infinite Goodness, I beseech Thee that, from this day forward, I may love Thee with all possible earnestness and tenderness. Who can love my soul more tenderly than Thou, my Redeemer, Who after having given Thy life for me, dost give me Thy whole Self in this Sacrament? My beloved Lord, may I always remember Thy love, so that I may

forget all else, and love Thee alone, without interruption and without reserve.

## II.

Moreover, this Sacrament kindles in us the love of God: *He brought me into the cellar of wine, he set in order charity in me. Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples; because I languish with love.* (Cant. ii. 4, 5). St. Gregory of Nyssa tells us, that this cellar of wine is the Holy Communion, in which the soul is so inebriated with Divine Love, that she forgets earth and all created things. And what intense flames of love does Jesus Christ kindle in souls which receive Him in this Sacrament with a desire that He should do so! St. Catherine of Sienna one day saw Jesus in the hands of a priest as a furnace of love; so that she wondered how all the hearts of mankind were not wholly consumed with such a fire. St. Rose of Lima used to say that, when she communicated, she seemed to receive the sun; and hence such brilliant rays shone from her face, that people used to be dazzled; and such a heat proceeded from her mouth, that those who gave her to drink after Communion, felt their hand scorched, as if they had approached a furnace. When the pious king, St. Wenceslaus, went to visit the Most Holy Sacrament, he burned even outwardly with such ardour, that the servant who accompanied him used, when there was snow on the ground, to set his feet in the footprints of the Saint, and thus he never felt the cold. St. Chrysostom says that "the Blessed Eucharist is a flame which sets us on fire; so that, like lions breathing flame, we may return from that table dreadful to the devil," who has no longer courage to tempt us.

But some will say, "I do not communicate often, because I feel so cold in the love of God." Gerson says that this is the same as if a person would not go near the fire because he was cold: the colder we feel ourselves, the more often we should approach the Most Holy Sacrament, if we really desire to love God. St. Francis de Sales writes: "If anyone asks you why you communicate so often, tell him that two classes of persons should communicate frequently, the perfect and the imperfect: the perfect, to preserve themselves in perfection; and the imperfect, that they may attain to it." St. Bonaventure says, in the same way, "Even if you be

cold, approach, trusting in the mercy of God. The more ill one feels, the more one requires the physician." And Jesus Christ said to St. Mechtilde: "When you are about to communicate, wish that you had all the love that any heart ever felt towards Me; and I will accept it as you wish, as if such love were really yours."

I love Thee, my Jesus, above all things, and I wish to love Thee alone; I beseech Thee to drive from my heart all affections which are not for Thee. I thank Thee for giving me time to love Thee and to weep over the offences I have offered to Thee. My Jesus, I desire that Thou mayst be the only object of my affections. Assist me, save me, and let my salvation consist in loving Thee with my whole heart, and in loving Thee always in this life and in the next. Mary, my Mother, obtain for me the grace to love Jesus Christ; pray to Him for me.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *MORTIFICATION: ITS NECESSITY AND ADVANTAGES*

For the recovery of bodily health you must take care never to impair the strength of the soul, which will always be weak so long as the flesh is not mortified. "I compassionate," says St. Bernard, "the infirmities of the body; but the infirmity of the soul should be an object of greater alarm." I pity the infirmities of the body, but feel greater commiseration for the more formidable and dangerous maladies of the soul. Oh, how often is bodily weakness made the pretext for unnecessary indulgence. "We leave the choir," says St. Teresa, "today, because the head aches; and tomorrow, because it has ached; and for three more days, lest it should ache." Hence, on another occasion she thus addresses her dear children: "You have entered Religion not to indulge the flesh, but to die for Jesus Christ. If we do not resolve to disregard the want of health, we shall do nothing. What injury will death do us? How often have our bodies molested us? Shall not we torment them in return?" St. Joseph Calasanctius says: "Woe to the Religious who loves health more than sanctity."

St. Bernard considered it unbecoming in those called to a perfect life, to take costly medicine; for them, he said, decoctions of herbs should be sufficient. I do not require this of you; but I say that small indeed must be the spiritual progress of him who is continually seeking physicians and remedies; who is sometimes



not content with the prescription of the ordinary physician; and who, by his discontent, disturbs everybody. "Men," says Salvi-an, "devoted to Christ are weak, and wish to be so: if they were robust, they could with difficulty be Saints." All who have con-secrated themselves to the love of Jesus Christ, and are weak in body, desire to continue in their infirmities: for were they strong and vigorous, it would be difficult for them to attain sanctity. The truth of this observation appears from the Lives of St. Teresa, St. Rose, St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, and other Saints. The Venerable Beatrix of the Incarnation, the first spiritual daughter of St. Teresa, though afflicted with pains and infirmities, was accustomed to say that she would not exchange her condition for that of the happiest princess on earth. Such was her patience, that in the greatest sufferings she never uttered a word of complaint. Hence a sister once said to her: "You are like one of those wretched paupers who languish for want of food, but continue to endure the pains of hunger rather than submit to the shame of manifesting their poverty."

If bodily weakness renders us unable to practise corporal austerities, let us at least learn from her example to embrace with joy the infirmities with which Almighty God visits us. If borne with patience, they will conduct us to perfection better than voluntary works of penance. St. Syncretica used to say, that "as corporal maladies are cured by medicine, so the diseases of the soul are healed by the infirmities of the body."

Oh, how profitable to the spirit are the mortifications of the flesh!

They detach the heart from sensual pleasures, which wound the soul, and frequently deprive her of life. "The wounds of charity," says Origen, "make us insensible to the wounds of the flesh."

## **Evening Meditation**

### *REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

#### I.

"Two things," says Cicero, "make us know a lover -- his doing good to his beloved, and suffering torments for him; and the latter is the greatest sign of true love." God has, indeed, already shown His love for man by many benefits bestowed upon him;

but His love would not have been satisfied by only doing good to man, as says St. Peter Chrysologus, if He had not found the means to prove to him how much He loved him by also suffering and dying for him, as He did by taking upon Him human flesh: "But He held it to be little if He showed His love without suffering." And what greater means could God have discovered to prove to us the immense love which He bears us than by making Himself Man and suffering for us? In no other way could the love of God for us be shown so well," writes St. Gregory Nazianzen. My beloved Jesus, how much hast Thou laboured to show me Thy love, and to make me enamoured of Thy goodness. Great indeed, then, would be the injury I should do Thee, if I were to love Thee but little, or to love anything else but Thee.

Ah, when He showed Himself to us, a God wounded, crucified, and dying, did He not indeed, says Cornelius a Lapide, give us the greatest proofs of the love that He bears us? "God showed His utmost love on the Cross." And before him St. Bernard said that Jesus, in His Passion, showed us that His love towards us could not be greater than it was: "In the shame of the Passion is shown the greatest and incomparable love." The Apostle writes, that, when Jesus Christ chose to die for our salvation, then appeared how far the love of God extended towards us miserable creatures: *The goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared.* (Tit. iii. 4). O my most loving Saviour, I feel indeed that all Thy Wounds speak to me of the love Thou bearest me. And who after so many proofs of Thy love could resist loving Thee in return? St. Teresa was indeed right, O most amiable Jesus, when she said that he who loves Thee not, gives a proof that he does not know Thee.

## II.

Jesus Christ could easily have obtained salvation for us without suffering, and in leading a life of ease and delight; but no, St. Paul says, *having joy set before him he endured the cross.* (Heb. xii. 2). He refused the riches, the delights, the honours of the world, and chose for Himself a life of poverty, and a death full of suffering and ignominy. And wherefore? Would it not have sufficed for Him to have offered to His Eternal Father one single prayer for the pardon of man? -- for this prayer, being of infinite value,

would have been sufficient to save the world, and infinite worlds besides. Why, then, did He choose for Himself so much suffering, and a death so cruel, that an author has said very truly, that through mere pain the soul of Jesus separated itself from His Body? To what purpose so much cost in order to save man? St. John Chrysostom answers: a single prayer of Jesus would indeed have sufficed to redeem us; but it was not sufficient to show us the love that our God has borne us -- "That which sufficed to redeem us was not sufficient for love." And St. Thomas confirms this when he says, "Christ, in suffering from love, offered to God more than the expiation of the offence of the human race demanded." Because Jesus loved us so much, He desired to be loved very much by us; and therefore He did everything that He could, even unto suffering for us, in order to conciliate our love, and to show that there was nothing more that He could do to make us love Him: "He endured much weariness," says St. Bernard, "that He might bind man to love Him much."

## **Ash Wednesday**

### **Morning Meditation**

*"MEMENTO, HOMO, QUIA PULVIS ES."*

It is most useful for our salvation to say often to ourselves: *I must one day die!* The Church every year on Ash Wednesday brings this remembrance to the faithful: *Memento, homo, quia pulvis es et in pulverem reverteris!* Remember, man, that thou art dust and into dust shalt thou return!

O my God, give me light, give me strength to spend the rest of my life in serving and loving Thee.

I.

Remember, man, that thou art dust and into dust shalt thou return! This certainty of death is brought to our recollection many times in the year; sometimes by the burial grounds which we pass upon the road, sometimes by the graves which we behold in churches, sometimes by the dead who are carried to burial.

The most precious furniture that was carried by the anchorites to their caves was a cross and a skull; the cross to remind them of the great love of Jesus Christ for us, and the skull to

remind them of the day of their own death. And so they persevered in penitential works till the end of their days; and thus dying in poverty in the desert, they died more contented than if they had died as kings in their palaces.

*The end is at hand! The end is at hand! Finis venit; venit finis.* (Ezech. vii. 2). In this life one man lives a longer, another a shorter time; but for everyone sooner or later, the end comes; and when that end comes, nothing will comfort us at death but the thought that we have loved Jesus Christ, and have endured with patience the labours of this life for love of Him. Then, not the riches we have gained, nor the honours we have obtained, nor the pleasures we have enjoyed, will console us. All the greatness of the world cannot comfort a dying man; it rather adds to his pains; and the more he has gained of it, the more does he suffer. It was said by Sister Margaret of St. Anne, a very holy Discalced Carmelite, and daughter of the Emperor Rudolph II: "What profit is a kingdom at the hour of death?"

Oh, how many worldly persons are there to whom, at the very moment when they are busy in seeking for gain, power, and office, the message of death comes: *Set thy house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.* (Is. xxxvii. 1). Why, O man, hast thou neglected to make thy will till the hour when thou art in sickness? O my God, what pain is suffered by him who is on the point of gaining some lawsuit, or of taking possession of some palace or property, who hears it said by the priest who has come to pray for his soul: *Depart, Christian soul, from this world.* Depart from this world, and render thy account to Jesus Christ. "But," he cries, "I am not now well prepared." What matters that? Thou must now depart.

O my God, give me light, give me strength to spend the rest of my life in serving and loving Thee. If now I should die, I should not die content; I should die disturbed. What, then, do I wait for? That death should seize me at a moment of the greatest peril to my soul? O Lord, if I have been foolish in the past, I will not be so for the time to come. Now I give myself wholly to Thee; receive me and help me with Thy grace.

II.

In a word, to every one the end comes, and with the end

comes that decisive moment on which depends a happy or wretched eternity. Oh, what a moment, on which Eternity depends! Oh, that all would think upon that moment, and the account they must give to their Judge of their whole life! *Oh, that they were wise, and would understand, and would provide for their last end!* (Deut. xxxii. 29). Truly, they would not then devote themselves to amassing riches, nor labour to become great in this perishable world; they would think how to become Saints, and to be great in that life which never ends.

If, then, we have Faith, let us believe that there is a Death, a Judgment, an Eternity, and labour for the rest of our life to live only for God. And, therefore, let us take care to live as pilgrims on this earth, remembering that we must speedily leave it. Let us live ever with death before our eyes; and, in all the affairs of life, let us take care to act precisely as we should act at the point of death. All things upon earth either leave us or we leave them. Let us hear Jesus Christ, Who says: *Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither the rust nor moth doth consume.* (Matt. vi. 20). Let us despise the treasures of earth, which cannot content us, and speedily end; and let us gain those heavenly treasures which will make us happy and will never end.

Miserable I am, O Lord, in that I have so often, for the sake of the goods of this life, turned my back upon Thee Who art the Infinite Good! I see my folly in having sought for a great name, and for making my fortune in the world. I see what my true happiness is: it is henceforth to love Thee, and in everything to fulfil Thy will. O my Jesus, take from me the desire of gain; make me love neglect and a humble life. Give me strength to deny myself in everything that displeases Thee. Make me embrace, with a calm mind, infirmities, persecutions, desolations, and all the crosses that Thou mayest send me. Oh, that I could die for the love of Thee, abandoned by all, as Thou didst die for me! Holy Virgin, thy prayers can enable me to find my true happiness, which is earnestly to love thy Son. Oh, pray for me; in thee I put my trust.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *MORTIFICATION: ITS NECESSITY AND ADVANTAGES*

By mortifications we atone in this life for the pains due to

our sins. He that has offended God, though the offence may be pardoned, must either by expiatory works in this life, or by the pains of Purgatory in the next, make satisfaction for the temporal punishment due to sin after remission of its guilt. His sufferings in Purgatory will be infinitely greater than any torments that he could endure on earth. *They shall be in very great tribulation, unless they do penance from, their deeds.* (Apoc. ii. 22). They who have not expiated their sins shall suffer the sharpest torments in the other world. St. Antoninus relates that an Angel proposed to a sick man the choice of being confined to Purgatory for three days, or of being condemned to a continuation of his infirmities for two years. The sick man chose the three days in Purgatory; but scarcely had an hour elapsed in that place of torments, than he began to complain of the Angel for having condemned him to a purgation not of three days, but of several years. "What!" replied the Angel, "your body is still warm on the bed of death, and you speak of having spent years in Purgatory." If you wish to suffer in peace, imagine that you have still to live fifteen or twenty years, and say: This is my Purgatory: it is the spirit rather than the body that I must conquer.

Mortifications raise the soul to God. St. Francis de Sales used to say that a soul cannot ascend to the throne of God unless the flesh is mortified and depressed. There are many beautiful remarks on this subject in the *Works* of St. Teresa: "It would be a folly," says this great Saint, "to think that God admits to His familiar friendship those who seek their own ease. Sensuality and prayer are incompatible. Souls who truly love God cannot desire repose."

Mortifications merit great glory in Heaven. If "every one who striveth for the mastery," abstains from whatever is likely to diminish his strength, and thus endanger the conquest of a miserable earthly crown, how much more should we deny the flesh for the attainment of an eternal kingdom? *And they*, indeed, says St. Paul, *that they may receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible one.* (1 Cor. ix. 25). St. John saw all the Saints with *palms in their hands.* (Apoc. vii. 9). From this passage we learn that all the Elect must be Martyrs, either by the sword of the tyrant or by the voluntary crucifixion of the flesh. But while we consider

the necessity of works of penance, we should at the same time remember that the pains of this life bear no proportion to the eternal glory that awaits us in Paradise. *The sufferings of this time*, says St. Paul, *are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us.* (Rom. viii. 18). The few transitory mortifications which we practise here below will produce complete and everlasting felicity. *For*, says the Apostle, *that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.* (2 Cor. iv. 17).

Let us, then, animate our faith. Our pilgrimage on earth will not be of long duration: our home is eternity, where he who has practised the greatest mortifications during life shall enjoy the greatest glory. St. Peter says the Saints are the living stones of which the celestial Jerusalem is built. But before they are translated to the city which is above, they must be polished by the salutary chisel of penance.

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### I.

What greater proof of love, says Our Saviour Himself, can a friend show towards the person he loves than to give his life for his sake? *Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* (John xv. 13). But Thou, O most loving Jesus, says St. Bernard, hast done more than this, since Thou hast given Thy life for us, who are not Thy friends, but Thy enemies, and rebels against Thee: "Thou hast a greater charity, Lord, in giving Thy life for Thy enemies." And this is what the Apostle observes when he writes: *He commendeth his charity towards us, because when as yet we were sinners, according to the time Christ died for us.* (Rom. v. 8, 9). Thou wouldst then die for me, Thy enemy, O my Jesus; and can I yet resist so much love? Behold, here I am; since Thou dost so anxiously desire that I should love Thee, I will drive away every other love from my breast, and will love Thee alone.

St. John Chrysostom says, that the principal end Jesus had in His Passion was to discover to us His love, and thus to draw our hearts to Himself by the remembrance of the pains He has

endured for us: "This was the principal cause of the Passion of Our Lord; He wished it to be known how great was the love of God for man, of God Who would rather be loved than feared." St. Thomas adds, that we may, through the Passion of Jesus, know the greatness of the love that God bears to man: "By this man understands the greatness of the love of God to man"; and St. John had said before: *In this we have known the charity of God, because he hath laid down his life for us.* (1 John iii. 16). O my Jesus, Immaculate Lamb sacrificed on the Cross for me, *tantus labor non sit cassus*; let not all that Thou hast suffered for me be lost, but accomplish in me the object of Thy great sufferings. Oh, bind me entirely with sweet chains of Thy love, in order that I may not leave Thee, and that I may never more be separated from Thee: "Most sweet Jesus, suffer me not to be separated from Thee."

## II.

St. Luke relates that Moses and Elias on Mount Tabor, speaking of the Passion of Jesus Christ, called it an excess: *and they spoke of his excess that he should accomplish in Jerusalem.* (Luke ix. 31). "Yes," says St. Bonaventure, and rightly was the Passion of Jesus called an excess, for "it was an excess of suffering, and an excess of love." And a devout author adds, "What more could He suffer that He has not endured? The excess of His love reached the highest point." Yes, indeed, for the Divine law imposes on men no other obligation than that of loving their neighbours as themselves; but Jesus has loved man more than Himself: "He loved these more than Himself," says St. Cyril. Thou didst then, O my beloved Redeemer, -- I will say to Thee with St. Augustine -- love me more than Thyself, since to save me Thou wouldst lose Thy Divine life -- a life infinitely more precious than the lives of all men and angels put together. Thou didst love me more than Thyself, because Thou wert willing to die for me.

O infinite God, exclaims the Abbot Guerric, Thou hast for the love of men (if it is lawful to say so) become prodigal of Thyself. "Yes, indeed," he adds, "since Thou hast not been satisfied with bestowing Thy gifts, but Thou hast also given Thyself to recover lost man." O prodigy, O excess of love, worthy only of infinite goodness! "And who," says St. Thomas of Villanova, "will ever be able, Lord, to understand even in the slightest degree



the immensity of Thy love in having loved us miserable worms so much, that Thou didst choose to die, even upon a Cross, for us?" "Oh, how this love," continues the same Saint, "exceeds all measure, all understanding!"

## Thursday after Quinquagesima

### Morning Meditation

#### *THE TERRORS OF THE DYING MAN AT THE THOUGHT OF THE APPROACHING JUDGMENT*

How shall a dying man who has spent his life in sin, be able in the midst of the pains, the stupefaction, and the confusion of death, to repent sincerely of all his past iniquities? O God, what terrors and confusion will seize upon the unhappy Christian who has led a careless life, when he shall find himself overwhelmed with sins and the fear of Judgment, of Hell and Eternity And how should he not tremble who has offended God by many mortal sins and has done no penance for them!

#### I.

Consider the fear which the thought of Judgment will cause in the mind of a dying man, when he reflects that in a very short time he must present himself before Jesus Christ, his Judge, to render an account of all the actions of his past life. When the awful moment of his passage out of this world into another, out of time into eternity, arrives, then will there be nothing so tormenting to him as the sight of his sins. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, being ill, and thinking of Judgment, trembled. Her confessor told her not to fear. "Ah, Father," she replied, "it is an awful thing to appear before Jesus Christ as our Judge!" Such were the feelings of this holy virgin who was a Saint from her infancy. What will he say who has frequently deserved hell?

The Abbot Agatha after many years of penance trembled, saying, "What will become of me when I shall be judged?" And how should he not tremble who has offended God by many mortal sins, and yet has done no penance for them! At death, the sight of his crimes, the rigour of the Divine judgments, the uncertainty of the sentence to be pronounced upon him--what a tempest of horror and confusion will these raise around him! Let

us be careful to throw ourselves at the feet of Jesus Christ, and secure our pardon before the arrival of our accounting day.

Ah, my Jesus and my Redeemer, Who wilt one day be my Judge, have pity on me before the day of justice. Behold at Thy feet a deserter who has often promised to be faithful to Thee, and has as often again turned his back upon Thee. No, my God, Thou hast not deserved the treatment Thou hast hitherto received at my hands. Forgive me, O Lord, for I desire truly to change and amend my life. I am sorry, my Sovereign Good, for having despised Thee: take pity on me.

## II.

Then will be decided the great affair of our eternal salvation. Upon this decision will depend our being either saved for ever, or lost for ever, our being happy or miserable for all eternity. But, O God, each one knows this, and says, "Yes, so it is." But since it is so, why do we not leave all to attend only to our sanctification, and to the securing of our eternal salvation?

My God, I give Thee thanks for the light which Thou hast given me. Remember, O Jesus, that Thou didst die for my salvation; grant that when I first behold Thee I may see Thee appeased. If hitherto I have despised Thy grace, I now esteem it above every other good. I love Thee, O Infinite Goodness, and because I love Thee I am sorry for having offended Thee. Hitherto I have forsaken Thee, but now I desire Thee and seek Thee; grant that I may find Thee, O God of my soul! Mary, my Mother, recommend me to thy Son, Jesus.

## Spiritual Reading

### *MORTIFICATION: ITS NECESSITY AND ADVANTAGES*

Let us consider each act of self-denial as a work that will prepare us for Paradise. This thought will sweeten all our pains and all our toils. How pleasing is the fatigue of a journey to him who is assured that he shall obtain possession of all the territory through which he travels! It is related in the *Lives* of the Fathers of the Desert, that a certain monk was anxious to exchange his cell for another nearer to the fountain from which he was accustomed to draw water, but as he was one day going to the fountain he heard his steps counted by a person behind him. Turning round, he saw a young man who said: "I am an Angel:

I count your steps that none of them may be without a reward." The monk immediately abandoned the intention of changing his cell; and even wished it to be more distant from the water, that he might be able to acquire greater merit.

Mortified Christians enjoy peace and content in this life, as well as in the next. What greater happiness can a soul possess than to know that by her mortifications she pleases God. The very privation of earthly pleasures, and even the pains of penance, are so many spiritual delights to a loving soul. Love cannot be at rest. He that loves God cannot live without giving continual proofs of his affection. Now, a soul cannot give a stronger proof of its love for God than the voluntary renunciation of earthly pleasures for His sake, and the oblation of its pains to Him. A Christian enamoured of Jesus Christ feels no pain in his penitential works. "He that loves God," says St. Augustine, "labours not." "Who," says St. Teresa, "can behold his God covered with wounds and harassed by persecutions, without embracing and even desiring a portion of his Saviour's sufferings?" Hence St. Paul exclaimed that he wished for no other delight or glory than the Cross of the Redeemer. *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Gal. vi. 14). Again he says that the crucifixion of the flesh is the test by which the true lovers of Jesus Christ may be known. *They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences.* (Gal. v. 24). Worldlings go in search of sensual gratifications, but the followers of Christ seek only corporal austerities.

In conclusion, imagine that death is at hand, and that as yet you have done but little for Paradise. Strive from this day forward to mortify yourself as much as possible, at least by abstinence from the pleasures that self-love seeks. Endeavour to profit by every opportunity of mortification. *Let not the part of a good gift overpass thee.* (Ecclus. xiv. 14). Consider every occasion of self-denial as a gift which God bestows upon you, that you may be able to merit greater glory in another life; and remember that what can be done today may not be possible tomorrow, and time that is past never returns.

To animate your fervour in the practice of mortification, I shall here place before your eyes, in his own words, what St.

John Climacus saw in a monastery called the *Prison of Penitents*. "I saw," says the Saint, "some of them standing the whole night in the open air, to overcome sleep. I saw others with their eyes fixed on Heaven, and with tears, begging mercy from God. Others stood with their hands bound behind their shoulders, and their heads bowed down, as if they were unworthy to raise their eyes to Heaven. Others remained on ashes, with their heads between their knees, and beat the ground with their foreheads. Others deluged the floor with their tears. Others stood in the burning rays of the sun. Others, parched with thirst, were content with taking a few drops of water to prevent death. Others took a mouthful of bread, and then threw it out, saying that they who have lived like animals are unworthy of the food of men. Some had their cheeks furrowed by continual streams of tears; and others had their eyes sunken. Others struck their breast with such violence, that they began to spit blood. And I saw all with faces so pallid and emaciated, that they appeared to be so many corpses." The Saint then concludes by saying that notwithstanding their fall, he considered them, on account of their penitential rigours, more happy than those who had never sinned and never done penance. What shall be said of those who have fallen and have never atoned for their crimes by expiatory works?

### **Evening Meditation**

#### *REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

##### I.

It is a pleasing thing to see a person beloved by some great man, and more so if the latter has the power of raising him to some great fortune; but how much more sweet and pleasing must it be to us to see ourselves beloved by God, Who can raise us up to an eternity of happiness? Under the Old Law men might have doubted whether God loved them with a tender love; but after having seen Him shed His Blood on an infamous gibbet and die for us, how can we doubt His loving us with infinite tenderness and affection? O my soul, behold now thy Jesus, hanging from the Cross, all covered with Wounds! Behold how, by these Wounds, He proves to Thee the love of His enamoured Heart: "The secrets of His Heart are revealed through the Wounds of

His Body," says St. Bernard. My dearest Jesus, it does indeed afflict me to see Thee dying with such dreadful suffering upon an ignominious tree; but at the same time I am greatly consoled and inflamed with love for Thee, when I see in these sacred Wounds the love that Thou bearest me. O heavenly Seraphs, what do you think of the love of my God, *who loved me and delivered himself for me* (Gal. ii. 20)?

St. Paul says that when the Gentiles heard it preached that Jesus was crucified for the love of men, they thought it such nonsense that they could not believe it. *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness.* (1 Cor. i. 23). And how is it possible, said they, to believe that an omnipotent God, Who wants nothing in order to be perfectly happy as He is, would choose to become Man and die on a Cross to save men? This would be the same, said they, as to believe that a God had become mad for love of men. *But unto the Gentiles foolishness.* And thus they refused to believe it. But faith teaches us that Jesus has really undertaken and accomplished this great work of Redemption which the Gentiles esteemed and called folly. "We have seen," says St. Laurence Justinian, "Eternal Wisdom, the Only-begotten of God, become as it were a fool through the excessive love He bears man." Yes, adds Cardinal Hugo, for it seemed nothing but a folly that a God should choose to die for men: "It seemed a folly that God should die for the salvation of men."

## II.

The Blessed Giacopone, who in this world had been a man of letters, and afterwards became a Franciscan, seemed to have become mad through the love that he bore to Jesus Christ. One day Jesus appeared to him and said: "Giacopone, why do you commit these follies?" "Why?" he answered. "Because You have taught them to me. If I am mad," said he, "You have been more mad than me, in that You have died for me. I am a fool, for Thou hast been a greater fool." Thus also St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, being in an ecstasy, exclaimed, "O God of love! O God of love! The love that Thou bearest to creatures, O my Jesus, is too great indeed." And one day, when rapt out of herself, she took an image of the Crucified One, and began running about the mon-

astery, crying, "O Love! Love! I shall never rest, my God, from calling Thee Love." Then, turning to the Religious, she said, "Do you not know, my dear sisters, that Jesus Christ is nothing but love? He is even mad with love, and I will go on saying it continually." And she added that she wished she could be heard by the whole universe when she called Jesus "Love," in order that the love of Jesus might be known and loved by all. And she sometimes even began to ring the bell, in order that all the people in the world should come (as she desired, if it had been possible) to love her Jesus.

Yes, my sweetest Redeemer, permit me to say so, this Thy spouse was indeed right when she called Thee mad with love. And does it not indeed seem a folly that Thou shouldst choose to die for love of me, for such an ungrateful worm as I am, and whose offences Thou didst foresee, as well as the infidelities of which I should be guilty? But if Thou, my God, art thus become mad, as it were, for the love of me, how is it that I do not become mad for the love of a God? When I have seen Thee crucified and dead for me, how is it that I can think of any other than Thee? Yes, O my Lord, my Sovereign Good, more worthy of love than every other good, I love Thee more than myself. I promise for the future to love none other but Thee, and to think constantly on the love Thou hast shown me by dying in the midst of so many sufferings for me.

O Scourges, O Thorns, O Nails, O Cross, O Wounds, O sufferings, O death of my Saviour, you irresistibly constrain me to love Him Who has loved me so much! O Incarnate Word, O loving God, my soul is enamoured of Thee! I would fain love Thee so much, that I should find no pleasure but in pleasing Thee, my most sweet Lord; and since Thou dost so earnestly desire my love, I protest that I will only live for Thee. I desire to do whatever Thou willest of me. O my Jesus, I pray Thee, help me, and grant that I may please Thee entirely and continually in time and in eternity. Mary, my Mother, entreat Jesus for me, in order that He may grant me His holy love; for I desire nothing else in this world and in the next but to love Jesus. Amen.

## Friday after Quinquagesima

### Morning Meditation

"THERE IS NO PEACE FOR THE WICKED."

Peace! What peace? No, says God, *There is no peace to the wicked.* (Is. xlviii. 22). If anyone has a powerful enemy, he can neither eat nor sleep in peace; and can he who has God for an enemy, rest in peace?

I.

Not only does Solomon say that the pleasures and riches of this world are but vanities that cannot satisfy the heart, but that they are pains which afflict the spirit: *Behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.* (Eccles. i. 14). Poor sinners! They think to gain happiness by their sins, but they find only bitterness and remorse: *Destruction and unhappiness in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known.* (Ps. xiii. 3). Peace! What peace! No, says God: *There is no peace to the wicked.* (Is. xlviii. 22). In the first place, sin brings with it the terror of Divine vengeance. If anyone has a powerful enemy, he can neither eat nor sleep in peace; and can he who has God for an enemy rest in peace? *Fear to them that work evil.* (Prov. x. 29). If there is an earthquake, or if it thunders, how does not he tremble who is living in sin! Every leaf that moves alarms him: *The sound of dread is always in his ears.* (Job xv. 21). He is ever flying, though he sees not who pursues him: *The wicked man fleeth when no man pursueth.* (Prov. xxviii. 1). And who pursues him? His own sin. Cain, after he had killed his brother Abel, said: *Everyone, therefore, that findeth me shall kill me.* (Gen. iv. 14). And although the Lord assured him that no one would injure him--No, it shall not be so --yet, as the Scripture says, *Cain was always a fugitive from one place to another: He dwelt as a fugitive on the earth.* (Gen. iv. 16). What persecuted Cain but his own sin?

Moreover, sin brings with it remorse of conscience--that cruel worm that gnaws without ceasing. The wretched sinner goes to the play, the ball, the banquet; but, says his conscience: Thou art at enmity with God; and if thou wert to die, whither wouldst thou go? Remorse of conscience is so great a torment even in this life, that to rid themselves of it, some have even deliberately destroyed themselves. One of these, as we all know, was Judas,

who hanged himself in despair. It is related of another, that, having killed a child, he became a Religious to fly from the pain of remorse of conscience; but not having found peace even in Religion, he went and confessed his crime to a judge, and caused himself to be condemned to death.

O my wasted life! O my God, had I but suffered to please Thee the pains that I have suffered to offend Thee, how much merit should I not now have for Heaven! Ah, my Lord, for what did I leave Thee, and lose Thy grace? For brief and empoisoned pleasures, which vanished almost as soon as possessed, and which left my heart full of thorns and bitterness. Ah, my sins, I detest and curse you a thousand times; and I bless Thy mercy, O my God, which has borne so patiently with me. I love Thee, O my Creator and Redeemer, Who hast given Thy life for me; and because I love Thee, I repent with all my heart of having offended Thee.

## II.

God compares sinners to a stormy sea: *The wicked are like the raging sea, which cannot rest.* (Is. lvii. 20). I ask of you, if any one were taken to a musical festival, or to a ball or feast, and to be there suspended with his head downwards, could he enjoy that amusement? Such is the sinner's state whose soul is, as it were, turned upside down, being in the midst of the enjoyments of this world, but without God. He may eat, and drink, and dance; he may wear to great advantage that rich apparel, receive those honours, obtain that dignity, or those possessions, but peace he will never have: *There is no peace to the wicked.* Peace comes from God alone; and God gives it to His friends, not to His enemies.

The pleasures of this earth, says St. Vincent Ferrar, run dry; they enter not into the heart: "They are waters which penetrate not where there is thirst." The sinner may wear rich embroidered robes or a splendid diamond on his finger; he may indulge the sense of taste according to his inclination; but his poor heart will remain full of thorns and bitterness; therefore shalt thou behold him, with all his riches, pleasures, and amusements, always unquiet, and at every contradiction infuriated and angry, like a mad dog. He who loves God resigns himself under adverse events to the Divine Will, and finds peace; but he cannot do this



who is an enemy to the will of God, and therefore he has no way of tranquillising himself. The unhappy man serves the devil,--serves a tyrant who repays him with grief and bitterness. Ah, the word of God cannot fail, which says: *Because thou didst not serve the Lord thy God with joy and gladness of heart ... thou shalt serve thy enemy ... in hunger and thirst and nakedness, and in want of all things.* (Deut. xxviii. 47, 48). What does not that revengeful man suffer when he has avenged himself! That unchaste man when he has gained his object! That ambitious, that avaricious man! Oh, how many, did they but suffer for God what they suffer in order to damn themselves, would become great Saints!

My God, my God, why have I lost Thee; and for what have I exchanged Thee? I now know the evil I have done; and I resolve to lose everything, even life itself, rather than Thy love. Give me light, Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ; make me know how great a good Thou art, and how vile are those pleasures which the devil offers me to make me lose Thy grace. I love Thee; but I desire to love Thee more. Grant that Thou mayest be my only thought, my only desire, my only love. I hope all things from Thy goodness, through the merits of Thy Son. Mary, my Mother, through the love thou bearest to Jesus Christ, I implore thee to obtain for me light and strength to serve Him, and to love Him until death.

## **Spiritual Reading**

### *THE MORTIFICATION OF THE APPETITE*

St. Andrew Avellini used to say that he who wishes to advance in perfection should begin zealously to mortify the appetite. "It is impossible," says St. Gregory, "to engage in the spiritual conflict without the previous subjugation of the appetite." Father Roggacci, in his treatise on *The One Thing Necessary*, asserts that the principal part of external mortification consists in the mortification of the palate. Since the mortification of the taste consists in abstinence from food, must we then abstain altogether from eating? No; it is our duty to preserve the life of the body, that we may be able to serve God as long as He wills us to remain on earth. But, as Father Vincent Carafa used to say, we should attend to the body with the same sense of loathing as a powerful monarch would perform by compulsion the meanest

work of a servant.

"We must," says St. Francis de Sales, "eat, in order to live; but we should not live as if for the purpose of eating." Some, like beasts, appear to live only for the gratification of the palate. "A man," says St. Bernard, "becomes a beast by loving what beasts love." Whoever, like brute animals, fixes his heart on the indulgence of the appetite, falls from the dignity of a spiritual and rational creature, and sinks to the level of senseless beasts. Unhappy Adam, for the pleasure of eating an apple, is *compared to senseless beasts, and is become like to them*. In another place, St. Bernard says that, on seeing Adam forget his God and his eternal salvation for the momentary gratification of his palate, the beasts of the fields, if they could have spoken, would say: "Behold Adam is become one of us!" Hence, St. Catherine of Sienna used to say that "without mortifying the taste, it is impossible to preserve innocence; since it was by the indulgence of his appetite that Adam fell." Ah! how miserable is the condition of those *whose God is their belly*. (Philipp. iii. 19).

How many have lost their souls by intemperance! In his *Dialogues*, St. Gregory relates that in a monastery of Sienna there was a monk who seemed to lead a very exemplary life. When he was at the point of death, the Religious, expecting to be edified by his last moments, gathered around him. "Brethren," said the dying man, "when you fasted, I ate in private; and therefore I have been already delivered over to Satan who now deprives me of life and carries away my soul." After saying this he expired. The same Saint relates in another place that a certain Religious, seeing in the garden a very fine lettuce, pulled and ate it in opposition to her Rule. She was instantly possessed by a devil, who tormented her grievously. Her companions called to her aid the holy abbot Equitius, at whose arrival the demon exclaimed: "What evil have I done? I sat upon the lettuce; she came and ate it." The holy man, by his commands, compelled the evil spirit to depart. In the *Cistercian Records* we read that St. Bernard once visiting his novices called aside a Brother whose name was Acardo, and said that a certain novice, to whom he pointed, would on that day fly from the monastery. The Saint begged of Acardo to watch the novice, and to prevent his escape. On the following

night, Acardo saw a demon approach the novice, and by the savoury smell of a roasted fowl tempt him to desire forbidden food. The unhappy young man awoke, and, yielding to the temptation, took his clothes and prepared to leave the monastery. Acardo endeavoured in vain to convince him of the dangers to which he would be exposed in the world. Overcome by gluttony, the unhappy man obstinately resolved to return to the world: there, the narrator adds, he died miserably.

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### I.

The Divine Word came into the world and took to Himself human flesh in order to make Himself loved of man, and therefore He came with such a longing to suffer for our sakes that He would not lose a moment in beginning to torment Himself, at least by apprehension. Hardly was He conceived in the womb of Mary, than He represented to His mind all the sufferings of His Passion; and in order to obtain for us pardon and Divine grace, He offered Himself to His Eternal Father to satisfy through His dolours for all the chastisements due to our sins; and from that moment He began to suffer everything that He afterwards endured in His most bitter death. O my most loving Redeemer, what have I hitherto done or suffered for Thee? If I could for a thousand years endure for Thy sake all the torments that all the Martyrs have suffered, they would yet be nothing compared with that one first moment in which Thou didst offer Thyself and begin to suffer for me.

The Martyrs did indeed suffer great pains and ignominy; but they endured them only at the time of their Martyrdom. Jesus, even from the first instant of His life, continually suffered all the torments of His Passion; for, from the first moment, He had before His eyes all the horrid scene of torments and insults which He was to receive from men. Wherefore He said by the mouth of the Prophet: *My sorrow is continually before me.* (Ps. xxxvii. 18). O my Jesus, Thou hast been so eager to suffer for my sake, that Thou wouldst even endure Thy sufferings before the time; and yet, I am so greedy for the pleasures of this world. How many

times have I offended Thee in order to please my body! O my Lord, through the merits of Thy sufferings, take away from me, I beseech Thee, all affection for earthly pleasures.

## II.

God in His compassion for us does not generally reveal to us the trials that await us before the time when we are destined to endure them. If a criminal to be executed on a gibbet had revealed to him from the first use of his reason the torture that awaited him, could he ever have been capable of joy? If Saul from the beginning of his reign had had present to his mind the sword that was to pierce him, if Judas had foreseen the cord that was to suffocate him, --how bitter would their life have been. Our kind Redeemer, even from the first instant of His life, had always present before Him the scourges, the thorns, the Cross, the outrages of His Passion, the desolate death that awaited Him. When He beheld the victims which were sacrificed in the Temple, He well knew that they were figures of the sacrifice which He, the Immaculate Lamb, would one day consummate on the Altar of the Cross. When He beheld the city of Jerusalem, He well knew that He was there to lose His life in a sea of sorrows and reproaches. When He saw His dear Mother, He already imagined He saw her in an agony of suffering at the foot of the Cross, near to His dying Self. So that, O my Jesus, the horrible sight of all these evils kept Thee during the whole of Thy life continually tormented and afflicted before the time of Thy death. And Thou didst accept and suffer everything for my sake.

O my agonising Lord, the sight alone of all the sins of the world, especially of mine, by which Thou didst already foresee I should offend Thee, rendered Thy life more afflicted and painful than all the lives that have ever been or ever will be. But, O my God, in what barbarous law is it written that a God should have such great love for a creature, and yet that same creature live without loving His God, or rather, should offend and displease Him? O my Lord, make me know the greatness of Thy love, in order that I may no longer be ungrateful to Thee. Oh, if I but loved Thee, O my Jesus, --if I really loved Thee--how sweet it would be to me to suffer for Thee!

## Saturday After Quinquagesima

### Morning Meditation

#### MARY'S MARTYRDOM LIFELONG

The Passion of Jesus, as St. Bernard says, began with His Birth, so did Mary's Martyrdom endure throughout her whole life. Wherefore well might Mary say: *My life is wasted with grief and my years in sighs. My sorrow is continually before me.*

#### I.

The Passion of Jesus, as St. Bernard says, began with His Birth. So also did Mary, in all things like unto her Son, endure her Martyrdom throughout her life. Amongst other significations of the name of Mary, as Blessed Albert the Great asserts, is that of "bitter sea." *Mare amarum*. Hence to her is applicable the text of Jeremias: *Great as the sea is thy destruction*. (Lam. ii. 13). For as the sea is all bitter and salt, so also was the life of Mary always full of bitterness at the sight of the Passion of the Redeemer, which was ever present to her mind. There can be no doubt, that, enlightened by the Holy Ghost in a far higher degree than all the Prophets, she, far better than they, understood the predictions recorded by them in the sacred Scriptures concerning the Messias. This is what the Angel revealed to St. Bridget, and he also added: "that the Blessed Virgin, even before she became His Mother, knowing how much the Incarnate Word was to suffer for the salvation of men, and compassionating this innocent Saviour Who was to be so cruelly put to death for crimes not His own, even then began her great Martyrdom." Mary's grief was immeasurably increased when she became the Mother of this Saviour; so that at the sad sight of the many torments that were to be endured by her poor Son, she indeed suffered a long Martyrdom, a Martyrdom which lasted her whole life. This was signified with great exactitude to St. Bridget in a vision which she had in Rome in the church of St. Mary Major, where the Blessed Virgin with St. Simeon, and an Angel bearing a very long sword, reddened with blood, appeared to her, denoting thereby the long and bitter grief which transpierced the heart of Mary during her whole life. Whence Rupert supposes Mary thus speaking: "Redeemed souls, and my beloved children, do not pity me only

for the hour in which I beheld my dear Jesus expiring before my eyes; for the Sword of Sorrow predicted by Simeon pierced my soul during my whole life. When I was giving suck to my Son, when I was warming Him in my arms, I already foresaw the bitter death that awaited Him. Consider, then, what long and bitter sorrows I must have endured."

## II.

Wherefore, well might Mary say, in the words of David: *My life is wasted with grief, and my years in sighs.* (Ps. xxx. 11). *My sorrow is continually before me.* (Ps. xxxvii. 18). "My whole life was spent in sorrow and in tears; for my sorrow, which was compassion for my beloved Son, never departed from before my eyes, as I always foresaw the sufferings and death which He was one day to endure." The Divine Mother herself revealed to St. Bridget, that even after the Death and Ascension of her Son, whether she ate, or worked, the remembrance of His Passion was ever deeply fixed in her heart, and ever fresh in her memory. Hence Tauler says that the most Blessed Virgin spent her whole life in continual sorrow; for her heart was always occupied with sadness and suffering.

Therefore time, which usually mitigates the sorrows of the afflicted, did not relieve Mary; nay, it even increased her sorrows; for, as Jesus, on the one hand, advanced in age, and always appeared more and more beautiful and amiable; so also, on the other hand, the time of His death ever drew nearer, and grief always increased in the heart of Mary, at the thought of having to lose Him on earth. In the words addressed by the holy Angel to St. Bridget: "As the rose grows up amongst thorns, so the Mother of God advanced in years in the midst of suffering: and as the thorns increase with the growth of the rose, so also did the thorns of her sorrow increase in Mary, the chosen rose of the Lord, as she advanced in age; and so much the more deeply did they pierce her heart."

## Spiritual Reading

### MORTIFICATION OF THE APPETITE

Let us take care not to be conquered by this brutal vice of gluttony. St. Augustine says that food is necessary for the support of life, but, like medicine, it should be taken only through

necessity. Intemperance is very injurious to the body as well as to the soul. It is certain that excess in eating is the cause of almost all the diseases of the body, for stomach complaints and very many other maladies spring from the immoderate use of food. But the diseases of the body are only a small part of the evils that flow from intemperance; its effects on the soul are far more disastrous. This vice, according to St. Thomas, in the first place, darkens the soul, and renders it unfit for spiritual exercises, but particularly for mental prayer. As fasting prepares the mind for the contemplation of God and of eternal goods, so intemperance diverts it from holy thoughts. St. John Chrysostom says that the glutton, like an overloaded ship, moves with difficulty, and that in the first tempest of temptation he is in danger of being lost. "Take," says St. Bernard, "even bread with moderation, lest a loaded stomach should make you weary of prayer." And again he says: "If you compel a person who takes a heavy meal to watch, you will extort from him wailing rather than singing." Hence it is a duty to eat sparingly, and particularly at supper: for whoever satisfies his appetite in the evening, is exposed to great danger of excess; and, in consequence of indigestion, will frequently feel the stomach over-burdened in the morning, and his head so stupid and confused that he will not be able to say a "Hail Mary." Do not imagine that the Almighty will, at the time of prayer infuse His consolations into the souls of those who, like senseless beasts, seek delight in the indulgence of the appetite. "Divine consolation," says St. Bernard, "is not given to those that admit any other delight." Celestial consolations are not bestowed on those that go in search of earthly pleasures.

Besides, he that gratifies the taste will readily indulge the other senses; for, having lost the spirit of recollection, he will easily commit faults, by indecent words and by unbecoming gestures. But the greatest evil of intemperance is, that it exposes chastity to great danger. "Repletion of the stomach," says St. Jerome, "is the hotbed of lust." Excess in eating is a powerful incentive to incontinence. Hence, Cassian says that "it is impossible for him who satiates his appetite not to experience conflicts." The intemperate cannot expect to be free from temptations against purity. To preserve chastity, the Saints practised the most rigor-

ous mortifications of the appetite. "The devil," says St. Thomas, "vanquished by temperance, does not tempt to lust." When his temptations to indulge the palate are conquered, he ceases to provoke incontinence.

He that attends to the abnegation of the appetite makes continual progress in virtue. That the mortification of the palate will facilitate the conquest of the other senses, and enable us to employ them in acts of virtue, may be inferred from the following Prayer of the Church: "O God, Who by this bodily fast extinguishest our vices, elevatest our understanding, bestowest on us virtue and its reward, etc." By fasting, the Lord enables the soul to subdue her vices, to raise her affections above the earth, to practise virtue, and to acquire merits for eternity.

Worldlings say: God has created the goods of this earth for our use and pleasure. Such is not the language of the Saints. The Venerable Vincent Carafa, of the Society of Jesus, used to say that God has given us the goods of the earth, not only that we may enjoy them, but also that we may have the means of thanking Him, and showing Him our love by the voluntary renunciation of His gifts, and by the oblation of them to His glory. To abandon, for God's sake, all worldly enjoyments, has always been the practice of holy souls.

## **Evening Meditation**

### *REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

#### I.

Jesus appeared one day on the Cross to Sister Magdalen Orsini, who had been suffering for some time from some great affliction, and animated her to suffer it in peace. The servant of God answered, "But, Lord, Thou didst hang on the Cross for only three hours, whereas I have gone on suffering this pain for several years." Jesus Christ then said to her reproachingly, "O ignorant that thou art, what dost thou mean? From the first moment that I was in My Mother's womb, I suffered in My Heart all that I afterwards endured on the Cross." And I, my dear Redeemer, how can I, at the sight of the great sufferings which Thou didst endure for my sake, during Thy whole life, complain of those crosses which Thou dost send me for my good?



I thank Thee for having redeemed me with so much love and such sufferings. In order to animate me to suffer with patience the pains of this life, Thou didst take upon Thyself all our evils. O my Lord, grant that Thy sorrows may be ever present to my mind, in order that I may always accept and desire to suffer for Thy love.

*Great as the sea is thy destruction.* (Lam. ii. 13). As the waters of the sea are all salt and bitter, so the life of Jesus Christ was full of bitterness and void of all consolation, as He Himself declared to St. Margaret of Cortona. Moreover, as all the waters of the earth unite in the sea, so did all the sufferings of men unite in Jesus Christ; wherefore He said by the mouth of the Psalmist, *Save me, O God, for the waters are come in even unto my soul. I am come into the depth of the sea, and a tempest hath overwhelmed me.* (Ps. lxxviii. 2, 3). Save me, O God, for sorrows have entered in even to the innermost parts of my soul, and I am left submerged in a tempest of ignominy and of sufferings, both interior and exterior.

O my dearest Jesus, my Love, my Life, my All, if I behold from without Thy Sacred Body, I see nothing else but wounds. But if I enter into Thy desolate Heart, I find nothing but bitterness and sorrows, which made Thee suffer the agonies of death. O my Lord, and who but Thee, Who art infinite Goodness, would ever suffer so much, and die for one of Thy creatures? But because Thou art God, Thou dost love as a God alone can love, with a love which cannot be equalled by any other love.

## II.

St. Bernard says, "In order to redeem the slave, the Father did not spare His own Son, nor did the Son spare Himself." O infinite love of God! On the one hand the Eternal Father required of Jesus Christ to satisfy for all the sins of men: *The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.* (Is. liii. 6). On the other hand, Jesus, in order to save men in the most loving way that He could, chose to take upon Himself the utmost penalty due to Divine justice for our sins. Wherefore, as St. Thomas asserts, He took upon Himself in the highest degree all the sufferings and outrages that ever were borne. It was on this account that Isaías called Him *a man of sorrows, despised, and the most abject of men.* (Is. liii. 3). And

with reason: for Jesus was tormented in all the members and senses of His Body, and was still more bitterly afflicted in all the powers of His Soul; so that the internal pains which He endured infinitely surpassed His external sufferings. Behold Him, then, torn, bloodless; treated as an impostor, as a sorcerer, a madman; abandoned even by His friends, and finally persecuted by all, until He finished His life upon an infamous gibbet.

*Know you what I have done to you?* (John xiii. 12). O my Lord, I do indeed know how much Thou hast done and suffered for my sake; but Thou knowest, alas, that I have hitherto done nothing for Thee. My Jesus, help me to suffer something for Thy love before death overtakes me. I am ashamed of appearing before Thee; but I will no longer be ungrateful, as I have been so many years towards Thee. Thou hast deprived Thyself of every pleasure for me; I will for the love of Thee renounce all the pleasures of the senses. Thou hast suffered so many pains for me; I will for Thy sake suffer all the pains of my life and of my death as it shall best please Thee. Thou hast been forsaken; I will be content that all should forsake me, provided Thou dost not forsake me, O my only and Sovereign Good. Thou hast been persecuted; I accept whatever persecution may befall me. Finally, Thou hast died for me; I will die for Thee. O my Jesus, my Treasure, my Love, my All, I love Thee. Oh, give me more love! Amen.

## **First Sunday of Lent**

### **Morning Meditation**

*"THOU SHALT NOT TEMPT THE LORD THY GOD."*

God, as the Apostle says, *will have all men to be saved.* (1 Tim. ii. 4). But God wishes us all to labour for our salvation by adopting the means of overcoming our enemies, and by obeying His voice calling us to repentance. The sinner who abandons himself to sin without an effort to resist temptations, without at least asking God's help to conquer, and hopes that the Lord will one day draw him forth out of the precipice, tempts God to work miracles and to show him an extraordinary mercy not generally extended to Christians. *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God!* (Matt. iv. 7).

I.

If God were to immediately chastise those who offend Him, He certainly would not be insulted as He now is: but because the Lord does not punish instantly, and delays, therefore do sinners take courage to offend Him all the more! We must, however, be assured that although God waits and endures, yet He does not wait and endure for ever. It is the opinion of many of the holy Fathers, of St. Basil, St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, and others, that as God has determined for each man the number of days he has to live, and the degrees of health or talents He chooses to bestow on him, *Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight* (Wis. xi. 21); so also has He determined the number of sins He will pardon in each one: when that number is filled up, He pardons no more. "We should remember this," says St. Augustine, "that for a certain time the patience of God bears with each one; that time being completed, no more pardon is reserved for him." Eusebius of Caesarea says the same: "God waits up to a certain number, and afterwards abandons"; and so speak also the above-named Fathers.

These Fathers have not spoken at random, but according to the Holy Scriptures. In one place the Lord says that He delayed the ruin of the Amorrrhites because the number of their sins was not yet filled up: *For as yet the iniquities of the Amorrrhites are not at the full.* (Gen. xv. 16). In another He says: *I will have no more compassion upon Israel.* (Os. i. 6). *They have tempted me ten times; they shall not see the land of promise.* (Num. xiv. 22). In another place, Job says: *Thou hast sealed up my offences as it were in, a bag.* (Job xiv. 17). Sinners keep no account of their sins; but God indeed keeps it, that He may chastise when the harvest is ripe, that is, when the number is filled up: *Put ye in the sickles, for the harvest is ripe.* (Joel iii. 13). In another place, God says: *Be not without fear about sin forgiven, and add not sin upon sin.* (Ecclus. v. 5). By which He would say: "Sinner, thou must fear even for the sins I have forgiven thee, because if thou addest another, it may be that the new sin, together with those pardoned, will complete the number, and there will then be no more mercy for thee." In another place, the Scripture still more plainly says: *The Lord waiteth patiently, that when the day of judgment shall come he may punish them*

(*that is, the nations*) in the fulness of their sins.(2 Mach. vi. 14). So that God waits until the day in which the measure of sins is filled up, and then He punishes.

Ah, my God, I thank Thee: how many for fewer sins than mine are now in hell: and there is no more pardon, no more hope for them. And I still live! I am not in hell, and I have the hope of pardon and of Heaven, if I so desire. Yes, my God, I do desire pardon; I grieve above every evil for having offended Thee, because I have offended Thy infinite Goodness. Eternal Father, look upon Thy Son upon the Cross dead for my sake, and through His merits have pity on me. I promise Thee to choose death rather than offend Thee again.

## II.

Of such punishment there are many examples in Scripture, especially that of Saul, who for his last disobedience was abandoned by God. When he pleaded with Samuel to intercede for him: *Bear, I beseech thee, my sin, and return with me, that I may adore the Lord*, Samuel replied, *I will not return with thee, because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee*. There is the example of Balthassar, who being at table profaned the vessels of the temple; and he then saw a hand which wrote on the wall, *Mane, Thecel, Phares*. Daniel came, and explaining these words, said to him, among other things, *Thou art weighed in the balance and art found wanting*. (Dan. v. 27). Giving him to understand that the weight of his sins had already sunk the scale of Divine justice; and in effect he was destroyed that same night. And oh, to how many miserable sinners does the same happen! They live on for years in their sins; but when their number is filled up, they are overtaken by death and condemned to hell: *They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down into hell*. (Job xxi. 13). Some apply themselves to searching out the number of the stars, the number of Angels, or of the years of such a one; but who can set about to discover the number of sins that God will pardon in each of us? And therefore must we tremble. Who knows, but that after that first criminal pleasure, that first thought consented to, that first sin which you shall commit, God will never again forgive you?

Well may I fear, O God, when I think of the sins I have com-

mitted, and the graces Thou hast bestowed on me, that should I add another sin, the measure would be filled up, and I should be lost. Ah, assist me by Thy grace. From Thee I hope for light and strength to be faithful to Thee. And if perchance Thou foreseest that I shall again offend Thee, let me die at this moment, in which I hope I am in Thy grace. My God, I love Thee above all things, and more than death itself I fear again to incur Thy displeasure; in mercy permit it not. Mary, my Mother, by thy compassion assist me; obtain for me holy perseverance.

### **Spiritual Reading**

*"ADD NOT SIN TO SIN."*

In this day's Gospel we read that, having gone into the desert, Jesus Christ permitted the devil to *set him upon the pinnacle of the temple*, and say to Him: *If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down* (Matt. iv. 6); for the Angels shall preserve Thee from all injury. But the Lord answered that in the Sacred Scriptures it is written: *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*.

The sinner who abandons himself to sin without striving to resist temptations or without at least asking God's help to conquer them, and hopes that the Lord will one day draw him forth out of the precipice, tempts God to work miracles, or rather to show to him an extraordinary mercy not extended to the generality of Christians. God, as the Apostle says, *will have all men to be saved* (1 Tim. ii. 4); but He also wishes us all to labour for our own salvation, or at least to adopt the means of overcoming our enemies, and to obey God when He calls us to repentance. Sinners hear the calls of God, but they forget them, and continue to offend Him. But God does not forget them. He numbers the many graces He dispenses, as well as the many sins we commit. Hence, when the time which He has fixed arrives, God deprives us of His graces, and begins to inflict chastisement.

*The Lord hath sent me to heal the contrite of heart.* (Is. lxi. 1).

God is ready to heal those who sincerely wish to amend their lives, but He cannot take pity on the obstinate sinner. The Lord pardons sins, but He cannot pardon sinners who are determined to offend Him. Nor can we demand from God a reason why He pardons one a hundred sins, and takes others out of life, and condemns them to hell after three or four sins. By His Prophet

Amos, God has said: *For three crimes of Damascus, and for four, I will not convert it.* (Amos. i. 3). In this we must adore the judgments of God, and say with the Apostle: *O the depth of the riches, of the wisdom, and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments.* (Rom. xi. 33). He who receives pardon, says St. Augustine, is pardoned through the pure mercy of God; and they who are chastised are justly punished.

How many has God sent to hell for the first offence! St. Gregory relates that a child of five years who had arrived at the use of reason, for having uttered a blasphemy, was seized by the devil and carried to hell. The Divine Mother revealed to that great servant of God Benedicta of Florence, that a boy of twelve years was damned after the first sin. Another boy of eight years died after his first sin and was lost. You say: I am young; there are many who have committed more sins than I have. But is God on that account obliged to wait for your repentance if you offend Him? In the Gospel of St. Matthew we read, that the Saviour cursed a fig-tree the first time He saw it without fruit. *May no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever. And immediately the fig-tree withered away.* (Matt. xxi. 19). You must, then, tremble at the thought of committing a single mortal sin, particularly if you have already been guilty of mortal sins.

*Be not without fear about sins forgiven, and add not sin to sin.* (Ecclus. v. 5). Say not then, O sinner: As God has forgiven me other sins, so He will pardon me this one if I commit it. Speak not thus; for, if to the sin which has been forgiven you add another, you have reason to fear that this new sin will be united to your former guilt, and that thus the number will be completed, and that you will be abandoned. Sinners multiply their sins without keeping any account of them; but God numbers them, that when the harvest is ripe, that is, when the number of sins is completed, He may take vengeance on them. *Put ye in the sickles for the harvest is ripe.* (Joel iii. 13).

Of this there are many examples in the Scriptures. Speaking of the Hebrews, the Lord in one place says: *All the men that have tempted me now ten times ... shall not see the land.* (Num. xiv. 22, 23). In another place He says that he restrained His vengeance against the Amorrites, because the number of their sins was

not completed. *For as yet the iniquities of the Amorrrhites are not at the full.* (Gen. xv. 16). We have, again, the example of Saul, who, after having disobeyed God a second time, was abandoned. He entreated Samuel to interpose before the Lord in his behalf. *Bear, I beseech thee, my sin, and return with me, that I may adore the Lord.* But, knowing that God had abandoned Saul, Samuel answered: *I will not return with thee, because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee.* (1 Kings xv. 25). Saul, you have abandoned God, and He has abandoned you. We have another example in Balthassar, who, after having profaned the vessels of the Temple, saw a hand writing on the wall: *Mane, Thecel, Phares.* Daniel was requested to expound the meaning of these words. In explaining the word *Thecel*, he said to the king: *Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting.* (Dan. v. 27). By this explanation he gave the king to understand that the weight of his sins in the balance of Divine justice had made the scale descend. *The same night, Balthassar, the Chaldean king, was killed.* (Dan. v. 30).

Oh, how many sinners have met with a similar fate! Continuing to offend God till their sins amounted to a certain number, they have been struck dead and sent to hell. *They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment they go down to hell.* (Job xxi. 13). Tremble lest, if you commit another mortal sin, God should cast you into hell.

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### I.

Oh, how exceedingly tender, loving, and constraining was that declaration of our Blessed Redeemer concerning His coming into the world, when He said that He had come to kindle in souls the fire of Divine love, and that His only desire was that this holy flame should be enkindled in the hearts of men: *I am come to cast fire upon the earth; and what will I but that it should be kindled?* (Luke xii. 49). He continued immediately to say that He was expecting to be baptised with the baptism of His own Blood—not, indeed to wash out His own sins, since He was incapable of sinning, but to wash out our sins, which He had come to satisfy

for by His sufferings: "The Passion of Christ is called baptism, because we are purified in His Blood." And, therefore, our loving Jesus, in order to make us understand how ardent was His desire to die for us, added, with sweetest expression of His love, that He felt an immense longing for the time of His Passion, so great was His desire to suffer for our sakes. These are His loving words: *I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptised; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?* (Luke xii. 50).

O God, the Lover of men, what more couldst Thou have said or done in order to put me under the necessity of loving Thee? And what good could my love ever do Thee, that Thou didst choose to die, and didst so much desire death in order to obtain it? If a servant of mine had only desired to die for me, he would have attracted my love; and can I then live without loving Thee with all my heart, my King and God, Who didst die for me, and Who hadst such a longing for death in order to acquire to Thyself my love?

## II.

*Jesus, knowing that his hour was come that he should pass out of the world to the Father, having loved his own, ... he loved them unto the end.* (John xiii. 1). St. John says that Jesus called the hour of His Passion *His* hour; because, as a devout commentator writes, this was the time for which our Redeemer had most sighed during His whole life; because by suffering and dying for men, He desired to make them understand the immense love that He bore to them: "That is the hour of the lover, in which he suffers for the object beloved"; because suffering for the beloved is the most fitting way of discovering the love of the lover, and of captivating to ourselves the love of the beloved. O my dearest Jesus, in order to show me the great love Thou bearest me, Thou wouldst not commit the work of my redemption to any other than Thyself. Was my love, then, of such consequence to Thee, that Thou wouldst suffer so much in order to gain it? Oh, what more couldst Thou have done if Thou hadst had to gain to Thyself the love of Thy Divine Father? What more could a servant endure to acquire to himself the affections of his master than what Thou hast suffered in order that Thou mayest be loved by me, a vile, ungrateful slave?



## Monday -- First Week of Lent

### Morning Meditation

*GOD IS MERCIFUL, YET MANY ARE LOST EVERY DAY.*

God is merciful! Yes; the mercy of God is infinite; but with all that mercy, how many are lost every day! *I come to heal the contrite of heart!* God heals those sinners who have a good will. He pardons their sins, but He cannot pardon their determination to go on sinning.

I.

The sinner says: But God is merciful. I reply: Who denies it? The mercy of God is infinite; but with all that mercy, how many are lost every day! *I come to heal the contrite of heart.* (Is. lxi. 1). God heals those who have a good will. He pardons sin; but He cannot pardon the determination to sin. The sinner will reply: But I am young. You are young; but God does not count years, but sins. And this reckoning of sins is not the same for all. In one, God pardons a hundred sins, in another a thousand, another He casts into hell after the second sin. How many has the Lord sent there at the first sin! St. Gregory relates that a child of five years old was cast into hell for uttering a blasphemy. The Blessed Virgin revealed to that great servant of God, Benedicta of Florence, that a girl of twelve years old was condemned for her first sin. Another child of eight years sinned, and after his first sin, died and was lost. We are told in the Gospel of St. Matthew, that the Lord immediately cursed the fig-tree the first time that He found it without fruit, and it withered: *May no fruit grow on thee forever!* (Matt. xxi. 19). Another time God said: *For three crimes of Damascus, and for four, I will not convert it.* (Amos i. 3). Some presumptuous man may perhaps ask the reason of God why He pardons three and not four sins. In this we must adore the Divine judgments of God, and say with the Apostle: *O the depth of the riches, of the wisdom, and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments, and how unsearchable his ways!* (Rom. xi. 33). St. Augustine says: "He well knows whom He pardons and whom He does not pardon; when He shows mercy to any one, it is gratuitous on His part; and when He denies it, He denies it justly."

The obstinate sinner will reply: But I have so often offend-

ed God, and He has pardoned me; I hope, therefore, He will pardon me this other sin. But I say: And because God has not hitherto punished you, is it always to be thus? The measure will be filled up, and the chastisement will come. Samson, continuing his wanton conduct with Dalila, hoped nevertheless to escape from the hands of the Philistines, as he had done before; *I will go out as I did before and shake myself*. (Jud. xvi. 20). But that last time he was taken, and lost his life. *Say not, I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me?* Say not, says the Lord, I have committed so many sins, and God has never punished me: *For the Most High is a patient rewarder*. (Ecclus. v. 4). That is, the time will come when He will repay all; and the greater His mercy has been, so much the greater will be the punishment.

When I am tempted, O my merciful God, I will instantly and always have recourse to Thee. Hitherto I have trusted in my promises and my resolutions, and I have neglected to recommend myself to Thee in my temptations; and this has been my ruin. No; from this day henceforth Thou shalt be my hope and my strength; and thus shall I be able to accomplish all things. Give me the grace, then, through Thy merits, O my Jesus, to recommend myself always to Thee, and to implore Thy aid in my necessities. I love Thee, O my Sovereign Good, amiable above all that is amiable, and Thee only will I love; but Thou must help me. And thou also, O Mary my Mother, thou must help me by thy intercession; keep me under the mantle of thy protection, and grant that I may always call upon thee when I am tempted; thy name shall be my defence.

## II.

St. Chrysostom says, that we ought to fear more when God bears with the obstinate sinner than when He punishes him: "There is more cause to fear when He forbears than when He quickly punishes"; because, according to St. Gregory, God punishes more rigorously those whom He waits for with most patience, if they remain ungrateful: "Whom He waits for the longer He the more severely condemns." Often, adds the Saint, do those whom He has borne with for a long time die suddenly at last, without having time to be converted: "Often those who have been borne with a long time are snatched away by sudden

death, so that it is not permitted them to shed a tear before they die." Especially, the greater the light which God has given you has been, the greater will be your blindness and obstinacy in sin: *For it had been better for them* (said St. Peter) *not to have known the way of justice, than after they had known it, to turn back.* (2 Peter ii. 21). And St. Paul said, that it is impossible (morally speaking) for a soul that sins after being enlightened to be again converted: *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift ... and are fallen away, to be renewed again unto penance.* (Heb. vi. 4, 6).

Terrible, indeed, is what the Lord says against those who are deaf to His calls: *Because I have called and you have refused ... I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock when that shall come to you which you feared.* (Prov. i. 24, 26). Take notice of those two words, *I also*; they signify that as the sinner has mocked God, confessing, promising, and yet always betraying Him, so the Lord will mock him at the hour of death. Moreover, the Wise Man says: *As a dog that returneth to his vomit, so is the fool that repeateth his folly.* (Prov. xxvi. 11). So he who relapses into the sins he has detested in Confession, becomes odious to God.

Behold me, O my God, at Thy feet. I am that loathsome sinner who so often returned to feed upon the forbidden fruit which I had before detested. I do not deserve mercy, O my Redeemer; but the Blood Thou hast shed for me encourages and compels me to hope for it. How often have I offended Thee, and Thou hast pardoned me! I have promised never again to offend Thee; and yet I have returned to the vomit, and Thou hast again pardoned me. Do I wait, then, for Thee to send me straight to hell—or to give me over to my sins which would be a greater punishment than hell? No, my God, I will amend; and that I may be faithful to Thee, I will place all my trust in Thee.

### **Spiritual Reading**

*SAY NOT: "I HAVE SINNED AND WHAT EVIL HATH BEFALLEN ME?"*

If God chastised sinners the moment they insult Him, we should not see Him so much despised. But, because He does not instantly punish their transgressions, and because, through mercy, He restrains His anger and waits for their return, they

are encouraged to continue to offend Him. *For, because sentence is not speedily pronounced against the evil, the children of men commit evils without any fear.* (Eccles. viii. 11). But it is necessary to be persuaded that, though God bears with us, He does not wait, nor bear with us forever. Expecting, as on former occasions, to escape from the snares of the Philistines, Samson continued to allow himself to be deluded by Dalila. *I will go out as I did before, and shake myself.* (Jud. xvi. 20). But the Lord was departed from him. Samson was at last taken by his enemies, and lost his life. The Lord warns you not to say: I have committed so many sins, and God has not chastised me. *Say not: I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me? for the Most High is a patient rewarder.* (Ecclus. v. 4). God has patience for a certain term, after which He punishes all your sins; the first and the last. And the greater has been His patience, the more severe His vengeance.

Hence according to St. John Chrysostom, God is more to be feared when He bears with sinners than when He instantly punishes their sins. And why? Because, says St. Gregory, they to whom God has shown most mercy, shall, if they do not cease to offend Him, be chastised with the greatest rigour. The Saint adds that God often punishes such sinners with a sudden death, and does not allow them time for repentance. And the greater the light God gives certain sinners for their correction, the greater is their blindness and obstinacy in sin. *For it had been better for them not to have known the way of justice, than, after they had known it, to turn back.* (2 Pet. ii. 21). Miserable the sinners who, after having been enlightened, return to the vomit. St. Paul says, that it is morally impossible for them to be again converted. *For it is impossible for those who were once illuminated-have tasted also the heavenly gifts, ... and are fallen away, to be renewed again to penance.* (Heb. vi. 4).

Listen, then, to the admonition of the Lord: *My son, hast thou sinned? Do so no more, but for thy former sins pray that they may be forgiven thee.* (Ecclus. xxi. 1). My child, add not sins to those which you have already committed, but be careful to pray for the pardon of your past transgressions; otherwise, if you commit another mortal sin, the door of the Divine Mercy may be closed against you, and your soul may be lost forever. When, then, the

devil tempts you again to yield to sin, say to yourself: If God pardons me no more, what shall become of me for all eternity? Should the devil, in reply, say: "Fear not, God is merciful," answer him by saying: What certainty or what probability have I, that, if I return again to sin, God will show me mercy or grant me pardon? Behold the threat of the Lord against all who despise His calls: *Behold I have called and you refused ... I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock when that shall come to you which you feared.* (Prov. i. 24). Mark the words *I also*; they mean that, as you have mocked the Lord by betraying Him again after your Confession and promises of amendment, so He will mock you at the hour of death. *I will laugh and will mock.* But *God is not mocked.* (Gal. vi. 7).

O folly of sinners! If you purchase a house, you spare no pains to get all the securities necessary to guard against loss; if you take medicine, you are careful to assure yourself that it cannot injure you; if you pass over a river, you carefully avoid all danger of falling into it; and, for a transitory enjoyment, for the gratification of revenge, for a brutal pleasure, which lasts but a moment, you risk your eternal salvation, saying: "I will go to Confession after I commit this sin!" And when, I ask, are you to go to Confession? You say: "Tomorrow." But who promises you tomorrow? Who assures you that you shall have time for Confession, and that God will not deprive you of life, as He has deprived so many others, in the act of sin? "Are you sure of a whole day," says St. Augustine, "and you cannot be sure of an hour?" You cannot be certain of living for another hour, and you say: "I will go for Confession tomorrow!" Listen to the words of St. Gregory: "He who has promised pardon to penitents, has not promised tomorrow to sinners." God has promised pardon to all who repent; but He has not promised to wait till tomorrow for those who insult Him. Perhaps God will give you time for repentance, but perhaps He will not. But, should He not give it, what shall become of your soul? In the meantime, for the sake of a miserable pleasure, you lose the grace of God, and expose yourself to the danger of being lost forever.

Would you, for such transient enjoyments, risk your money, your honour, your possessions, your liberty, and your life? No;

you would not. How, then, does it happen that, for a miserable gratification, you risk your soul, Heaven and God? Tell me: Do you believe that *Heaven, Hell, Eternity*, are *Truths of Faith*? Do you believe that, if you die in sin, you are lost forever? Oh, what temerity, what folly, to condemn yourself voluntarily to an Eternity of torment with the hope of afterwards reversing the sentence of your condemnation! "No one," says St. Augustine, "wishes to fall sick with the hope of getting well." No one can be found so foolish as to take poison with the hope of preventing its deadly effects by adopting the ordinary remedies. And you will condemn yourself to hell, saying that you expect to be afterwards preserved from it. O folly! which, in conformity with the Divine threats, has brought, and brings every day, so many to hell. *Thou hast trusted in thy wickedness, and evil shall come upon thee, and thou shalt not know the rising thereof.* (Is. xlvii. 10). You have sinned, trusting rashly in the Divine mercy; the punishment of your guilt shall fall suddenly upon you, and you shall not know from whence it comes.

What do you say? What resolution do you make? If, after reading this, you do not firmly resolve to give yourself to God, I weep over you, and regard you as lost.

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### I.

Now behold our loving Jesus already on the point of being sacrificed on the altar of the Cross for our salvation, in that blessed night which preceded His Passion. Let us hear Him saying to His Disciples at the last supper that He takes with them, *With desire have I desired to eat this pasch with you.* (Luke xxii. 15). St. Laurence Justinian, considering these words, asserts that they were all words of love: "With desire have I desired; this is the voice of love." As if our loving Redeemer had said, O men, know that this night, in which My Passion will begin, has been the time most longed after by Me during the whole of My life; because I shall now make known to you, through My sufferings and My bitter death, how much I love you, and will thereby oblige you to love Me, in the strongest way it is possible for Me

to do. A certain author says that in the Passion of Jesus Christ the Divine Omnipotence united itself to Love, --Love sought to love man to the utmost extent that Omnipotence could arrive at; and Omnipotence sought to satisfy Love as far as its desire could reach.

O Sovereign God! Thou hast given Thyself entirely to me; and how, then, shall I not love Thee with my whole self? I believe, --yes, I believe Thou hast died for me; and how can I, then, love Thee so little as constantly to forget Thee, and all that Thou hast suffered for me? And why, Lord, when I think on Thy Passion, am I not quite inflamed with Thy love, and do not, then, become entirely Thine, like so many holy souls who, after meditating on Thy sufferings, have remained the happy prey of Thy love, and have given themselves entirely to Thee?

## II.

The spouse in the Canticles said that whenever her Spouse introduced her into the sacred cellar of His Passion, she saw herself so assaulted on all sides by Divine love, that, all languishing with love, she was constrained to seek relief for her wounded heart: *The king brought me into the cellar of wine, he set in order charity in me. Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples; because I languish with love.* (Cant. ii 4, 5). And how is it possible for a soul to enter upon the meditation of the Passion of Jesus Christ without being wounded, as by so many darts of love, by those sufferings and agonies which so greatly afflicted the Body and Soul of our loving Lord, and without being sweetly constrained to love Him Who loved her so much? O Immaculate Lamb, thus lacerated, covered with Blood, and disfigured, as I behold Thee on this Cross, how beautiful and how worthy of love dost Thou appear to me! Yes, because all these wounds that I behold in Thee are so many signs and proofs of the great love Thou bearest to me. Oh, if all men did but contemplate Thee often in that state in which Thou wert one day made a spectacle to all Jerusalem, who could help being seized with Thy love? O my beloved Lord, accept me to love Thee, since I give Thee all my senses and all my will. And how can I refuse Thee anything, if Thou hast not refused me Thy Blood, Thy life, and all Thyself?

## Tuesday -- First Week of Lent

### Morning Meditation

*"MY SON, HAST THOU SINNED? DO SO NO MORE."*

The more you have offended God, so much the more should you fear to offend Him again. I do not say absolutely that after another sin there will be no more pardon for you, because this I know not. But I say that *it may happen*. Therefore, when you are tempted to sin, say: But supposing God should pardon me no more, and I should be lost!

I.

*My son, hast thou sinned? do so no more; but for thy former sins, pray that they may be forgiven thee.* (Ecclus. xxi. 1). Behold, dear Christian, the advice your good Lord gives you, because He desires your salvation: My son, do not offend Me any more; but from this day henceforth be mindful to ask pardon for your past offences. The more you have offended God, so much the more must you fear to offend Him again, because the next sin you commit may sink the scale of Divine Justice, and you will be lost. I do not absolutely say that after another sin there will be no more pardon for you, because this I know not; but I say that it may happen. Therefore, when you are tempted, say: But supposing God should no more pardon me, and I should be lost! I pray you tell me, if it were probable that a certain food contained poison, would you take it? If with probability you believed that on a certain road your enemies lay in wait to take your life, would you pass that way, having another more secure? And thus what certainty, nay, what probability is there, that if you again sin, you will afterwards have a true sorrow, and will not return to the sin? And that in sinning God will not strike you dead in the very act of sin, or that He will not abandon you after it?

If you buy a house, you take all care to obtain proper securities, and not to throw away your money. If you take medicine, you endeavour to be well assured that it cannot injure you. If you have to pass a torrent, you try to secure yourself from falling into it. And yet for a miserable gratification, for a brutal pleasure, you risk your eternal salvation, saying, I hope to confess it. But I ask of you: When will you confess it? On Sunday. And who prom-



ises you to live till Sunday? Tomorrow. And who promises you this tomorrow? St. Augustine says: "Do you cling to a day, when you are not sure of an hour?" How can you promise yourself to confess tomorrow, when you know not whether you will have even another hour to live? "He Who has promised pardon to the penitent, has not promised a tomorrow to the sinner: perhaps He will grant it, perhaps He will not." God, continues the Saint, has promised pardon to those who repent; but He has not promised a tomorrow to those who offend Him. If you now sin, perhaps God will give you time to do penance, and perhaps not; and should He not give it you, what will become of you for all eternity? In the meantime you already lose your soul for a wretched pleasure, and incur the peril of losing it for ever.

Behold, O Lord, one of those madmen who so often has lost his soul and Thy grace, in the hope of recovering it! And if Thou hadst taken me in that moment, and in those nights when I was in sin, what would have become of me? I thank Thy mercy which has waited for me, and which now makes me sensible of my folly. I see that Thou desirest my salvation, and I desire to be saved. I repent, O Infinite Goodness, of having so often turned my back on Thee; I love Thee with my whole heart. I hope, through the merits of Thy Passion, O my Jesus, to be no longer so foolish; pardon me speedily, and receive me into Thy favour, for I wish never more to leave Thee.

## II.

Would you risk a thousand crowns for that vile gratification? I say more: Would you for that momentary gratification cast away all--money, houses, estates, liberty, and life? No. And how, then, can you for that wretched pleasure in one moment make shipwreck of all--soul, Heaven, and God? Tell me, are these things, taught by Faith--that there is a Heaven, a Hell, an Eternity--Truths, or are they fables? Do you believe that, if death should overtake you in sin, you will be lost for ever? And what temerity, what madness, to condemn yourself to an eternity of pain, saying: I hope afterwards to repair it. "No one wishes to fall ill in the hope of being cured," says St. Augustine. No one is so mad as to take poison and say: Perhaps I shall afterwards be cured by remedies; and you choose to condemn yourself to an

eternal death, saying: Perhaps I shall afterwards deliver myself from it! O folly, which has cast, and casts, so many souls into hell! According to the threat of the Lord: *Thou hast trusted in thy wickedness ... evil shall come upon thee; and thou shalt not know the rising thereof.* (Is. xlvii. 10, 11). Thou hast sinned, confiding rashly in the Divine mercy; and the punishment will fall suddenly on Thee, without Thy knowing whence it comes.

In thee, O Lord, have I hoped; let me not be confounded for ever. Ah, no! I hope, O my Redeemer, never again to suffer the disgrace and confusion of finding myself deprived of Thy grace and Thy love. Give me holy perseverance; and grant that I may always ask it of Thee, especially when tempted, calling for aid upon Thy Holy Name, and that of Thy holy Mother, saying: My Jesus, help me; my Mother Mary, help me! Yes, O my Queen, for as long as I have recourse to thee I shall never be conquered. And if the temptation should continue, obtain for me that I may never cease persisting in calling upon thee.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *MORTIFICATION OF THE APPETITE*

The ancient monks, as St. Jerome relates, thought it a great abuse to make use of food cooked by fire. Their daily sustenance consisted of a pound of bread. St. Aloysius, though always sickly, fasted three times in the week on bread and water. St. Francis Xavier, during his missions, was satisfied each day with a few grains of toasted rice. St. John Francis Regis, in the great fatigues of his missions, took no other food than a little flour steeped in water. The daily support of St. Peter of Alcantara was but a small quantity of broth. We read in the *Life* of the Venerable Brother John Joseph of the Cross, who lived in our own days, and with whom I was intimately acquainted, that for twenty-four years he fasted very often on bread and water, and never ate anything but bread, and a little herbs or fruit. When commanded, on account of his infirmities, to use warm food, he took only bread dipped in broth. When the physician ordered him to take a little wine, he mixed it with his broth to increase the insipidity of his scanty repast.

I do not mean to say that to attain sanctity it is necessary to imitate these examples; but I assert that whoever is attached

to the pleasures of the table, or does not seriously attend to the mortification of the appetite, will never make any considerable progress in perfection. They who neglect the mortification of the taste will daily commit a thousand faults.

Let us now come to the practice of denying the appetite. In what is it to be mortified? St. Bonaventure answers: "In the *quality*, the *quantity*, and the *manner*."

In the *quality*, adds the Saint, by seeking not what is delicate, but what is simple. Small is the progress of him who is not content with what is offered to him, but requires that it be prepared in a different manner, or seeks more palatable food. He who is mortified is satisfied with what is placed before him; and instead of seeking after delicacies, he selects among all the dishes that may be presented to him the least palatable, provided it be not prejudicial to health. Such was the practice of St. Aloysius, who always chose what was most disagreeable to the taste.

"Wine and flesh," says Clement of Alexandria, "give strength indeed to the body, but they render the soul languid." Speaking of himself, St. Bernard says: "I abstain from flesh, lest I should cherish the vices of the flesh." *Give not wine to kings*, says the Wise Man. (Prov. xxxi. 4). By *kings*, in this place, we are to understand, not the monarchs of the earth, but the Servants of God, who rule their wicked passions and subject them to reason. In another place, Solomon says: *What hath woe? ... Surely they that pass their time in wine, and study to drink off their cups*. (Prov. xxiii. 29, 30). Since, then, the word *woe* in the Sacred Scriptures, according to St. Gregory, means that everlasting misery, woe, eternal woe, shall be the lot of all who are addicted to wine! Because *wine is a luxurious thing* (Prov. xx. 1), and incites to incontinence. "My first advice," says St. Jerome, in one of his epistles to the virgin Eustochium, "is, that the spouse of Christ fly from wine as from poison. Wine and youth are a twofold incentive to pleasure." From the words of the holy Doctor we may infer that he who has not enough courage or bodily strength to abstain altogether from flesh and from wine, should at least use them with great moderation: otherwise he must be prepared for continual molestation from temptations against purity.

A mortified Christian would also do well to abstain from su-

perfluous seasonings which serve only to gratify the palate. The seasonings used by the Saints were ashes, aloes, and wormwood. I do not require such mortifications of you; nor do I recommend very extraordinary fasts. On the contrary, it is, according to Cassian, the duty of all who are not solitaries and that live with others, to avoid, as a source of much vain-glory, whatever is not conformable to common usages. "Where there is a common table," says St. Philip Neri, "all should eat of what is served up." Hence he frequently exhorted his disciples "to avoid all singularity as the origin of spiritual pride." One who is courageous finds opportunities of practising mortification without allowing it to appear to others. St. John Climacus partook of whatever was placed before him; but his refecton consisted in tasting rather than in eating what was offered to him; and thus, by his abstemiousness, he practised continual mortification of the appetite without the danger of vanity. St. Bernard used to say that he who lives in Community will take more pleasure in fasting once, while his companions at table take their ordinary repast, than in fasting seven times with them.

## Evening Meditation

### *REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

#### I.

So great was the desire of Jesus to suffer for us that in the night preceding His death, He not only went of His own will into the Garden, where He knew that the Jews would come and take Him, but knowing that Judas the traitor was already near at hand with the company of soldiers, He said to His disciples, *Arise, let us go; behold he that will betray me is at hand* (Mark xiv. 42). He would even go Himself to meet them, as if they came to conduct Him, not to the punishment of death, but to the crown of a great kingdom. O my sweet Saviour, Thou dost, then, go to meet Thy death with such a longing to die, through the desire that Thou hast to be loved by me! And shall I not have a desire to die for Thee, my God, in order to prove to Thee the love I bear Thee? Yes, my Jesus, Who hast died for me, I also desire to die for Thee. Behold, my blood, my life, I offer all to Thee. I am ready to die for Thee as Thou wilt, and when Thou wilt. Accept

this miserable sacrifice which a miserable sinner offers to Thee, who once offended Thee, but now loves Thee more than himself.

St. Laurence Justinian, in considering this word "*Sitio*" (*I thirst*), which Jesus pronounced on the Cross when He was expiring, says that this thirst was not a thirst which proceeded from dryness, but one that arose from the ardour of the love Jesus Christ had for us: "This thirst springs from the fever of His love." Because by this word our Redeemer intended to declare to us, more than the thirst of the body, the desire He had of suffering for us, by showing us His love; and the immense desire He had of being loved by us, by the many sufferings He endured for us: "This thirst proceeds from the fever of His love." And St. Thomas says, "By this '*Sitio*' is shown the ardent desire for the salvation of the human race."

O God, enamoured of souls, is it possible that such an excess of goodness can remain without being corresponded to? It is said that love must be repaid by love; but by what love can Thy love ever be repaid? It would be necessary for another God to die for Thee, in order to compensate for the great love Thou hast borne us in dying for us. And how, then, couldst Thou, O my Lord, say that Thy delight was to dwell with men, if Thou dost receive from them nothing but injuries and ill-treatment? Love has made Thee change into delights the sufferings and the insults Thou hast endured for us.

O my Redeemer, most worthy of love, I will no longer resist the stratagems of Thy love; I give Thee from henceforth my whole love. Thou art and shalt be always the only-beloved One of my soul. Thou didst become Man in order that Thou mightest have a life to devote to me; I would fain have a thousand lives, in order that I may sacrifice them all for Thee. I love Thee, O Infinite Goodness, and I will love Thee with all my strength. I will do all that lies in my power to please Thee. Thou, being innocent, hast suffered for me; I, a sinner, who have deserved hell, desire to suffer for Thee as much as Thou wilt. O my Jesus, assist, I pray Thee, by Thy merits, this desire which Thou Thyself dost give me. O Infinite God, I believe in Thee, I hope in Thee, I love Thee. Mary, my Mother, intercede for me. Amen.

## Wednesday -- First Week of Lent

### Morning Meditation

*"AFTER SIN, HOPE FOR MERCY: BEFORE SIN, FEAR JUDGMENT."*

St. Augustine says the devil deceives men in two ways: by despair and by hope. After the sinner has sinned, the devil tempts him to despair through terror of the Divine justice. Before he sinned, he encouraged him to it by the hope of Divine mercy. Therefore does the Saint give this counsel: *After sin, hope for mercy: before sin, fear Judgment.*

I.

We read in the Parable of the Cockle in St. Matthew, that the cockle having grown up in a field together with the wheat, the servants desired to go and pluck it up: *Wilt thou that we go and gather it up?* But the Master replied: "No, let it grow, and then it shall be gathered and be cast in the fire": *In the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers: Gather up first the cockle and bind it into bundles to burn.* From this Parable we learn, on the one hand, the patience of the Lord with sinners; and, on the other hand, His rigour with the obstinate. St. Augustine says that the devil deceives men in two ways: "by despair and by hope." After the sinner has sinned, he tempts him to despair through terror of Divine justice; but before he sins, he encourages him to it by the hope of Divine mercy. Therefore does the Saint thus counsel everyone: "After sin, hope in mercy; before sin, fear judgment." Yes; because he deserves not mercy who makes use of the mercy of God only to offend Him. Mercy is shown to him who fears God, not to him who avails himself of it to exclude fear: "He who offends against justice," says Abulensis, "may have recourse to mercy; but he who offends against mercy itself, to whom can he have recourse?"

Rarely is a sinner found so desperate as positively to desire his own damnation. Sinners wish to sin without losing the hope of being saved. They sin, and say: God is merciful; I will commit this sin, and then I will confess it: "God is good; I will do what I please;" behold how sinners talk, says St. Augustine. But, O God, so also spoke many who are now in hell!

Say not, says the Lord, the mercies of God are great; however many sins I may commit, by an act of sorrow I shall be pardoned: *Say not, the mercy of the Lord is great: He will have mercy on the multitude of my sins.* (Ecclus. v. 6). Speak not thus, says God. And why? *For mercy and wrath quickly come from him, and his wrath looketh upon sinners.* (Ecclus. v. 7). The mercy of God is infinite; but the acts of this mercy (in this or that particular case) are finite. God is merciful but He is also just. "I am just and merciful," said the Lord one day to St. Bridget; "sinners regard Me only as merciful." Sinners, says St. Basil, choose to see God only under one aspect: "The Lord is good, but He is also just; we will not consider Him only on one side." To bear with those who make use of the mercy of God only to offend Him the more, would not, said Blessed John of Avila, be mercy, but a want of justice. Mercy is promised to him who fears God, not to him who abuses it. "His mercy is to them that fear Him," as the Divine Mother sang. The obstinate are threatened with justice: and as, according to St. Augustine, God deceives not in His promises, so neither does He deceive in His threats: "He Who is true to His promises, is true also, to His threats."

From this day henceforth, O Lord, I will never more betray Thee, as I have done in past times. Thou hast borne with me so long, in order that I might one day learn to love Thy goodness. Behold this day has, I trust, arrived. O my God, I love Thee above all things, and I value Thy grace more than all the kingdoms of the world; rather than lose it, I am ready to lose my life a thousand times. My God, for the love of Jesus Christ, grant me holy perseverance until death, together with Thy holy love. Do not permit that I ever again betray Thee, and cease to love Thee. Mary, thou art my hope; obtain for me this perseverance, and I ask for nothing more.

## II.

Beware, says St. John Chrysostom, when the devil, not God, promises thee Divine mercy that thou mayest sin: "Take care not to receive that dog which holds out to you the mercy of God." Woe, adds St. Augustine, woe to him who hopes in order that he may sin! "He hopes, in order that he may sin: woe to that perverse hope!" Oh, how many, says the Saint, have been deceived

and lost through this vain hope! "They are innumerable whom the shadow of this vain hope has deceived." Unhappy he who abuses the mercy of God, that he may insult Him the more! St. Bernard says, that Lucifer was on this account so speedily punished--because He rebelled in the hope of not receiving punishment. King Manasses was a sinner; but he was afterwards converted, and God pardoned him: his son Ammon, seeing that his father was so easily forgiven, gave himself up to a bad life in the hope of pardon; but for Ammon there was no mercy. St. John Chrysostom asserts that Judas was lost because he sinned confiding in the benignity of Jesus Christ: "He trusted in the meekness of his Master." In fine, God bears with sin, but He does not bear for ever. Were God to bear for ever, no one would be lost; whereas the most common opinion is, that the greater part even of Christians (speaking of adults) are lost: *Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction; and many there are that go in thereat.* (Matt. vii. 13).

He who offends God in the hope of pardon "is a scoffer, not a penitent," says St. Augustine. But, on the other hand, St. Paul says, *God is not mocked.* (Gal. vi. 7). It would be mocking God to continue to offend Him whenever we please, and then to think to gain Heaven. *What things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap.* (Gal. vi. 8). He who sows in sin has no reason to expect anything but punishment and hell. The net with which the devil drags to hell almost all those Christians who are lost is this delusion, by which he says to them: Sin freely, because, with all your sins, you will be saved. But God curses him who sins in the hope of pardon. The hope of the sinner after sin, when accompanied by repentance is dear to God; but the hope of the obstinate is an abomination to Him: *Their hope the abomination of the soul.* (Job xi. 20). Such a hope provokes God to punish, as a master would be provoked by a servant who offended him because of his goodness.

Ah, my God, behold, I have been one of those who offended Thee because of Thy goodness to me! Ah, Lord, wait for me; do not forsake me yet; for I hope, through Thy grace, never again to provoke Thee to abandon me. I repent, O Infinite Goodness, of having offended Thee, and of having thus abused Thy patience.



I thank Thee for having waited for me until now.

## Spiritual Reading

### *MORTIFICATION OF THE APPETITE*

However, those who seek perfection may, without the danger of vain-glory, occasionally perform very rigorous mortifications. For example, by doing with only bread and water on the days of devotion, on Fridays and Saturdays, on the vigils of the Blessed Virgin, and on similar occasions; for such fasts are ordinarily practised by fervent souls. If, on account of bodily infirmity, or through want of fervour, you do not practise rigid fasts, you should, at least, not complain of the common fare; and should be content with whatever is brought to table. St. Thomas never asked for particular food, but was always satisfied with what was placed before him, and ate of it with great moderation. Of St. Ignatius we read that he never refused any dish, and never complained that the food was not well dressed or well seasoned. It is the duty of the Superior to provide wholesome food, but we should never complain when what is laid before us is badly cooked; when it is scanty, smoked, insipid, or too highly seasoned with salt. The poor, provided they receive what is necessary for the support of life, take what is offered to them without conditions or complaints; and we should, in like manner, accept whatever is laid before us as an alms from Almighty God.

With regard to the *quantity*, St. Bonaventure says that "food ought not to be taken too often, nor in excess, but in such a quantity that it may be a refectio and not a burden to the body." Hence the rule of all who seek perfection is never to eat to satiety. "Let your repast be moderate," says St. Jerome, "so that the stomach will never be replete." Some fast one day, and eat to excess on the next. St. Jerome says that it is better to take always a reasonable quantity of food than to fast sometimes, and afterwards to commit excess. The same holy Doctor remarks that satiety is to be avoided in the use, not only of delicacies, but also of the coarsest food. If a person commit excess, it matters not whether he eat of partridges or of vegetables: the bad effects of intemperance are the same in both cases. St. Jerome's rule for determining the quantity of food is that a person should always rise from the table in such a state that he may be able to apply

himself at once to prayer or study. "When," says the holy Doctor, "you eat, think that it will be your duty to pray or to read immediately after."

An ancient Father wisely said, that "he who eats a great deal, and is still hungry, will receive a greater reward than the man who eats little and is satiated." Cassian relates that to comply with the duty of hospitality a certain monk was one day obliged to sit at table many times with strangers, and to partake of the refreshment prepared for them, and that after all he arose the last time with an appetite. This is the best and most difficult sort of mortification; for it is easier to abstain altogether from certain meats, than, after having tasted them, to eat but little.

He who desires to practise moderation in eating would do well to diminish his meals gradually till, by experience, he ascertains the quantity of food necessary to support the body. It was in this manner that St. Dorotheus trained his disciple, St. Dositheus, to the just practice of mortification. But the most secure means of removing all doubts and scruples with regard to fasts and abstinence is to follow the advice of your spiritual director. St. Benedict, and after him St. Bernard, says that mortifications that are performed without the permission of one's confessor are not meritorious, because they are the fruit of a criminal presumption: "What is done without the permission of the spiritual Father will be regarded as presumption, and shall not be rewarded." All should make it a general rule to eat sparingly at supper, even when there is some apparent necessity for a plentiful meal; for in the evening all are subject to a false appetite, and therefore a slight excess will occasion, on the following morning, headaches, fulness of the stomach, and, as a consequence, repugnance and incapacity for all spiritual exercises.

### **Evening Meditation**

#### *REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

##### I.

Behold how our most loving Saviour, having come to the Garden of Gethsemani, did of His own accord make a beginning of His bitter Passion by giving full liberty to the passions of fear, of weariness, and of sorrow to come and afflict Him with all

their torments: *He began to fear, and to be heavy, to grow sorrowful, and to be sad.* (Mark xiv., Matt. xxvi.). He began, then, first to feel a great fear of death, and of the sufferings He would soon have to endure. *He began to fear.* But how? Was it not He Himself Who had offered Himself spontaneously to endure all these torments? *He was offered because he willed it.* Was it not He Who had so much desired this hour of His Passion, and Who had said shortly before: *With desire have I desired to eat this pasch with you?* And yet, how is it that He was seized with such a fear of death, that He even prayed His Father to deliver Him from it: *My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me* (Matt. xxvi. 39)? The Venerable Bede answers this: "Jesus Christ prays that the chalice may pass from Him, in order to show that He was truly Man." He, our loving Saviour, chose indeed to die for us in order by His death to prove to us the love He bore us; also in order that men might not suppose that He had assumed a fantastic body (as some heretics have blasphemously asserted), or that in virtue of His Divinity, He had died without suffering any pain, He therefore made this prayer to His heavenly Father, not indeed with a view of being heard, but to give us to understand that He died as man, and afflicted with a great fear of death and of the sufferings which should accompany His death. O most amiable Jesus, Thou wouldst, then, take upon Thee our fearfulness in order to give us Thy courage in suffering the trials of this life. Oh, be Thou for ever blessed for Thy great mercy and love! Oh, may all our hearts love Thee as much as Thou desirest, and as much as Thou deservest!

## II.

*He began to be heavy.* He began to feel a great weariness on account of the torments that were prepared for Him. When one is weary, even pleasures are painful. Oh, what anguish united to this weariness must Jesus Christ have felt at the horrible representation which then came before His mind, of all the torments, both exterior and interior, which, during the short remainder of His life, were so cruelly to afflict His body and His blessed Soul! Then did all the sufferings He was to endure pass distinctly before His eyes, as well as all the insults He should endure from the Jews and from the Romans; all the injustice of which the

judges of His cause would be guilty towards Him; and, above all, He had before Him the vision of that death of desolation which He should have to endure, forsaken by all, by men and by God, in the midst of a sea of sufferings and contempt. And this it was that caused Him such heavy grief that He was obliged to pray for consolation to His Eternal Father. O my Jesus, I compassionate Thee, I thank Thee, and I love Thee.

*And there appeared to him an angel ... strengthening him.* (Luke xxii. 43). Strength came; but, says the Venerable Bede, this rather increased than lightened His sufferings: "Strength did not diminish, but increased His sorrow." Yes, for the Angel strengthened Him that He might suffer still more for the love of men, and the glory of His Father. Oh, what sufferings did not this first combat bring Thee, my beloved Lord! During the progress of Thy Passion, the scourges, the thorns, the nails, came one after the other to torment Thee. But in the Garden all the sufferings of Thy whole Passion assaulted Thee altogether and tormented Thee. And Thou didst accept all for my sake and my good. O my God, how much I regret not having loved Thee in times past, and having preferred my own accursed pleasures to Thy will. I detest them now above every evil, and repent of them with my whole heart. O my Jesus, forgive me.

## **Thursday -- First Week of Lent**

### **Morning Meditation**

*"THE LORD WAITETH THAT HE MAY HAVE MERCY ON YOU."*

God waits for the sinner that he may amend. Know you not that the Lord has borne with you till now, not that you may continue to offend Him, but that you may weep over the evil you have done. But when God sees that the sinner employs the time given him to weep over his sins in only adding to them, He then calls upon that same time to judge him: *He hath called against me the time.* (Lament. i. 15).

I.

Some will say: God has shown me so many mercies in the past, that I hope He will show me the same in the future. But I reply: Because, then, God has shown you so many mercies, for

this do you return to offend Him? Is it thus, says St. Paul to you, that you despise the goodness and patience of God? Know you not that the Lord has borne with you till now, not that you may continue to offend Him, but that you may weep over the evil you have done? *Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and patience and long-suffering? Knowest thou not that benignity of God leadeth thee to penance?* (Rom. ii. 4). If, confiding in the Divine mercy, you will not put an end to your sins, the Lord will, for: *Except you be converted, he will brandish his sword.* (Ps. vii. 13). *Revenge is mine, and I will repay them in due time.* (Deut. xxxii. 35). God waits; but when the time of vengeance is come, He waits no longer, and punishes.

*The Lord waiteth that he may have mercy on you.* (Is. xxx. 18). God waits for the sinner that he may amend; but when He sees that he employs the time given him for weeping over his sins in increasing them, He then calls upon that same time to judge him: *He hath called against me the time.* (Lament. i. 15). So that the very time bestowed on him, and the very mercies shown him, will serve to render the sinner's punishment more severe, and cause him to be more speedily abandoned: *We would have cured Babylon; but she is not healed; let us forsake her.* (Jer. li. 9). And how does God forsake him? Either He sends him a sudden death, and permits him to die in sin, or He deprives him of His abundant graces, and leaves him only that sufficient grace with which the sinner could indeed save himself, but will not. His understanding blinded, his heart hardened, evil habits contracted, will render his salvation morally impossible; and then he will be, if not absolutely, at least morally abandoned.

My God, in this miserable state I perceive that I have already deserved to be deprived of Thy grace and deprived of light; but the light Thou now givest me, and Thy calls to me to repent, are signs that Thou hast not yet abandoned me. And since Thou hast not abandoned me, arise, O my Lord, increase Thy mercies towards my soul, increase Thy light, increase my desire to love and serve Thee. Change me, O omnipotent God; and from a traitor and a rebel as I have been, make me a true lover of Thy goodness, that I may one day come to praise Thy mercies for all eternity in Heaven. Thou desirest, then, to pardon

me; and I desire nothing but Thy pardon and Thy love. I repent, O Infinite Goodness, of having so often displeased Thee. I love Thee, O my Sovereign Good, because Thou so commandest; I love Thee, because Thou art truly worthy of being loved.

## II.

*I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be wasted.* (Is. v. 5). Oh, what a chastisement! When the master of the vineyard breaks down the hedge, and allows all who will, men and beasts, to enter it, what does this mean? It is a sign that he abandons it. Thus God, when He forsakes a soul, takes away the hedge of fear, of remorse of conscience, and leaves it in darkness; and then all the monsters of vice will enter into that soul: *Thou hast appointed darkness, and it is night: and in it shall all the beasts of the woods go about.* (Ps. ciii. 20). And the sinner, thus left in that obscurity, will despise all, --the grace of God, Heaven, admonitions, excommunications; he will make a jest of his own damnation: *The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth.* (Prov. xviii. 3).

God will leave him unpunished in this life; but his greatest chastisement will be that he is unpunished: *Let us have pity on the wicked, but he will not learn justice.* (Is. xxvi. 10). St. Bernard observes upon this text: "I do not wish for this mercy; it is worse than any wrath." Oh, what a punishment, when God leaves the sinner in the midst of his sin, and appears to demand no further account of it! *According to the multitude of his wrath he will not seek him.* (Ps. x. 4). God will even seem not to be angry with him. *My jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will cease and be angry no more* (Ezech. xvi. 42); and apparently permits him to obtain all that he desires in this life: *Let them go according to the desires of their hearts.* (Ps. lxxx. 13). Alas for poor sinners who prosper in this life! It is a sign that God waits to make them victims of His justice in Eternity. Jeremias asks: *Why doth the way of the wicked prosper?* (Jer. xii. 1). And then he replies: *Gather them together as sheep for a sacrifice.* There is no greater punishment than when God permits a sinner to add sin to sin; as David says: *Add thou iniquity upon their iniquity ... let them be blotted out of the book of the living.* (Ps. lxviii. 28). Upon which Bellarmine observes: "There is no punishment so great as when sin is the punishment of sin." Better would it have been for

each of these unhappy sinners had he died after the first sin; for, dying later, he shall have as many hells as he has committed sins.

Ah, my Redeemer, through the merits of Thy Blood cause Thyself to be loved by a sinner whom Thou hast so much loved, and hast endured for so many years with so much patience. All my hopes are in Thy mercy. I hope to love Thee from this day henceforth till the hour of my death, and for all eternity. I will for ever praise Thy clemency, my Jesus. And I will praise thy mercy, O Mary, who hast obtained for me so many graces; acknowledge them all as the effects of thy intercession. Continue, O Blessed Lady, now to aid me, and to obtain for me holy perseverance.

## **Spiritual Reading**

### *MORTIFICATION OF THE APPETITE*

Abstinence from drink, except at meals, may be safely observed by all, unless when, in particular circumstances, such as in the heats of summer, the want of liquid might be prejudicial to health. However, St. Laurence Justinian, even in the burning heats of summer, never drank out of meal-time; and to those who asked how he could bear the thirst, he replied "How shall I be able to bear the burning thirst of Purgatory if I cannot now abstain from drink?" On Fast Days, the ancient Christians abstained from drink till the hour of their repast, which was always taken in the evening. Such is the practice of the Turks at the present day during their Fasts of Lent. We should at least observe the rule that is universally prescribed by physicians, not to take any drink for four or five hours after dinner.

With regard to the *manner* of eating, St. Bonaventure says that "food should not be taken unseasonably nor inordinately, but religiously."

Food should not be taken unseasonably; that is, before the hours prescribed. To a penitent who could not abstain from eating till the hour of meals, St. Philip Neri said: "Child, if you do not correct this defect you will never advance in virtue." *Blessed*, says the Holy Ghost, *is the land whose princes eat in due season.* (Eccles. x. 17). And happy the Community whose members never eat out of the hours of meals. When St. Teresa heard that some of her Religious had asked permission from the Provincial

Superior to keep eatables in their cells, she reproved them very severely. "Your request," said the Saint, "if granted, would lead to the destruction of the convent."

To avoid the fault of taking your food inordinately, you must be careful not to eat with avidity, with eagerness or with haste. *Be not greedy in your feasting*, says the Holy Ghost. (Ecclus. xxxvii. 32). Your object in eating must be to support the strength of the body, and to be able to serve the Lord. To eat through mere pleasure cannot be excused from the guilt of venial sin; for Innocent XI has condemned the *Proposition* which asserts that it is not a sin to eat or to drink from the sole motive of satisfying the palate. However, it is not a fault to feel pleasure in eating; for it is, generally speaking, impossible to eat without experiencing the delight which food naturally produces. But it is a defect to eat like beasts through the sole motive of sensual gratification, and without proposing any reasonable end. Hence the most delicious meats may be eaten without sin if the motive be good and worthy of a rational creature; and in taking the coarsest food through attachment to pleasure there may be a fault. In the *Lives* of the Fathers it is related that though the same food was served to all the monks of a certain Monastery, a holy bishop saw some of them feasting on honey, others on bread, and others on mire. By this vision he was given to understand that the first ate with a holy fear of violating temperance, and were accustomed at meals to raise their souls to God by holy aspirations; that the second felt some delight in eating, but still returned thanks to God for His benefits; and that the third ate for the mere gratification of the taste.

To practise temperance in the *manner* of eating, you must not perform indiscreet fasts, which would render you unable to do your work, or to observe your Rule. Transported with a certain fervour, by which the Almighty animates their zeal for virtue, beginners are often very indiscreet in their fasts and other works of penance. Their rigours sometimes bring on infirmities, which disqualify them for their religious duties, and sometimes make them give up all exercises of piety. Discretion is necessary in all things. A master who entrusts a servant with the care of a horse will be equally displeased whether the animal be rendered unfit



for use by an excess or by a want of food. St. Francis de Sales used to say to his Religious of the Visitation, that "continual moderation is better than fits of violent abstinence interspersed with occasional excesses. Besides, such abstinences make us esteem ourselves more holy than others who do not practise them." It is certainly the duty of all to avoid indiscretion, but it has been justly remarked by a great spiritual master (and the remark deserves attention), that the spirit seldom deceives us by suggesting excessive mortifications; while the flesh, under false pretences, frequently claims commiseration, and procures an exemption from what is displeasing to its propensities.

The following are some of the mortifications that are very useful:

To abstain from delicacies agreeable to the taste, and in some measure injurious to health.

To refrain from the fruits that come first in season.

To deprive yourself throughout the year of some particular fruit.

To abstain once or twice in the week from all fruit, and every day from a portion of what is laid before you.

To deny yourself some delicacy, or merely to taste it, and say, with St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, that it is not useful for you.

To leave, every day, according to the advice of St. Bernard, a part of what is most pleasing to the palate.

"Let every one," says the Saint, "offer at table something to God."

To check for some time the desire of drinking or of eating what is before you; and to abstain from wine, spirits, and spices. Such abstinence is particularly useful for young persons.

The preceding mortifications may be practised without pride, or injury to health. It is not necessary to perform all of them. Let each person observe the abstinences the Spiritual Director permits. It is certainly better to practise small and frequent works of penance, than to perform rare and extraordinary fasts, and afterwards lead an unmortified life.

### **Evening Meditation**

*REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

## I.

*He began to grow sorrowful and to be sad.* Together with this fear and weariness, Jesus began to feel a great melancholy and affliction of soul. But, my Lord, art Thou not He Who didst give to Thy Martyrs such a delight in suffering that they even despised their torments and death? St. Augustine said of St. Vincent, that he spoke with such joy during his Martyrdom, that it seemed as if it were not the same person who suffered and who spoke. It is related of St. Laurence, that whilst he was burning on the gridiron, such was the consolation he enjoyed in his soul that he insulted the tyrant, saying: "Turn, and eat." How, then, my Jesus, didst Thou, who gavest such great joy to Thy servants in dying, choose for Thyself such extreme sorrowfulness in Thy death?

O Delight of Paradise, Thou dost rejoice Heaven and earth with Thy gladness; why, then, do I behold Thee so afflicted and sorrowful? Why do I hear Thee say that the sorrow that afflicts Thee is enough to take away Thy life? *My soul is sorrowful even unto death.* (Mark xiv. 34). O my Redeemer, why is this? Ah, I understand it all! It was less the thought of Thy sufferings in Thy bitter Passion, than of the sins of men that afflicted Thee; and amongst these, alas, were my sins, which caused Thee this great dread of death.

## II.

He, the Eternal Word, as much as He loved His Father, so much did He hate sin, of which He well knew the malice; wherefore, in order to deliver the world from sin, and that He might no longer behold His beloved Father offended, He had come upon earth, and had made Himself Man, and had undertaken to suffer such a painful death and Passion. But when He saw that, notwithstanding all His sufferings, there would yet be so many sins committed in the world, His sorrow for this, says St. Thomas, exceeded the sorrow that any penitent has ever felt for his own sins: "It surpassed the sorrow of all contrite souls"; and, indeed, it surpassed every sorrow that ever could afflict a human heart. The reason is, that all the sorrows that men feel are always mixed with some relief; but the sorrow of Jesus was pure sorrow without any relief: "He suffered pure pain without any admixture

of consolation."

Oh, if I loved Thee, my Jesus, if I loved Thee, the consideration of all that Thou hast suffered for me would render all sufferings, all contempt, and all vexations sweet to me. Oh, grant me, I beseech Thee, Thy love, in order that I may endure with pleasure, or at least with patience, the little Thou givest me to suffer. Oh, let me not die so ungrateful to all Thy loving kindnesses. I desire, in all tribulations that shall happen to me, to say constantly, My Jesus, I embrace this trial for Thy love; and I will suffer it in order to please Thee.

## **Friday -- First Week of Lent**

### **Morning Meditation**

*THE LORD IS SILENT BUT NOT FOREVER.*

God has not only waited for you, but has often called you and invited you to receive pardon. *What is there that I ought to do more for my vineyard?* If God stood in need of you, or if you had done Him some great favour, could He show you greater mercy? Are you waiting for God to send you to hell?

I.

It is related in the *Life* of Father Louis La Nusa that there were two friends in Palermo. Walking one day together, one of them, named Caesar, a comedian, seeing the other thoughtful, said: "I lay a wager that you have been to Confession; and it is on that account you are uneasy. Listen," he added, "and know that Father La Nusa told me one day that God had allotted me yet twelve years of life; and that if I did not amend within that time, I should make an unhappy end. I have travelled over many parts of the world; I have had illnesses, especially one which brought me to the brink of the grave; but this month, in which the twelve years are completed, I feel better than I ever felt in my life before." He then invited his friend to come and hear on the following Saturday a new play which he had composed. Now what happened? On the Saturday, which was the 24th November, 1688, whilst he was preparing to go on the stage, he was seized with apoplexy, and died suddenly, expiring in the arms of an actress; and thus ended the comedy. Now let us come to ourselves. When the devil tempts you to sin again, if you choose

to lose your soul, it is in your power to sin, but do not say then that you wish to be saved; as long as you choose to sin, look upon yourself as damned, and picture to yourself that God then writes your condemnation, and says to you: *What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it?* (Is. v. 4). Ungrateful soul, what is there that I ought to have done for you that I have not done? Well, then, since you choose to be damned, be it so; it is all your own doing.

Ah, my God, unhappy me, if from this day henceforward I should be unfaithful to Thee, and should again betray Thee after the light Thou now givest me! This light is a sign that Thou wilt pardon me. I repent, O Sovereign Good, of all the injuries I have done Thee, and for having offended Thy Infinite Goodness. I hope in Thy Blood for pardon, and I hope with certainty; but I feel that were I again to turn my back upon Thee, I should deserve a hell expressly for myself. This it is that makes me tremble, O God of my soul, --I may again lose Thy grace. I call to mind how many times I have promised to be faithful to Thee, and then I have again rebelled against Thee. Ah, Lord, do not permit it: do not abandon me to the great misfortune of becoming once more Thy enemy. Send me any chastisement rather than this: "Do not permit me to be separated from Thee."

## II.

But you will say: And where, then, is the mercy of God? Ah, unhappy one, and does it not appear to you mercy in God to have borne with you for so many years with all your sins? You ought to remain always with your face to the ground, thanking Him, and saying: *The mercies of the Lord, that we are not consumed.* (Lament. iii. 22). In committing one mortal sin, you have been guilty of a greater crime than if you had trampled under foot the first monarch of the earth; you have committed so many, that if you had done the same to your brother in the flesh, he would not even have endured you; God not only has waited for you, but He has so often called you, and invited you to receive pardon. *What is there that I ought to have done more?* If God stood in need of you, or if you had done Him some great favour, could He show you greater mercy? This being so, if you return to offend Him, all His pity will be turned to anger and chastisement.

If the fig-tree which the Master found barren should still have produced no fruit after the year conceded for its cultivation, who would have expected that the Lord would allow it more time, or excuse it from being cut down? Listen, then, to the admonition of St. Augustine: "O fruitless tree, the axe was only deferred: rest not in security; thou shalt be cut down." The punishment, says the Saint, has been delayed, but not done away with; if you again abuse the Divine mercy, "you shall be cut down" --vengeance will at last overtake you. Are you waiting for the great God to send you straight to hell? But should He send you there, you well know there is no further remedy for you. The Lord is silent, but not forever; when the time of vengeance is come, He is silent no more: *Those things hast thou done, and I was silent; thou thoughtest unjustly that I should be like to thee; I will reprove thee, and set before thy face.* (Ps. xlix. 21). He will set before you the mercies He has shown you, and will make these very mercies judge and condemn you.

O my Jesus, I am sorry. I repent. If Thou seest that I shall again offend Thee, let me die first. I am content to die any death, however painful, rather than have to bewail the misery of being again deprived of Thy grace: "Do not permit me to be separated from Thee." I repeat it, my God; and grant that I may always repeat it: "Do not permit me to be separated from Thee." I love Thee, my dear Redeemer; I will not separate myself from Thee: by the merits of Thy death, give me an ardent love, which may so bind me to Thee that I may never again be able to free myself. O Mary, my Mother, if I return to offend God, I fear that thou also wilt abandon me. Assist me, then, by thy prayers; obtain for me holy perseverance and the love of Jesus Christ.

## **Spiritual Reading**

### *INTERIOR MORTIFICATION*

There are two kinds of self-love: the one good, the other hurtful. The former is that which makes us seek eternal life--the end of our creation; the latter inclines us to pursue earthly goods, and to prefer them to our everlasting welfare, and to the holy will of God. "The celestial Jerusalem," says St. Augustine, "is built up by loving God so as to condemn one's self; but the earthly city is raised by loving self so as to despise Almighty God." Hence, Jesus

Christ has said: *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.* (Matt. xvi. 24). Christian perfection, then, consists in self-abnegation. Whoever denies not himself, cannot be a follower of Jesus Christ. "The augmentation of charity," says St. Augustine, "is the diminution of cupidity: the perfection of charity is its destruction." Therefore, the less a Christian desires to indulge passion, the more he will love God; and if he seeks nothing but God, he will then possess perfect charity. But in the present state of corrupt nature it is not possible to be altogether exempt from the molestation of self-love. Jesus alone among men, and Mary alone among women, have been free from its suggestions. All the other Saints had to combat their irregular passions. The principal and only care of a religious man should be to restrain the inordinate inclinations of self-love. "To regulate the motions of the soul is," as St. Augustine says, "the office of interior mortification."

Unhappy the soul that suffers itself to be ruled by its own inclinations. "A domestic enemy," says St. Bernard, "is the worst of foes." The devil and the world continually seek our destruction, but self-love is a still more dangerous enemy. "Self-love," says St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, "like a worm which corrodes the roots of a plant, deprives us not only of fruit, but of life." In another place she says, "Self-love is the most deceitful of all enemies: like Judas, it betrays us with the kiss of peace. Whoever overcomes it conquers all. He that cannot cut it off by a single stroke should at least endeavour to destroy it by degrees." We must pray continually, in the language of Solomon: *Give me not over to a shameless and foolish mind.* (Ecclus. xxiii. 6). O my God, do not abandon me to my foolish passions that seek to destroy in my soul Thy holy fear, and even to deprive me of the use of my reason.

Our whole life must be one continual contest. *The life of a man upon earth, says Job, is a warfare.* (Job vii. 1). Now he that is placed in the front of battle must be always prepared for an attack: as soon as he ceases to defend himself he is conquered. And here it is necessary to remark that the soul should never cease to combat her passions, however great her victories over them may have been; for human passions, though conquered a thousand times, never die. "Believe me," says St. Bernard, "that after being cut off they bud forth again; and after being put to flight they

return." Hence by struggling with concupiscence, we can only render its attacks less frequent, less violent, and more easy to be subdued. A certain monk complained to the Abbot Theodore that he had contended for eight years with his passions, and that still they were not extinguished. "Brother," replied the Abbot, "you complain of this warfare of eight years, and I have spent *seventy years* in solitude, and during all that time I have not been for a single day free from assaults of passion." We shall be subject during all our lives to the molestation of our passions. "But," as St. Gregory says, "it is one thing to look at these monsters, and another to shelter them in our hearts." It is one thing to hear their roar, and another thing to admit them into our souls, and suffer them to devour us.

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### I.

Bellarmino says that to noble spirits affronts cause greater pain than sufferings of the body: "Noble spirits think more of ignominy than of pains of body." Because as the former afflict the flesh, the latter afflict the soul, which, in proportion as it is more noble than the body, so much the more does it feel pain. But who could ever have imagined that the most noble Personage in Heaven and earth, the Son of God, by coming into the world to make Himself Man for love of men, would have had to be treated by them with such reproaches and injuries, as if He had been the lowest and most vile of all men? *We have seen him despised and the most abject of men.* (Is. liii. 2). St. Anselm asserts that Jesus Christ was willing to suffer such and so great dishonours that it could not be possible for Him to be more humbled than He was in His Passion: "He humbled Himself so much that He could not go beyond it."

O Lord of the world, Thou art the greatest of all kings; but Thou hast willed to be despised more than all men in order to teach me the love of contempt. Because, then, Thou hast sacrificed Thine honour for love of me, I am willing to suffer for love of Thee every affront which shall be offered to me.

#### II.

And what kind of affronts did not the Redeemer suffer in His Passion? He saw Himself affronted by His own disciples. One of them betrays Him and sells Him for thirty pieces. Another denies Him many times, protesting publicly that he knows Him not; and thus attesting that he was ashamed to have known Him in the past. The other disciples, when they see Him taken and bound, all fly and abandon Him: *Then his disciples leaving him, all fled away.* (Mark xiv. 50).

O my Jesus, thus abandoned, who will ever undertake Thy defence, if, when Thou art first taken, those most dear to Thee depart from and forsake Thee? But, my God, to think that this dishonour did not end with Thy Passion! How many souls, after having offered themselves to follow Thee, and after having been favoured by Thee with many graces and special signs of love, being then driven by some passion of vile interest, or human respect, or sordid pleasure, have ungratefully forsaken Thee! Which of these ungrateful ones is found to turn and lament, saying, Ah, my dear Jesus, pardon me; for I will not leave Thee again. I will rather lose my life a thousand times than lose Thy grace, O my God, my Love, my All.

## **Saturday -- First Week of Lent**

### **Morning Meditation**

#### *THE GREATNESS OF MARY'S MARTYRDOM*

Who can measure the greatness of Mary's Martyrdom? The Prophet Jeremias seems unable to find any one to compare with this Mother of Sorrows when he considers her great sufferings at the death of her Son. *To what shall I compare thee or to what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? ... For great as the sea is thy destruction: who shall heal thee?* As the sea exceeds in bitterness all other bitterness, so does thy grief, O Blessed Virgin, exceed all other griefs.

I.

Mary is the Queen of Martyrs not only because her Martyrdom was longer than that of all others, but also because it was the greatest of all Martyrdoms. Who, however, can measure its greatness? Jeremias seems unable to find any one with whom he can compare this Mother of Sorrows, when he considers her



great sufferings at the death of her Son. *To what shall I compare thee? or to what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? ... for great as the sea is thy destruction: who shall heal thee?* (Lam. ii. 13). Wherefore Cardinal Hugo, in a commentary on these words, says: "O Blessed Virgin, as the sea in bitterness exceeds all other bitterness, so does thy grief exceed all other grief." Hence St. Anselm asserts that had not God by a special miracle preserved the life of Mary in each moment of her life, her grief was such that it would have caused her death. St. Bernardine of Sienna goes so far as to say that "the grief of Mary was so great that, were it divided amongst all men, it would suffice to cause their immediate death."

But let us consider the reasons for which Mary's Martyrdom was greater than that of all Martyrs.

In the first place, we must remember that the Martyrs endured their torments, which were the effect of fire and other material agencies, in their bodies; Mary suffered hers in her soul, as St. Simeon foretold: *And thy own soul a sword shall pierce.* (Luke ii. 35). As if the holy old man had said: "O most sacred Virgin, the bodies of other Martyrs will be torn with iron, but thou wilt be transfixed, and martyred in thy soul by the Passion of thine own Son." Now, as the soul is more noble than the body, so much greater were Mary's sufferings than those of all the Martyrs, as Jesus Christ Himself said to St. Catherine of Sienna: "Between the sufferings of the soul and those of the body there is no comparison." Whence the holy Abbot Arnold of Chartres says that "whoever had been present on Mount Calvary to witness the great Sacrifice of the Immaculate Lamb, would there have beheld two great altars, the one in the body of Jesus, the other in the heart of Mary, for, on that Mount, at the same time that the Son sacrificed His body by death, Mary sacrificed her soul by compassion.

## II.

St. Antoninus says that while other Martyrs suffered by sacrificing their own lives, the Blessed Virgin suffered by sacrificing her Divine Son's life--a life she loved far more than her own; so that she not only suffered in her soul all that her Son endured in His body, but moreover the sight of her Son's torments brought

more grief to her heart than if she had endured them all in her own person. No one can doubt that Mary suffered in her heart all the outrages that she saw inflicted on her beloved Jesus. Any one can understand that the sufferings of children are also those of their mothers who witness them. St. Augustine, considering the anguish endured by the mother of the Machabees in witnessing the tortures of her sons, says, "she, seeing their sufferings, suffered in each one; because she loved them all, she endured in her soul what they endured in their flesh." Thus also did Mary suffer all those torments, scourges, thorns, nails, and the Cross, which tortured the innocent flesh of Jesus; all entered at the same time into the heart of this Blessed Virgin, to complete her Martyrdom. "He suffered in the flesh, and she in the heart," writes the Blessed Amadeus. "So much so," says St. Laurence Justinian, "that the heart of Mary became, as it were, a mirror of the Passion of the Son, in which might be seen, faithfully reflected, the spitting, the blows, and wounds, and all that Jesus suffered."

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *INTERIOR MORTIFICATION*

The human soul is a garden in which useless and noxious herbs constantly spring up: we must, therefore, by the practice of holy mortification, continually hold the mattock in our hands to root them up and banish them from our hearts; otherwise our souls will become a wild, uncultivated waste, covered with briars and thorns. *Conquer yourself!* was an expression always on the lips of St. Ignatius of Loyola, and the text of his familiar discourses to his Religious. Conquer self-love and break down your own will. Few, he would say, of those who practise mental prayer become Saints, because few of them endeavour to overcome themselves. "Of a hundred persons," says the Saint, "devoted to prayer, more than ninety are self-willed." Hence he preferred a single act of mortification of self-will to long prayer accompanied with many spiritual consolations. "What does it avail," says Gilbert, "to close the gates if famine--the internal enemy--produce general affliction?" What does it profit us to mortify the exterior senses and to perform exercises of devotion while at the same time we cherish in our hearts rancour, ambition, attachment to self-will and to self-esteem, or any other passion which brings ruin on the soul?

St. Francis Borgia says that prayer introduces the love of God into the soul, but mortification prepares a place for it by banishing from the heart earthly affections--the most powerful obstacles to charity. Whoever goes for water to the fountain must cleanse the vessel of any earth it may contain; otherwise he will bring back mire instead of water. "Prayer without mortification," says Father Balthasar Alvarez, "is either an illusion, or lasts but for a short time." And St. Ignatius asserts that a mortified Christian acquires a more perfect union with God in a quarter of an hour's prayer, than an unmortified soul does by praying for several hours. Hence, whenever he heard that any one spent a great deal of time in mental prayer, he said: "It is a sign that he practises great mortification."

There are some religious souls who perform a great many exercises of devotion, who practise frequent Communion, long meditations, fasting, and other corporal austerities, but make no effort to overcome certain little passions--for example, certain resentments, aversions, curiosity, and certain dangerous affections. They will not submit to any contradiction; they will not give up attachment to certain persons, or subject their will to the commands of obedience, or to the holy will of God. What progress can they make in perfection? Unhappy souls! They will be always imperfect: always out of the way of sanctity. "They," says St. Augustine, "run well, but out of the way." They imagine that they run well because they practise the works of piety their own self-will suggests; but they shall be forever out of the way of perfection, which consists in conquering self. "Thou shalt advance," says the devout Thomas a Kempis, "in proportion to the violence thou shalt have offered to thyself." I do not mean to censure vocal prayer, or acts of penance, or the other spiritual works. But, because all exercises of devotion are but the means of practising virtue, the soul should seek in them only the conquest of its passions. Hence, in our Communions, Meditations, Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and other similar exercises, we ought always to beseech Almighty God to give us strength to practise humility, mortification, obedience, and conformity to His holy will. In every Christian it is a defect to act from a motive of self-satisfaction. But in those who make a particular

profession of perfection and mortification, it is a much greater fault. "God," says Lactantius, "calls to life by labour; the devil, to death by delights." The Lord brings His servants to eternal life by mortification; but the devil leads sinners to everlasting death by pleasure and self-indulgence.

### **Evening Meditation**

#### *REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

##### **I.**

Behold how Judas, arriving in the Garden together with the soldiers, advances, embraces his Master, and kisses Him. Jesus suffers him to kiss Him; but, knowing already his evil intent, could not refrain from complaining of this most unjust treachery, saying, *Judas, betrayest thou the son of man with a kiss?* (Luke xxii. 48). Then those insolent servants crowd round Jesus, lay hands upon Him and bind Him as a villain: *The servants of the Jews apprehended Jesus, and bound him.* (John xviii. 12).

Ah, me! what do I see? A God bound! By whom? By men; by worms created by Himself. Angels of Paradise, what say ye to it? And Thou, my Jesus, why dost Thou allow Thyself to be bound? What, says St. Bernard, have the bonds of slaves and of the guilty to do with Thee, who art the Holy of Holies, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords? "O King of kings and Lord of lords, what hast Thou to do with chains?"

But if men bind Thee, wherefore dost Thou not loosen and free Thyself from the torments and death which they are preparing for Thee? But I understand it. It is not, O my Lord, these ropes which bind Thee. It is only love which keeps Thee bound, and constrains Thee to suffer and die for us: "O Charity," exclaims St. Laurence Justinian, "how strong is thy chain, by which God was able to be bound!" O Divine Love, thou only wast able to bind a God, and conduct Him to death for the love of men.

##### **II.**

"Look O man," says St. Bonaventure, "at these dogs dragging Him along, and the Lamb, like a victim meekly following without resistance. One seizes, another binds Him; another drives, another strikes Him." They carry our sweet Saviour, thus bound, first to the house of Annas, then to that of Caiphas; where Jesus,

being asked by that wicked one about His disciples and His doctrine, replied that He had not spoken in private, but in public, and that they who were standing round about well knew what He had taught: *I spoke openly; lo, these know what I said.* (John xviii. 21). But at this answer one of those servants, treating Him as if too bold, gave Him a blow on the cheek: *One of the servants standing by gave Jesus a blow, saying, Answerest thou the high-priest so?* (John xviii. 22). Here exclaims St. Jerome: "Ye Angels, how is it that ye are silent? How long can such patience withhold you in your astonishment?"

Ah, my Jesus, how could an answer so just and modest deserve such an affront in the presence of so many people? The worthless high-priest, instead of reproving the insolence of this audacious fellow, praises him, or at least by signs, approves. And Thou, my Lord, sufferest all this to compensate for the affronts which I, a wretch, have offered to the Divine Majesty by my sins. My Jesus, I thank Thee for it. Eternal Father, pardon me by the merits of Jesus.

## Second Sunday of Lent

### Morning Meditation

*"LORD, IT IS GOOD FOR US TO BE HERE!"* (Gospel of Sunday. Matt. xvii. 1, 9)

Let us labour during the remainder of our lives to gain Heaven. The Saints did but little to gain Heaven. St. Augustine said that to gain the eternal glory of Paradise we should willingly embrace eternal labour. *The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come.* (Rom. viii. 18).

I.

In this day's Gospel we read that, wishing to give His disciples a glimpse of the glory of Paradise, so as to animate them to labour for the Divine honour, the Redeemer was transfigured, and allowed them to behold the splendour of His countenance. Ravished with joy and delight, St. Peter exclaimed: *Lord, it is good for us to be here!* Lord, let us remain here; let us never more depart from this place; for the sight of Thy beauty consoles us more than all the delights of the earth.

Let us labour during the remainder of our lives to gain

Heaven. Heaven is so great a good, that, to purchase it for us, Jesus Christ has sacrificed His life on the Cross. Be assured that the greatest of all the torments of the damned in hell arises from the thought of having lost Heaven through their own fault. The blessings, the delights, the joys, the sweetness of Paradise may be acquired; but they can be described and understood only by those blessed souls that enjoy them. According to the Apostle, no man on this earth can comprehend the infinite blessings which God has prepared for the souls that love Him. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him.* (1 Cor. ii. 9). In this life we cannot have an idea of any other pleasures than those which we enjoy by means of the senses.

Speaking of Paradise, St. Bernard says: O man, if you wish to understand the blessings of Heaven, know that in that happy country there is nothing which you would not desire and everything that you would desire. Although there are some things here below which are agreeable to the senses, how many more are there which only torment us? If the light of day is pleasant, the darkness of night is disagreeable: if the spring and the autumn cheer us, the cold of winter and the heat of summer are painful. In addition, we have to endure the pains of sickness, the persecution of men, and the inconveniences of poverty; we must submit to interior troubles, to fears, to temptations of the devil, doubts of conscience, and to the uncertainty of eternal salvation.

But, after entering into Paradise, the blessed shall have no more sorrows. *God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. And death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away. And he that sat on the throne, said: Behold, I make all things new.* (Apoc. xxi. 4)

## II.

In Paradise, death and the fear of death are no more: in that place of bliss there are no sorrows, no infirmities, no poverty, no inconveniences, no vicissitudes of day or night, of cold or of heat. In that kingdom there is a continual day, always serene, a continual spring, always blooming. In Paradise there are no persecutions, no envy; for all love each other with tenderness, and each rejoices at the happiness of the others, as if it were his own.

There is no more fear of hell, for the soul confirmed in grace can neither sin nor lose God.

In Heaven you will have all you can desire. *Behold, I make all things new.* There everything is new; new beauties, new delights, new joys. There all our desires shall be satisfied. The sight shall be satiated with beholding the beauty of that city. How delightful to behold a city the streets of which were made of crystal, the houses of silver, the windows of gold, and all adorned with the most beautiful flowers. But, oh, how much more beautiful shall be the city of Paradise! The beauty of the place shall be heightened by the beauty of the inhabitants, who are all clothed in royal robes; for, according to St. Augustine, they are all kings: *Quot cives, tot reges.*

Justly, then, has St. Augustine said that to gain the eternal glory of Paradise, we should cheerfully embrace eternal labour. The Saints have done but little to acquire Heaven. So many kings who have abdicated their thrones and shut themselves up in cloisters; so many holy anchorets who have confined themselves in caves; so many Martyrs who have cheerfully submitted to torments--to the rack, and to red-hot plates--all these have done but little. *The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared to the glory to come.* (Rom. viii. 18). To gain Heaven, it would be but little to endure all the pains of this life.

Let us, then, courageously resolve to bear patiently all the sufferings which may come upon us during the remaining days of our lives: to secure Heaven they are all little or nothing. Rejoice, then, for all these pains, sorrows, and persecutions shall, if we are saved, be to us a source of never-ending joys and delights. *Your sorrow, shall be turned into joy.* (John xvi. 20). When, therefore the crosses of this life afflict us, let us raise our eyes to Heaven, and console ourselves with the hope of Paradise. At the end of her life, St. Mary of Egypt was asked by the Abbot, St. Zozimus, how she had been able to live for forty-seven years in the desert where he found her dying. She answered: *With the hope of Paradise.* If we be animated with the same hope, we shall not feel the tribulations of this life. Courage! Let us love God and labour for Heaven. There the Saints expect us, Mary expects us, and Jesus Christ expects us. He holds in His hand a crown to make each of

us a king in that eternal kingdom.

## Spiritual Reading

*"NOT IN THE PASSION OF LUST LIKE THE GENTILES WHO KNOW NOT GOD."* (Epistle of Sunday. 1 Thess. iv. 1, 7)

They are deluded who say that sins of impurity are not a great evil. Immersed in their filth, *like the sow wallowing in the mire*. (2 Pet. ii. 22), they do not see the malice of their actions and, therefore, neither feel nor abhor the stench of their impurities, which excite disgust and horror in all others. Can you, who say that the vice of impurity is but a small evil--can you, I ask, deny that it is a mortal sin? If you deny it, you are a heretic; for as St. Paul says: *Do not err. Neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate, etc., shall possess the kingdom of God*. (1 Cor. vi. 9). It is a mortal sin; it cannot, then, be a small evil. It is more sinful than theft, or detraction, or the violation of the fast. How then can you say that it is not a great evil? Perhaps mortal sin appears to *you* to be a small evil? Is it a small evil to despise the grace of God, to turn your back upon Him, and to lose His friendship for a transitory, beastly pleasure?

St. Thomas teaches that mortal sin, because it is an insult offered to an Infinite God, contains a certain infinitude of malice. "A sin committed against God has a certain infinitude, on account of the infinitude of the Divine Majesty." Is mortal sin a small evil? It is so great an evil that if all the Angels and all the Saints, the Apostles, Martyrs, and even the Mother of God, offered all their merits to atone for a single mortal sin, the oblation would not be sufficient. No; for that atonement or satisfaction would be finite; but the debt contracted by mortal sin is infinite, on account of the infinite majesty of God which has been offended. The hatred which God bears to sins against purity is great beyond measure. If a lady find her plate soiled she is disgusted, and cannot eat. Now, with what disgust and indignation must God, Who is purity itself, behold the filthy impurities by which His law is violated? He loves purity with an infinite love; and consequently He has an infinite hatred for the sensuality which the lewd, voluptuous man calls a small evil. Even the devils who held a high rank in Heaven before their fall, disdain to tempt men to sins of the flesh.



St. Thomas says that Lucifer, who is supposed to have been the devil that tempted Jesus Christ in the desert, tempted Him to commit other sins, but scorned to tempt Him to offend against chastity. Is this sin a small evil? Is it, then, a small evil to see a man endowed with a rational soul, and enriched with so many Divine graces, bring himself by the sin of impurity to the level of a brute? "Fornication and sensuality," says St. Jerome, "pervert the understanding, and change men into brute beasts." In the voluptuous and unchaste are literally verified the words of David: *And man, when he was in honour, did not understand: he is compared to senseless beasts, and is become like to them.* (Ps. xlviii. 13). St. Jerome says that there is nothing more vile or degrading than to allow oneself to be conquered by the flesh. Is it a small evil to forget God, and to banish Him from the soul, for the sake of giving the body a vile satisfaction, of which, when it is ended, you feel ashamed? Of this the Lord complains by the Prophet Ezechiel: *Then saith the Lord God: Because Thou hast forgotten me, and hast cast me off behind thy back.* (Ezech. xxiii. 35). St. Thomas says, that by every vice, but particularly by the vice of impurity, men are removed far from God.

Moreover, sins of impurity, on account of their great number, are an immense evil. A blasphemer does not always blaspheme, but only when he is drunk or provoked to anger. The assassin, whose very trade is to murder, does not commit more than eight or ten homicides. But the unchaste are guilty of an unceasing torrent of sins, by thoughts, by words, by looks, by complacencies, and by touches; so that when they go to Confession, they find it impossible to tell the number of sins they have committed against purity. Even in their sleep the devil represents to them obscene objects, that, on awakening, they may take delight in them; and because they are made the slaves of the enemy, they obey and consent to his suggestions; for it is easy to contract a habit of this sin. To other sins, such as blasphemy, detraction, and murder, men are not prone; but to this vice nature itself inclines them. Hence St. Thomas says that there is no sinner so ready to offend God as is the votary of lust, on every occasion that occurs to him. The sin of impurity brings in its train the sins of defamation, of theft, hatred, and of boasting

of its own filthy abominations. Besides, it ordinarily involves the malice of scandal. Other sins, such as blasphemy, perjury, and murder, excite horror in those who witness them; but this sin excites and draws others, who are flesh, to commit it, or, at least, to commit it with less horror.

St. Cyprian says that the devil through impurity triumphs over the whole of man. By lust the devil triumphs over the entire man, over his body and over his soul; over his memory, filling it with the remembrance of unchaste delights, in order to make him take complacency in them; over his intellect, to make him desire occasions of committing sin; over the will, by making it love its impurities as his last end, and as if there were no God. *I made, said Job, a covenant with my eyes, that I would not so much as think upon a virgin. For what part should God from above have in me?* (Job xxxi. 1). Job was afraid to look at a virgin, because he knew that if he consented to a bad thought, God should have no part in him. According to St. Gregory, from impurity arises blindness of understanding, destruction, hatred of God, and despair of eternal life. St. Augustine says though the unchaste may grow old, the vice of impurity does not grow old in them. Hence St. Thomas says that there is no sin in which the devil delights so much as in this sin; because there is no other sin to which nature clings with so much tenacity. To the vice of impurity it adheres so firmly, that the appetite for carnal pleasures becomes insatiable. Will you now say that the sin of impurity is but a small evil? At the hour of death you shall not say so; every sin of that kind will then appear to you a monster of hell. Much less shall you say so before the Judgment seat of Christ Who will tell you what the Apostle has already told you: *No fornicator, or unclean, hath inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.* (Ephes. v. 5). The man who has lived like a brute, does not deserve to sit with the Angels.

Let us continue to pray to God to save us from this vice; if we do not, we shall lose our souls.

## **Evening Meditation**

*REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

### **I.**

The iniquitous high-priest then asked Jesus if He were verily the Son of God: *I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us if thou be the Christ, the Son of God.* (Matt. xxvi. 63). Jesus, out of respect for the Name of God, affirmed that He was so indeed; whereupon Caiphas rent his garments, saying that He had blasphemed; and all cried out that He deserved death: *But they answering said, he is guilty of death.* (Matt. xxvi. 66). Yes, O my Jesus, with truth do they declare Thee guilty of death, since Thou hast willed to take upon Thee to make satisfaction for me, who deserved eternal death. But if by Thy death Thou hast acquired for me life, it is just that I should spend my life wholly, yea, and if need be, to lose it for Thee. Yes, my Jesus, I will no longer live for myself; but only for Thee, and for Thy love. Succour me by Thy grace.

*Then they spat in his face and buffeted him.* (Matt. xxvi. 67). After having proclaimed Him guilty of death, as a man already given over to punishment, and declared infamous, the rabble set themselves to ill-treat Him all the night through with blows, and buffets, and kicks, with plucking out His beard, and even spitting in His Face, by mocking Him as a false prophet, and saying: *Prophecy unto us, O Christ, who is he that struck thee?* (Matt. xxvi. 68). All this our Redeemer foretold by Isaias: *I have given my body to the strikers, and my cheeks to them that plucked them; I have not turned my face away from them that rebuked and spit upon me.* (Is. l. 6). The devout Thauler relates that it is an opinion of St. Jerome that all the pains and infirmities which Jesus suffered on that night shall be made known only on the day of the Last Judgment. St. Augustine, speaking of the ignominies suffered by Jesus Christ, says, "If this medicine cannot cure our pride, I know not what can. Ah, my Jesus, how is it that Thou art so humble and I so proud? O Lord, give me light; make me know who Thou art, and who I am.

## II.

*Then they spat in his face.* Spat! O God, what greater affront can there be than to be defiled by spitting: "To be spit upon is to suffer the extreme of insult," says Origen. Where are we wont to spit, except in the most filthy place? And didst Thou, my Jesus, suffer Thyself to be spit upon in the face? Behold how these

wretches outrage Thee with blows and kicks, insult Thee, spit on Thy Face, do with Thee just what they will; and dost Thou not threaten or reprove them? *When he was reviled, he reviled not; when he suffered, he threatened not; but delivered himself to him that judged him unjustly.* (1 Pet. ii. 23). No, but like an innocent lamb, humble and meek, Thou didst suffer all without so much as complaining, offering all to the Father to obtain the pardon of our sins: *Like a lamb before the shearer, he shall be dumb and shall not open his mouth.* (Is. liii. 7). St. Gertrude one day, when meditating on the injuries done to Jesus in His Passion, began to praise and bless Him; this was so pleasing to Our Lord, that He lovingly thanked her.

Ah, my reviled Lord, Thou art the King of Heaven, the Son of the Most High: Thou surely deservest not to be ill-treated and despised, but to be adored and loved by all creatures. I adore Thee, I bless Thee, I thank Thee, I love Thee with all my heart. I repent of having offended Thee. Help me, have pity upon me.

## **Monday -- Second Week of Lent**

### **Morning Meditation**

#### *THE HABIT OF SIN PRODUCES BLINDNESS*

Every sin produces blindness; and as sin increases, so does the sinner's blindness increase. Therefore do we see relapsing sinners lose all light, and go from sin to sin, without even thinking of amendment. The very habit of committing sin, says St. Augustine, prevents sinners from perceiving the evil they do, and so they live as if they no longer believed in God, in Heaven, or in eternity.

#### **I.**

*The wicked man, when he is come into the depths of sins, contemneth.* (Prov. xviii. 3). One of the greatest ills which the sin of Adam brought upon us was the evil inclination to sin. This made the Apostle weep when he found himself compelled by concupiscence towards those very sins which he abhorred: *I see another law in my members . . . captivating me in the law of sin.* (Rom. vii. 23). Therefore is it so difficult for us, infected as we are by this concupiscence, and with so many enemies urging us to evil, to arrive sinless at our heavenly country. Now such being our frailty, I ask, what would you say of a voyager who, having to

cross the sea in a great storm, and in a frail barque, would load it in such a manner as would be sufficient to sink it even were there no storm and the vessel strong? What would you predict as to the life of that man? Now, we may say the same of the habitual sinner, who, having to pass the sea of this life--a stormy sea in which so many are lost--in a frail and shattered barque, such as is our flesh to which we are united, still burdens it with habitual sins. Such a one can hardly be saved, because a bad habit blinds the understanding, hardens the heart, and thus renders him obstinate to the last. In the first place, a bad habit produces *blindness*. And why indeed, do the Saints always beg for light from God, trembling lest they should become the worst sinners in the world? Because they know that if for a moment they lose that light, there is no enormity they may not commit. How is it that so many Christians have lived obstinately in sin until at last they have damned themselves? *Their own malice blinded them*. (Wis. ii. 21). Sin deprived them of sight, and thus they were lost. Every sin produces blindness; and as sin increases, so does the blindness increase. God is our light; as much, therefore, as the soul withdraws from God, so much the more blind does she become: *His bones shall be filled with the vices of his youth*. (Job xx. 11). As in a vessel full of earth the light of the sun cannot penetrate, so in a heart full of vices Divine light cannot enter. Therefore do we see certain relapsed sinners lose all light, and proceed from sin to sin, without any more even thinking of amendment: *The wicked walk round about*. (Ps. xi. 9). Having fallen into that dark pit, the unhappy wretches can do nothing but sin; they speak only of sin; they think only of sin; and hardly perceive at last what harm there is in sin. The very habit of committing sin, says St. Augustine, prevents sinners from perceiving the evil they do. So that they live as if they no longer believed in God, in Heaven, in hell, or in eternity.

My God, Thou hast conferred signal blessings upon me, favouring me above others; and I have signally offended Thee by outraging Thee more than any other person that I know. O sorrowful Heart of my Redeemer, afflicted and tormented on the Cross by the sight of my sins, give me, through Thy merits, a lively sense of my offences, and sorrow for them. Ah, my Jesus, I

am full of vices; but Thou art omnipotent, Thou canst easily fill my soul with Thy holy love. In Thee, then, I trust; Thou Who art infinite goodness and infinite mercy. I repent, O my Sovereign Good, of having offended Thee. Oh, that I had rather died, and had ever caused Thee any displeasure!

## II.

That sin which at first struck the sinner with terror, now, through bad habit, no longer causes horror: *Make them as stubble before the wind*. (Ps. lxxxii. 14). Behold, says St. Gregory, with what ease a straw is stirred by the slightest wind; thus also you will see one who before he fell, resisted, at least for some time, and combated temptation, when the bad habit is contracted fall instantly at every temptation, and on every occasion of sin that presents itself. And why? Because the bad habit has deprived him of light. St. Anselm says that the devil acts with some sinners like one who holds a bird tied by a string; he allows it to fly, but, when he chooses, he drags it to the earth again. So is it, says the Saint, with habitual sinners: "Entangled by a bad habit, they are held bound by the enemy; and though flying, they are cast down into the same vices." Some, adds St. Bernardine of Sienna, continue to sin, even without occasion. You will see an habitual sinner without occasion indulging in bad thoughts, without pleasure, and almost without will, drawn forcibly on by bad habit. As St. John Chrysostom observes, "Habit is a merciless thing; it forces men, sometimes even against; their will, to the commission of unlawful acts." Yes because, according to St. Augustine, "When no resistance is made to a habit, it becomes a necessity. And, as St. Bernardine adds: "Habit is changed into nature." Hence, as it is necessary for a man to breathe so to habitual sinners, who have made themselves slaves of sin, it appears almost necessary that they must sin. I have used the expression *slaves*; there are servants who serve for pay, but *slaves* serve by force and without pay; to this do some poor wretches come, who at last sin without pleasure.

*The wicked man, when he is come to the depth of sin: contemneth.* (Prov. xviii. 3). St. Chrysostom explains this of the habitual sinner, who, plunged into that pit of darkness, despises corrections, sermons, censures, help, God--despises all, and becomes

like the vulture, which, rather than leave the dead body, allows itself to be killed upon it. Father Recupito relates, that a criminal on his way to execution raised his eyes, beheld a young girl and consented to a bad thought. Father Gisolfo also relates that a blasphemer, likewise condemned to death uttered a blasphemy as he was thrown off the ladder. St. Bernard goes so far as to say that it is of no use praying for habitual sinners, but we must weep for them as lost. How can they, indeed, avoid the precipice which they no longer see? It requires a miracle of grace. These unhappy beings will open their eyes in hell, when it will be of no avail to open them, unless it be to weep the more bitterly over their folly.

O my Jesus, I have forgotten Thee; but Thou hast not forgotten me; I perceive it by the light Thou now givest me. Since, then, Thou givest me light, give me likewise strength to be faithful to Thee. I promise Thee rather to die a thousand times than ever again to turn my back on Thee. But all my hopes are in Thine assistance: *In thee, O Lord, have I hoped; let me not be confounded forever.* I hope in Thee, my Jesus, never again to find myself entangled in iniquity and deprived of Thy grace. To thee, also, do I turn, O Mary, my blessed Lady: "In thee, O Lady, have I hoped; let me not be confounded for ever." O my hope, I trust by thy intercession that I may never again find myself at enmity with thy Son. Ah, beg of Him rather to let me die than that He should abandon me to this greatest of misfortunes.

## **Spiritual Reading**

### *INTERIOR MORTIFICATION*

Even works of piety must be always undertaken with a spirit of detachment; so that whenever our efforts are unsuccessful we shall not be disturbed, and when our exercises of devotion are prohibited by a Superior we shall give them up with cheerfulness. Self-attachment of every kind hinders a perfect union with God. We must therefore seriously and firmly resolve to mortify our passions, and not to submit to be their slaves. External as well as interior mortification is necessary for perfection: but with this difference, that the former should be practised with discretion; the latter without discretion, and with fervour. What does it profit us to mortify the body, while the passions of the heart

are indulged? "Of what use is it," says St. Jerome, "to reduce the body by abstinence, if the soul is swelled with pride?--or to abstain from wine, and to be inebriated with hatred?" It is useless to chastise the body by fasting, while pride inflates the heart to such a degree, that we cannot bear a word of contempt or the refusal of a request. In vain do we abstain from wine while the soul is intoxicated with anger against all who thwart our designs or oppose our inclinations. No wonder, then, that St. Bernard deplored the miserable state of him who wears the external garb of humility, and at the same time inwardly cherishes his passions. "Such people," says the Saint, "are not divested of their vices: they only cover them by the outward sign of penance."

By attention to the mortification of self-love, we shall become Saints in a short time, and without the risk of injury to health; for since God is the only witness of interior acts, they will not expose us to the danger of being puffed up with pride. Oh! what treasures of virtue and of merits are laid up by stifling in their very birth those little inordinate desires and affections, those bickerings, those suggestions of curiosity, those bursts of wit and humour, and all similar effects of self-love! When you are contradicted, give up your opinion with cheerfulness, unless the glory of God require that you maintain it. When feelings of self-esteem spring up in your heart, make a sacrifice of them to Jesus Christ. If you receive a letter, restrain your curiosity, and abstain from opening it for some time. If you desire to read the termination of an interesting narrative, lay aside the book, and defer the reading of it to another time. When you feel inclined to mirth, to pull a flower, or to look at any object, suppress these inclinations for the love of Jesus Christ, and deprive yourself for His sake of the pleasure of indulging in them. A thousand acts of this kind may be performed in the day. St. Leonard of Port Maurice relates that a servant of God performed eight acts of mortification in eating an egg, and that it was afterwards revealed to her that, as the reward of her self-denial, eight degrees of grace and as many degrees of glory were bestowed upon her. It is also related of St. Dositheus, that by a similar mortification of the interior, he arrived in a short time at a high degree of perfection. Though unable, in consequence of bodily infirmities, to fast or



to discharge the other duties of the Religious Community, he attained so perfect a union with God, that the other monks, struck with wonder at his sublime sanctity, asked him what exercises of virtue he performed. "The exercise," replied the Saint, "to which I have principally attended is the mortification of all self-love."

### **Evening Meditation**

#### *REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

##### I.

When it was day, the Jews conduct Jesus to Pilate, to make him condemn Him to death; but Pilate declares Him to be innocent: *I find no cause in this man.* (Luke xxiii. 4). And to free himself from the importunities of the Jews, who pressed on him, seeking the death of the Saviour, he sends Him to Herod. It greatly pleased Herod to see Jesus Christ brought before him, hoping that in his presence, in order to deliver Himself from death, He would have worked one of those miracles of which he had heard; wherefore Herod asked Him many questions. But Jesus, because He did not wish to be delivered from death, and because that wicked one was not worthy of His answers, was silent, and answered him not. Then the proud king, with his court, offered Him many insults, and making them cover Him with a white robe, as if declaring Him to be an ignorant and stupid fellow, sent Him back to Pilate: *But Herod with his soldiers despised him, and mocked him, putting on him a white robe, and sent him back to Pilate.* (Luke xxiii. 11). Cardinal Hugo in his Commentary says, "Mocking Him as if a fool, he clothed Him with a white robe." And St. Bonaventure, "He despised Him as if impotent, because He worked no miracle; as if ignorant, because He answered him not a word; as if idiotic, because He did not defend Himself."

O Eternal Wisdom! O Divine Word! This one other ignominy was wanting to Thee, that Thou shouldst be treated as a fool bereft of sense. So greatly does our salvation weigh on Thee, that through love of us Thou willest not only to be reviled, but to be satiated with revilings; as Jeremias had already prophesied of Thee: *He shall give his cheek to him that striketh him; he shall be filled with reproaches.* (Lam. iii. 30). And how couldst Thou bear such love to men, from whom Thou hast received nothing but

ingratitude and slights? Alas, that I should be one of these who have outraged Thee worse than Herod. Ah, my Jesus, chastise me not, like Herod, by depriving me of Thy voice. Herod did not recognise Thee for what Thou art! I confess Thee to be my God: Herod loved Thee not; I love Thee more than myself. Deny me not, I beseech Thee, deny me not the voice of Thy inspiration, as I have deserved by the offences I have committed against Thee. Tell me what Thou wilt have of me, for, by Thy grace, I am ready to do all that Thou wilt.

## II.

When Jesus had been led back to Pilate, the governor inquired of the people whom they wished to have released at the Passover, Jesus or Barabbas, a murderer. But the people cried out, *Not this man, but Barabbas*. Then said Pilate, *What, then, shall I do with Jesus?* They answered, *Let him be crucified*. But what evil hath this innocent One done? replied Pilate: *What evil hath he done?* They repeated: *Let him be crucified*. And even up to this time, O God, the greater part of mankind continue to say, "Not this Man, but Barabbas"; preferring to Jesus Christ some pleasure of sense, some point of honour, some outbreak of wounded pride.

Ah, my Lord, well knowest Thou that at one time I did Thee the same injury when I preferred my accursed tastes to Thee. My Jesus, pardon me, for I repent of the past, and from henceforth I prefer Thee before everything. I esteem Thee, I love Thee more than any good; and am willing a thousand times to die rather than forsake Thee. Give me holy perseverance, give me Thy love.

## **Tuesday -- Second Week of Lent** **Morning Meditation**

*THE HABIT OF SIN HARDENS THE HEART.*

*His heart shall be as hard as a stone and as firm as a smith's anvil.* God does not indeed harden the habitual sinner, but He withdraws His grace in punishment of his ingratitude for past favours; and thus his heart becomes as hard as a stone. And St. Thomas of Villanova says: "Hardness of heart is a sign of damnation."

## I.

A bad habit *hardens the heart*, and God justly permits it in punishment of resistance to His calls. The Apostle says that the Lord *hath mercy on whom he will; and whom he will he hardeneth*. (Rom. ix. 18). St. Augustine explains it thus: It is not that God hardens the habitual sinner; but He withdraws His grace in punishment of his ingratitude for past graces, and thus his heart becomes hard as a stone: *His heart shall be hard as a stone, and as firm as a smith's anvil*. (Job xli. 15). Hence, when others are moved and weep on hearing sermons on the rigours of Divine justice, the pains of the damned, and the Passion of Jesus Christ, the habitual sinner is in no way affected; he will speak of these things, and hear them spoken of, with indifference, as if they were things that concerned him not; and he will only become more hardened: *He shall be as firm as a smith's anvil*. Even sudden deaths, earthquakes, thunderbolts, and lightning, will no longer terrify him; and, instead of arousing him, and making him enter into himself, they will rather produce in him that stupor of death in which he hopelessly sleeps: *At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, they have all slumbered*. (Ps. lxxv. 7). A bad habit by degrees destroys even remorse of conscience. To the habitual sinner the most enormous sin appears as nothing, says St. Augustine: "Sins, however horrible, when once habitual, seem little or no sin at all." How can I thank Thee, O Lord, as I ought, for the many graces Thou hast bestowed on me! How often hast Thou called me, and I have resisted! Instead of being grateful to Thee, and loving Thee for having delivered me from hell, and called me with so much love, I have continued to provoke Thy wrath by requiting Thee with insults. No, my God, I will no longer outrage Thy patience; I have offended Thee enough. Thou alone, Who art infinite love, couldst have borne with me till now. But I now see that Thou canst bear with me no longer; and with reason. Pardon, then, my Lord and my Sovereign Good, all my offences against Thee; of which I repent with my whole heart, for I purpose in future never to offend Thee again.

## II.

The commission of sin naturally carries along with it a certain shame; but, says St. Jerome, "Habitual sinners lose even

shame in sinning." St. Peter compares the habitual sinner to the swine that wallows in the mire (2 Peter ii. 22) As the swine that rolls in the mire perceives not the stench, so it is with the habitual sinner; that stench, which is perceived by all others, is unnoticed by him alone. And, supposing the mire to have deprived him also of sight, what wonder is it, says St. Bernardine, that he amends not even when God chastises him! "The people wallow in sin, as the sow in a pool of filth; what wonder is it if they perceive not the coming judgments of an avenging God!" Hence, instead of grieving over his sins, he rejoices in them, he laughs at them, he boasts of them: *They are glad when they have done evil. A fool worketh mischief, as it were, for sport.* (Prov. ii. 14; x. 23). What signs are not these of diabolical obduracy! They are all signs of damnation, says St. Thomas of Villanova: "Hardness of heart is a sign of damnation." Tremble lest the same should happen to you. If perchance you have any bad habit, endeavour to break from it speedily, now that God calls you. And as long as your conscience smites you, rejoice; for it is a sign that God has not yet abandoned you. But amend, give up sin at once; for if not, the wound will become gangrenous, and you will be lost.

What! shall I, perchance, always continue to provoke my God? Ah, be appeased with me, O God of my soul; not through my merits, for which vengeance and hell alone are reserved, but through the merits of Thy Son and my Redeemer, in which I place my hope. For the love, then, of Jesus Christ receive me into Thy grace, and give me perseverance in Thy love. Detach me from all impure affections, and draw me wholly to Thyself. I love Thee, O great God, O Supreme Lover of souls, worthy of infinite love. Oh, that I had always loved Thee! O Mary, my Mother, grant that the remainder of my life may be spent, not in offending thy Son, but only in loving Him, and weeping over the displeasure O have caused Him.

## Spiritual Reading

### INTERIOR MORTIFICATION

St. Joseph Calasanctius used to say that "the day which is spent without mortification is lost." To convince us of the necessity of mortification, the Redeemer has chosen a life of self-denial, full of pains and ignominy, and destitute of all sensi-

ble pleasure. Hence He is called by Isaias, *a man of sorrows*. (Is. liii. 3). He might have saved the world amid the enjoyment of honours and delights; but He preferred to redeem it by sorrows and contempt. *Who having joy set before him, endured the cross*. (Heb. xii. 2). To give us an example, Jesus renounced the joy which was set before Him, and embraced the Cross. "Reflect again and again," says St. Bernard, "on the life of Jesus, and you will find Him always on the Cross." The Redeemer revealed to St. Catherine of Bologna that the sorrows of His Passion began in His Mother's womb. For His birth He selected the season, the place and the hour most adapted to excite pain. During life He chose to be poor, unknown, despised; and, dying, He preferred the most painful, the most ignominious, and the most desolate of all kinds of death which human nature could suffer. St. Catherine of Sienna used to say that as a mother takes the bitterest medicine to restore the health of the infant she suckles, so Jesus Christ has assumed all the pains of life to heal the infirmities of His children.

Thus He invites all His followers to accompany Him to the mountain of myrrh; that is, of bitterness and of sorrows. *I will go to the mountain of myrrh*. (Cant. iv. 6). Behold, Jesus invites us to follow if we wish for His company. "Do you come," says St. Peter Damian, "to Jesus crucified? If you do, you must come already crucified, or to be crucified." If, O beloved soul, you come to embrace your crucified Saviour, you must bring with you a heart already crucified, or to be crucified. Speaking especially of His consecrated virginal spouses: Jesus Christ said to the Blessed Baptist Varani: "The crucified Bridegroom desires a crucified spouse" --that is, one that leads a life of continual mortification and self-denial. *Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus*. (2 Cor. iv. 10). We must never seek our own satisfaction in any action or desire, but the pleasure of Jesus Christ, crucifying for His sake all our inclinations. *They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences*. (Gal. v. 24).

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### I.

Presently we will speak of the other reproaches which Jesus Christ endured, until He finally died on the Cross: *He endured the cross, despising the shame.* (Heb. xii. 2). Meanwhile let us consider how truly in our dear Redeemer was fulfilled what the Psalmist had foretold, that in His Passion He should become the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people: *But I am a worm, and no man; the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people.* (Ps. xxi. 7); even to a death of ignominy suffered at the hands of the executioner on a Cross, as a malefactor between two malefactors: *And he was reputed with the wicked.* (Is. liii. 12).

O Lord, the Most High, exclaims St. Bernard, become the lowest among men! O lofty One become vile! O glory of Angels become the reproach of men: "O lowest and highest! O humble and sublime! O reproach of men and glory of Angels!"

O grace, O strength of the love of God, continues St. Bernard. Thus did the Lord most high over all become the most lightly esteemed of all! "O grace, O power of love, did the highest of all thus become the lowest of all?" And who was it, adds the Saint, that did this? "Who hath done this? Love." All this hath the love which God bears towards men done, to prove how He loves us, and to teach us by His example how to suffer with peace contempt and injuries: *Christ also suffered for us* (writes St. Peter), *leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps.* (1 Pet. ii. 21). St. Eleazer, when asked by his wife how he came to endure with such peace the great injuries that were done him, answered: I turn to look on Jesus enduring contempt, and say that my affronts are as nothing in respect to those which He, my God, was willing to bear for me.

Ah, my Jesus, and how is it that, at the sight of a God thus dishonoured for love of me, I know not how to suffer the least contempt for love of Thee? A sinner, and proud! And whence, my Lord, can come this pride? I pray Thee, by the merits of the contempt Thou didst suffer, give me grace to suffer with patience and gladness all affronts and injuries. From this day forth I propose by Thy help never more to resent them, but to receive with joy all the reproaches which shall be offered me. Truly have I deserved greater contempt for having despised Thy Divine Majesty, and deserved the contempt of hell. Exceeding sweet

and pleasant to me hast Thou rendered affronts, my beloved Redeemer, by having embraced such great contempt for love of me. Henceforth I propose, in order to please Thee, to benefit as much as possible whoever despises me; at least to speak well of and pray for him. And even now I pray Thee to heap up Thy graces on all those from whom I have received any injury. I love Thee, O infinite Good, and will ever love Thee as much as I can. Amen.

## II.

Let us enter into the pretorium of Pilate, one day made the horrible scene of the ignominies and pains of Jesus; let us see how unjust, how shameful, how cruel was the punishment there inflicted on the Saviour of the world. Pilate, seeing that the Jews continued to make a tumult against Jesus, as a most unjust judge, condemned Him to be scourged: *Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him.* (John xix. 1). The iniquitous judge thought by means of this barbarity to win for Him the compassion of His enemies, and thus to deliver Him from death: *I will chastise him,* he said, *and let him go.* (Luke xxiii. 16). Scourging was the chastisement inflicted on slaves only. Therefore, says St. Bernard, our loving Redeemer willed to take the form, not only of a slave, in order to subject Himself to the will of others, but even of a bad slave, in order to be chastised with scourges, and so to pay the penalty due from man, who had made himself the slave of sin: "Taking not only the form of a slave, that he might submit, but even of a bad slave, that he might be beaten and suffer the punishment of the slave of sin."

O Son of God, O Thou great lover of my soul, how couldst Thou, the Lord of infinite Majesty, so love an object so vile and ungrateful as I am, as to subject Thyself to so much punishment, to deliver me from the punishment which was my due. A God scourged! It were a greater marvel that God should receive the slightest blow, than that all men and Angels should be destroyed. Ah, my Jesus, pardon me the offences I have committed against Thee, and then chastise me as it shall please Thee. This alone is enough, --that I love Thee, and that Thou love me; and then I am content to suffer all the pains Thou wilt.

**Wednesday -- Second Week of Lent**

## Morning Meditation

### THE HABIT OF SIN MAKES THE SINNER OBSTINATE EVEN TO THE LAST.

*A hard heart shall fare evil at the last.* When light is lost and the heart is hardened, the probable consequence will be that the sinner will make a bad end, and die obstinate in sin. O Jesus, I am resolved to change my life and give myself to Thee.

I.

When light is lost, and the heart is hardened, the probable consequence will be that the sinner will make bad end, and die obstinate in his sin: *A hard heart shall fare evil at the last.* (Ecclus. iii. 27). The just continue to walk in the straight road: *The path of the just is right to walk in.* (Is. xxvi. 7). Habitual sinners, on the contrary, go always in a circle: *The wicked walk round about.* (Ps. xi. 9). They leave sin for a while, and then they return to it. To such as these St. Bernard announces a curse: "Woe to the man who follows this circle!" Such a one will say: I will amend before I die. But the difficulty lies in this--will an habitual sinner amend even though he should attain old age? The Holy Spirit says: *A young man according to his way, even when he is old he will not depart from it.* (Prov. xxii. 6). The reason is, according to St. Thomas of Villanova, that our strength is very feeble: *Your strength shall be as the ashes of tow.* (Is. i. 31). From which it follows, as the Saint observes, that the soul, deprived of grace, cannot avoid committing fresh sins: "Hence it comes to pass that the soul, destitute of grace, cannot long escape fresh sins." But besides this, what madness would it be in a person to play and lose voluntarily all he possessed, in the hope of winning it back at the last stake! Such is the folly of those who continue to live in sin, and hope at the last moment of their life to repair all. Can the Ethiopian or the leopard change the colour of their skin? And how can he lead a good life who has contracted a long habit of sin? *If the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots, you also may do well when you have learned evil.* (Jer. xiii. 23). Hence it happens that the habitual sinner abandons himself at last to despair, and thus ends his life.

Ah, my God, shall I, then, wait till Thou dost absolutely abandon me, and send me to hell? Ah, Lord, wait for me; for I am resolved to change my life, and give myself to Thee. Tell



me what I must do and I will do it. O Blood of Jesus, aid me. O Mary, Advocate of sinners, succour me; and Thou, Eternal Father, through the merits of Jesus and Mary, have pity on me.

## II.

St. Gregory, on that passage of Job: *He hath torn me with wound upon wound, he hath rushed in upon me like a giant* (xvi. 15), remarks: "If a person is attacked by an enemy, he is perhaps able to defend himself at the first wound he receives; but the more wounds that are inflicted on him, the more strength does he lose, until at last he is overcome and killed." Thus it is with sin: after the first or the second time, the sinner has still some strength left (always, be it understood, through the means of grace, which assists him); but if he continues to sin, sin becomes a giant: "It rushes upon him as a giant." On the other hand, the sinner being weaker, and covered with wounds, how can he escape death? Sin, according to Jeremias, is like a heavy stone that weighs upon the soul: *They have laid a stone over me*. (Lament. iii. 53). Now, St. Bernard says, that it is as difficult for an habitual sinner to rise, as for one who has fallen under a heavy stone, and who has not strength sufficient to remove it, to free himself from it; "He rises with difficulty who is pressed down by the mass of a bad habit."

But the habitual sinner will exclaim: Then my case is desperate? No, not desperate, if you wish to amend. But well does a certain author observe that great ills require great remedies: "It is good in severe diseases to commence the cure by severe remedies. If a physician were to say to a sick man in danger of death who refused to apply proper remedies, being ignorant of the serious nature of his malady: "My friend, you are a dead man unless you take such a medicine" --how would the sick man reply? "Here I am," he would say, "ready to take anything; my life is at stake." Dear Christian, I say the same to you: if you have contracted the habit of some sin, you are in a bad way, and of the number of those sick men who "are rarely cured," according to St. Thomas of Villanova. You are on the brink of perdition. If, however, you wish to recover, there is a remedy: but you must not expect a miracle of grace; you must on your side do violence to yourself, you must fly from dangerous occasions, avoid bad company, and resist when you are tempted, recommending your-

self to God. You must make use of proper means, going frequently to Confession, reading every day a spiritual book, practising devotion to the Blessed Virgin, praying constantly to her that she may obtain for you strength not to relapse. You must do violence to yourself, otherwise the threat of the Lord against the obstinate will be fulfilled in your regard: *You shall die in your sin.* (John viii. 21). And if you do not amend, now that God gives you light, it will be more difficult to do so later. Hear God, Who calls you: *Lazarus, come forth.* Poor sinner, already dead, come out of the dark grave of your bad life. Reply quickly, give yourself to God, and tremble lest this should be your last call.

I repent, O God of infinite goodness, of having offended Thee; and I love Thee above all things. Pardon me, for the love of Jesus Christ, and give me Thy love. Give me also, O Lord, a great fear of eternal perdition should I again offend Thee. Light, O my God, --light and strength! I hope for all through Thy mercy. Thou hast bestowed on me so many graces when I wandered far from Thee; how much more, then, may I hope, now that I return to Thee, resolved to love Thee alone. I love Thee, my God, my Life, my All. I love thee also, O Mary, my Mother; to thee I consign my soul; preserve it by thy intercession from again falling into disfavour with God.

## **Spiritual Reading**

### *INTERIOR MORTIFICATION*

Let us now see what are the means by which the spirit of interior mortification may be acquired.

The first means is to discover the passion which predominates in our heart, and which most frequently leads us into sin; and then to endeavour to conquer it. St. Gregory says that to overcome the devil, we must avail ourselves of the artifices by which he seeks our destruction. He labours continually to increase in us the violence of the passion to which we are most subject; and we must direct our attention principally to the extirpation of that passion. Whoever subdues his predominant passion will easily conquer all other evil inclinations; but he that is under its sway can make no progress in perfection. "Of what advantage," says St. Ephrem, "are wings to the eagle when his foot is chained?" Oh! how many souls are there who, like the

royal eagle, are capable of lofty flights in the way of God, and who, because they are bound by earthly attachments, never fly, and never advance in holiness! St. John of the Cross says that a slender thread is sufficient to fetter a soul that flies not with eagerness to its God. Besides, he that submits to the tyranny of any passion, not only does not go forward in the way of virtue, but is exposed to great danger of being lost. If we neglect to subdue the ruling passion, other mortifications will be unprofitable to us. Some despise worldly riches, but are full of self-esteem. If they do not endeavour to bear the humiliations which they receive, their contempt of Mammon will profit them but little. Others, on the contrary, are patient and humble, but enslaved to the love of money. If they do not mortify the desire of wealth, their patience and humility in bearing contempt will be of little use to them.

Resolve, then, with a resolute will, to subdue the evil inclination which is most predominant in your heart. A resolute will, aided by the grace of God (which is never wanting), conquers all difficulties. St. Francis de Sales was very prone to anger; but by continual violence to himself he became a model of meekness and of sweetness. We read in his *Life* that he bore without murmur or complaint the injuries and calumnies which, to try his patience, were by the Divine permission heaped upon him. As soon as one passion is subdued, we must endeavour to overcome the others; for a single unmortified passion will be sufficient to lead the soul to destruction. St. Joseph Calasanz asserts that while a single passion reigns in a heart, though all the others should have been extirpated, the soul shall never enjoy tranquillity. "A ship," says St. Cyril, "however strong and perfect it may be, will be unsafe if the smallest hole remains in it." And St. Augustine says: "Trample under foot passions already subdued, and combat those that still offer resistance." If you wish to be a Saint, I advise you to entreat your spiritual director to point out the way in which you ought to walk. Tell him not to spare you, but to contradict your inclinations as often as he shall judge it useful to you. "Be of an upright and perfect will," says that great servant of God, Cardinal Petrucci. St. Teresa relates that she derived more advantage from one of her confessors who sought on all occa-

sions to oppose her desires, than from all the others. She adds that she was frequently tempted to leave him; and that, as often as she yielded to the suggestion of the devil, God rebuked her severely. "Every time," says the Saint, "I resolved to leave him, I felt within me a rebuke more painful than the conduct of my confessor towards me."

## **Evening Meditation**

### *REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

#### I.

As soon as He arrived at the pretorium (as was revealed to St. Bridget), our loving Saviour at the command of the servants, stripped Himself of His garments, embraced the column, and then laid on it His hands to have them bound. O God, already is begun the cruel torture! O Angels of Heaven, come and look on this sorrowful spectacle; and if it be not permitted you to deliver your King from this barbarous slaughter which men have prepared for Him, at least come and weep for compassion. And thou, my soul, imagine thyself to be present at this horrible tearing of the Flesh of thy beloved Redeemer. Look on Him, how He stands, --thy afflicted Jesus, --with His head bowed, looking on the ground, blushing all over for shame, He awaits this great torture. Behold these barbarians, like so many ravening dogs, are already with the scourges attacking this innocent Lamb. See how one beats Him on the breast, another strikes His shoulders, another smites His loins and His legs; even His Sacred Head and His beautiful face cannot escape the blows. Ah, me! already flows that Divine Blood from every part; already with that Blood are saturated the scourges, the hands of the executioners, the column, and the ground. "He is wounded," mourns St. Peter Damian, "over His whole Body, torn with the scourges; now they twine round His shoulders, now round His legs--weals upon weals, wounds added to fresh wounds." Ah, cruel men, with whom are you dealing thus? Stay--stay; know that you are mistaken. The Man Whom you are torturing is innocent and holy; it is myself who am the culprit; to me, to me who have sinned, are these stripes and torments due. But you regard not what I say. And how canst Thou, O Eternal Father, bear with this great

injustice? How canst Thou behold Thy beloved Son suffering thus, and not interfere on His behalf? What is the crime that He has ever committed, to deserve so shameful and so severe a punishment?

## II.

*For the wickedness of my people have I struck him.* (Is. liii. 8). I well know, says the Eternal Father, that this My Son is innocent; but inasmuch as He has offered Himself as a satisfaction to My justice for all the sins of mankind, it is fitting that I should so abandon Him to the rage of His enemies. Hast Thou, then, my adorable Saviour, in compensation for our sins, and especially for those of impurity,--that most prevalent vice of mankind--been willing to have Thy most pure Flesh torn in pieces? And who, then, will not exclaim with St. Bernard, "How unspeakable is the love of the Son of God towards sinners!"

Ah, my Lord, smitten with the scourge, I return Thee thanks for such great love, and I grieve that I am myself, by reason of my sins, one of those who scourge Thee. O my Jesus, I detest all those wicked pleasures which have cost Thee so much pain. Oh, how many years ought I not already to have been in the flames of hell! And why hast Thou so patiently waited for me until now? Thou hast borne with me, in order that at length, overcome by so many wiles of love, I might give myself up to love Thee, abandoning sin. O my beloved Redeemer, I will offer no further resistance to Thy loving affection; I desire to love Thee henceforth to the uttermost of my power. But Thou already knowest my weakness; Thou knowest how often I have betrayed Thee. Do Thou detach me from all earthly affections which hinder me from being all Thine own. Put me frequently in mind of the love which Thou hast borne me, and of the obligation I am under of ever loving Thee. In Thee I place all my hopes, my God, my Love, my All.

## **Thursday -- Second Week of Lent** **Morning Meditation**

### *DELUSIONS THE DEVIL SUGGESTS TO SINNERS*

The devil brings sinners to hell by closing their eyes to the dangers of damnation. He first blinds them, and then leads them

into eternal torments. If, then, we wish to be saved, we must continually pray to God in the words of the blind man in the Gospel: *Lord, that I may see! Domine, ut videam!* Give me light, O Lord, and make me see the way in which I must walk, in order to escape the illusions of the enemy of my salvation.

I.

Let us take a young person who has fallen into grievous sins, has confessed them, and has regained Divine grace. The devil again tempts him to sin; he resists, but already wavers through the deceits suggested to him by the enemy. I say to that person--to you: Tell me, what will you do? Will you now lose the grace of God, which you have regained, and which is of more value than the whole world, for this wretched gratification? Will you write your own sentence of eternal death, and condemn yourself to burn for ever in hell? "No," you say, "I do not wish to condemn myself, I wish to be saved; if I commit this sin, I will afterwards confess it." Behold the first delusion of the tempter. You say to me, then, that you will afterwards confess it? But in the meantime you already give away your soul. Tell me, if you had in your hand a jewel worth a thousand crowns, would you throw it into the river, saying: Afterwards I will search diligently and hope to find it? You hold in your hand that precious jewel of your soul, which Jesus Christ has purchased by His Blood; and you cast it voluntarily into hell (for in sinning you are, according to present justice, already condemned), and say: But I hope to recover it by Confession. But supposing you should not recover it? To recover it you must have true repentance, which is the gift of God; and if God should not give you this repentance? And if death were to come, and take from you time for Confession?

You say you will not allow a week to pass over without Confession; and who promises you a week? You say you will go to Confession tomorrow; and who promises you tomorrow? St. Augustine says: "God has not promised you tomorrow; perhaps He will give it you, and perhaps He will not give it you," as He has denied it to so many, who have gone to bed well, and have been found dead in the morning. How many has God struck dead and sent to hell in the very act of sinning!

And should He do the same to you, how can you ever repair

your eternal ruin? Know, that through this delusion, "I will confess afterwards," the devil has carried off thousands and thousands of Christians to hell. We shall hardly ever find a sinner so desperate as positively to resolve to damn himself: all, even when they commit sin, do so in the hope of future Confession. And thus have so many poor souls been lost, and now they can no longer repair the past.

Is it, then, O my God, because Thou hast been so good to me, that I have been thus ungrateful to Thee? We have been engaged in a contest--I to fly from Thee, and Thou to pursue me; Thou to do me good, and I to return Thee evil. Ah, my Lord, were there no other reason, Thy goodness alone towards me ought to enamour me of Thee, since whilst I have increased my sins, Thou hast increased Thy graces. And how have I merited the light Thou now givest me? My Lord, I thank Thee for it with my whole heart; and I hope to thank Thee for it for all eternity in Heaven.

## II.

But you say: At present I do not feel strength to resist this temptation. Behold the second delusion of the devil, who makes it appear to you impossible to resist the present passion. In the first place, you must know that God, as the Apostle says, is faithful, and never permits us to be tempted above our strength: *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able.* (1 Cor. x. 13). I ask of you, moreover, if you are not confident now of being able to resist, how can you hope to resist hereafter? Hereafter the devil will not fail to tempt you to other sins; and then he will have become much stronger against you, and you will be weaker. If, then, you feel you cannot now extinguish this flame, how can you hope to do so when it will be immeasurably greater. You say: God will aid me. But God aids you now; why, then, with this aid will you not resist? Do you hope, perchance, that God will increase His aids and His graces after you have increased the number of your sins? And if you now require greater help and strength, why do you not ask it of God? Do you, perhaps, doubt of the faithfulness of God, Who has promised to give all that is asked of Him? *Ask, and it shall be given to you.* (Matt. vii. 7). God cannot fail; have recourse to Him, and

He will give you that strength which you need to resist. "God does not command impossibilities," says the Council of Trent; "but by commanding, both admonishes thee to do what thou art able, and to pray for what thou art not able (to do), and aids thee that thou mayest be able." God does not command what is impossible, but in imposing on us His precepts He admonishes us to do what we can with the actual aid He bestows on us; and should that aid prove insufficient for us to resist, He exhorts us to ask for more aid; and if we ask for it properly, He will certainly give it to us.

O dear Jesus, I come to Thee. I hope to be saved through Thy Blood; and I hope it with certainty, since Thou hast shown me such great mercy. In the meantime I hope Thou wilt give me strength never more to betray Thee. I purpose, with Thy grace, to die a thousand times rather than offend Thee any more. I have offended Thee enough; during the remainder of my life I will love Thee. And how can I but love a God, Who, after having died for me, has borne with me so patiently in spite of the many injuries I have done Him! O God of my soul, I repent with all my heart; I wish I could die of sorrow. But if in the past I have turned my back on Thee, I now love Thee above all things; I love Thee more than myself. Eternal Father, through the merits of Jesus Christ, succour a miserable sinner, who desires to love Thee. Mary, my hope, assist me; obtain for me the grace to have recourse always to thy Son and to thee, whenever the devil tempts me to sin again.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *INTERIOR MORTIFICATION*

The second means to obtain the spirit of interior mortification is to resist the passions, and to beat them down before they acquire strength. If one of them becomes strong by habitual indulgence, the subjugation of it will be exceedingly difficult. "Lest cupidity," says St. Augustine, "should gain strength, strike it to the ground whilst it is weak." Sometimes it will happen that you will feel inclined to make use of an angry expression, or to entertain an affection for a certain person. If you do not resist these desires in the beginning, the slight wound, inflicted by your consent to them, shall soon become incurable. "Unless," says St.



Ephrem, "you quickly take away the passions, they produce an ulcer." One of the ancient monks, as we learn from St. Dorotheus, has beautifully illustrated this doctrine. He commanded one of his disciples to pluck up a young cypress. The disciple executed the command without difficulty. The Superior then told him to pull up another tree of greater growth: to perform this task all the strength of the young monk was necessary. Lastly, the venerable Father commanded the disciple to tear up a tree which had taken deep root. In obedience to this precept, the young religious exerted all his strength; but his efforts were fruitless--the tree was immovable. Behold, said the old man, how easily our passions are rooted out in the beginning, and how difficult it is to conquer them after they have acquired strength and vigour by evil habits. This truth is confirmed by daily experience. If when you receive an insult you feel a motion of resentment, but you at once stifle the spark and silently offer to God the sacrifice of your feelings, the fire is extinguished, you escape unhurt, and even acquire merit before the Lord. But if you yield to the impulse of passion, if you pause to reflect on the insult you have received and manifest externally the feelings of your soul--that spark of resentment will soon be kindled into a flame of hatred.

The third means by which to acquire the spirit of interior mortification, is, as Cassian says, to endeavour to change the object of our passions, that thus the pernicious and vicious desires of the heart may become salutary and holy. Some are inclined to an inordinate love of all from whom they receive a favour. They should seek to change the object of this propensity, and to turn their affections to God Who is infinitely amiable, and Who has bestowed the most inestimable blessings upon them. Others are prone to anger against those who are opposed to them: they ought to direct their resentment against their own sins, which have done them more injury than all the devils in hell could inflict upon them. Others pant after honours and temporal goods: they should aspire to the goods and honours of God's eternal kingdom.

But to practise successfully this means of conquering our passions, frequent meditation on the Truths of Faith, frequent spiritual readings, and frequent reflections on the eternal max-

ims are indispensably necessary. And above all, it is necessary to impress deeply on the mind certain fundamental spiritual maxims, such as: "God alone deserves to be loved. Sin is the only evil which we ought to hate. Whatever God wills is good. All worldly goods shall have an end. The most insignificant action, performed for God's sake, is more profitable than the conversion of the whole world, effected from any other motive than the love of God. It is necessary to do what at the hour of death we would wish to have done. We ought to live on this earth as if there were nothing in existence but ourselves and God." He whose mind is continually filled with holy maxims suffers little molestation from earthly objects, and is always strong enough to resist his corrupt inclinations. The Saints kept their souls always occupied with the truths of eternity, and thus in the time of temptation, were almost insensible to the goods or the evils of this life. To conquer self-love, and to shake off the tyranny of passion, we must above all things pray without ceasing, and continually ask of God the assistance of His grace. He that prays, obtains all God's gifts. *For every one that asketh receiveth.* (Luke xi. 10). We ought especially to beg the gift of Divine love; for to him who loves God, nothing is difficult. Consideration and reflection assist us greatly in the practice of virtue; but in the observance of the Divine commands a single spark of the love of God affords more help than a thousand reflections and considerations. Acts of virtue which proceed from reflection are accompanied with labour and violence; but he that loves is not fatigued by doing what pleases his Beloved. "He that loves, labours not," says St. Augustine.

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### I.

St. Bonaventure sorrowfully exclaims, "The royal Blood is flowing; bruise is superadded to bruise, and gash to gash." That Divine Blood was already issuing from every pore: that Sacred Body had already become but one perfect Wound; yet those infuriated brutes did not forbear from adding blow to blow, as the Prophet had foretold: *And they have added to the grief of my wounds.* (Ps. lxxviii. 27). So that the thongs had not only made

the whole Body one Wound, but even bore away pieces of it into the air, until at length the gashes in that Sacred Flesh were such that the bones might have been counted: "The Flesh was so torn away that the bones could be numbered." Cornelius a Lapide says that in this torment Jesus Christ ought, naturally speaking, to have died; but He willed by His Divine power to keep Himself in life, in order to suffer yet greater pains for love of us; and St. Laurence Justinian had observed the same thing before: "He evidently ought to have died. Yet He reserved Himself unto life, it being His will to endure heavier sufferings."

Ah, my most loving Lord, Thou art worthy of an infinite love; Thou hast suffered so much in order that I may love Thee. Oh, never permit me, instead of loving Thee, to offend or displease Thee more! Oh, what place in hell should there not be set apart for me, if, after having known the love that Thou hast borne towards such a wretch, I should damn myself, despising a God Who had suffered scorn, smitings, and scourgings for me; and Who had, moreover, after having so often offended Him, so mercifully pardoned me! Ah, my Jesus, let it not, oh, let it not be thus! O my God, how would the love and patience which Thou hast shown me be a torture for me in hell, another hell even yet more full of torments!

## II.

Cruel in excess to our Redeemer was this torture of His scourging, in the first place, because of the great number of those by whom it was inflicted; who, as was revealed to St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, were no fewer than sixty. And these, at the instigation of the devils, and even more so of the priests, who being afraid lest Pilate should, after this punishment, be minded to release the Lord, as he had already protested to them saying, *I will therefore scourge him and let him go*, aimed at taking away His life by means of the scourging. Again, all theologians agree with St. Bonaventure, that, for this purpose, the sharpest implements were selected, so that, as St. Anselm declares, every stroke produced a wound. Moreover, the number of the strokes amounted to several thousand, the flagellation being administered, as Father Crasset says, not after the manner of the Jews, for whom the Lord had forbidden that the number of strokes

should ever exceed forty: *Yet so, that they exceed not the number of forty; lest thy brother depart shamefully torn.* (Deut. xxv. 3); but after the manner of the Romans, with whom there was no measure. And so it is related by Josephus, the Jew (who lived shortly after our Lord), that Jesus was torn in his scourging to such a degree that the bones of His ribs were laid bare; as it was also revealed by the most Holy Virgin to St. Bridget in these words "I, who was standing by, saw His body scourged to the very ribs, so that His ribs themselves might be seen. And what was even yet more bitter still, when the scourges were drawn back, His flesh was furrowed by them." To St. Teresa, Jesus revealed Himself in His scourging; so that the Saint wished to have Him painted exactly as she had seen Him, and told the painter to represent a large piece of flesh torn off, and hanging down from the left elbow; but when the painter enquired as to the shape in which he ought to paint it, he found, on turning round again to his picture, the piece of flesh already drawn. Ah, my beloved and adored Jesus, how much hast Thou suffered for love of me! Oh, let not so many pangs, and so much Blood be lost for me!

## **Friday -- Second Week of Lent**

*(For First Friday of March)*

### **Morning Meditation**

#### **THE LOVING HEART OF JESUS**

The Sacred Heart of Jesus loves us infinitely more than we love ourselves. Jesus has loved us even to excess. He has loved us more than His own honour, more than His repose, more than His very life. And is not this an excess of love sufficient to stupefy with astonishment the Angels of Paradise!

I.

Oh, if we could but understand the love that burns in the Heart of Jesus for us! He has loved us so much, that if all men, all the Angels, and all the Saints were to unite with all their energies, they could not arrive at the thousandth part of the love that Jesus bears to us. He loves us infinitely more than we love ourselves. He has loved us even to excess: *They spoke of his decease (excess) which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem.* (Luke ix. 31). And what greater excess of love could there be than for God

to die for His creatures? He has loved us to the greatest degree: *Having loved his own . . . he loved them unto the end.* (John xiii. 1); since, after having loved us from eternity,—for there never was a moment from eternity when God did not think of us and did not love each one of us: *I have loved thee with an everlasting love*,—for the love of us He made Himself Man, and chose a life of sufferings and the death of the Cross for our sakes. Therefore He has loved us more than His honour, more than His repose, and more than His life; for He sacrificed everything to show us the love that He bears us. And is not this an excess of love sufficient to stupefy with astonishment the Angels of Paradise for all eternity? This love has induced Him also to remain with us in the Holy Sacrament as on a throne of love; for He remains there under the appearance of a small piece of bread, shut up in a Ciborium, where He seems to remain in perfect annihilation of His Majesty, without movement, and without the use of His senses; so that it seems that He performs no other office than that of loving men. Love makes us desire the constant presence of the object of our love. It is this love and this desire that makes Jesus Christ reside with us in the most Holy Sacrament.

O adorable Heart of my Jesus, Heart inflamed with the love of men, Heart created on purpose to love them, how is it possible that Thou canst be despised, and Thy love so ill corresponded to by men? Oh, miserable that I am, I also have been one of those ungrateful ones that have not loved Thee. Forgive me, my Jesus, this great sin of not having loved Thee Who art so amiable, and Who hast loved me so much that Thou canst do nothing more to oblige me to love Thee. I feel that I deserve to be condemned to be unable to love Thee, for having renounced Thy love, as I have hitherto done. But no, my dearest Saviour, give me any chastisement, but do not inflict this one upon me. Grant me the grace to love Thee, and then, give me any affliction Thou pleasest. But how can I fear such a chastisement, whilst I feel that Thou continuest to give me the sweet, the pleasing precept of loving Thee, my Lord and my God? "Love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart."

## II.

It seemed too short a time to this loving Saviour to have

been only thirty-three years with men on earth; therefore, in order to show His desire of being constantly with us, He thought right to perform the greatest of all miracles, in the institution of the Holy Eucharist. But the work of redemption was already completed, men had already become reconciled to God; for what purpose, then, did Jesus remain on earth in this Sacrament?

Ah, He remains there because He cannot bear to separate Himself from us, as He has said that He takes a delight in us. Again, this love has induced Him even to become the Food of our souls, so as to unite Himself to us, and to make His Heart and ours as one: *He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him.* (John vi. 57). O wonder! O excess of Divine love! It was said by a servant of God: If any thing could shake my faith in the Eucharist, it would not be the doubt as to how the bread could become Flesh, or how Jesus could be in several places and confined into so small a space, because I should answer that God can do everything; but if I were asked how He could love men so much as to make Himself their Food, I have nothing else to answer but that this is a Mystery of Faith above my comprehension, and that the love of Jesus cannot be understood. O Love of Jesus, do Thou make Thyself known to men, and do Thou make Thyself loved.

Yes, O my God, Thou wouldst be loved by me, and I will love Thee; indeed, I will love none but Thee Who hast loved me so much. O Love of my Jesus, Thou art my Love. O Burning Heart of my Jesus, do Thou inflame my heart also. Do not permit me in future, even for a single moment, to live without Thy love; rather kill me, destroy me; do not let the world behold the spectacle of such horrid ingratitude as that I, who have been so beloved by Thee, and received so many favours and lights from Thee, should begin again to despise Thy love. No, my Jesus, permit it not. I trust in the Blood that Thou hast shed for me, that I shall always love Thee, and that Thou wilt always love me, and that this love between Thee and me will not be broken off for eternity. O Mary, Mother of fair love, thou who desirest so much to see Jesus loved, bind me, unite me with thy Son; but bind me to Him so that we may never again be separated.

### **Spiritual Reading**

*HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH*  
SAINTS PERPETUA AND FELICITAS AND COMPAN-  
IONS

(March 7).

St. Augustine makes frequent and honourable mention of these Saints in his *Works*, and was wont to hold them up to the people as examples of fidelity to Jesus Christ.

The Emperor Severus published an edict commanding all Christians who refused to sacrifice to the gods to be put to death; whereupon Minutius, the proconsul of Africa, caused five young persons to be arrested at Carthage, who were as yet catechumens, and, together with them, Saints Perpetua and Felicitas, Saturninus and Secundulus.

Perpetua was a young married woman, only twenty-two years of age, who led a very devout life, and had an only child. Felicitas was still younger, but also married, and a most exemplary person. The Martyrs were kept for some time in a private house, guarded by soldiers; during which time the father of St. Perpetua, came to see her, and being a Pagan, used all his endeavours to make her abandon the Faith. In the original *Acts* of these Martyrs, we find that the occurrences which took place up to the eve of their Martyrdom were written by Saint Perpetua herself: The following are the principal facts:

"My father," writes the Saint, "used all his endeavours to pervert me. I resolutely answered: 'Father, I am a Christian.' He instantly threw himself upon me in a rage, as if to tear out my eyes, and used the most injurious language. A few days afterwards, we all received holy Baptism, and were led to the public prison, where I was horrified by the darkness, the noisome smell, and the great heat occasioned by the number of prisoners. I had the happiness to have my child brought to me here, which greatly consoled me. My brother came to see me, and desired me to pray to the Lord to let me know whether I was to obtain the crown of Martyrdom. I accordingly placed myself in prayer, and saw, in a vision, a golden ladder which reached to the heavens; it was very narrow, and to the sides were fixed sharp knives and iron spikes. At the foot of this ladder was a dragon, which appeared ready to devour those that would attempt to mount it.

The first that went up was a certain Christian named Saturus, who invited me to follow him. I ascended, and found myself in a spacious garden, where I met a man of very fine aspect, who said to me: 'Thou art welcome, my daughter.' After this vision I knew that we were all destined to suffer Martyrdom, and I told my brother so.

"My father came again to see me at the prison, and throwing himself at my feet in a flood of tears: 'Daughter,' he said, 'have pity on me, a poor old man, that am thy father; have pity, at least, on thy child, and bring not ruin upon us all by thy obstinacy.' I was pierced with grief, but remained immovable in my resolution.

"On the following day I was brought before the auditor, Hilarian, who, by reason of the death of the proconsul, acted as judge. My father appeared with me, holding my child in his arms, whereupon the judge said: 'Perpetua, have pity on thy father and on thy son--sacrifice to the gods.' I answered that I was a Christian, and that we were all ready to die for our Faith. The judge then condemned us to be devoured by wild beasts.

"We received the sentence with joy, and were brought back to prison, where we were met by my father, who tearing his hair and his beard, threw himself upon his face on the earth, lamenting that he lived to see that day. He once endeavoured to pull me off the platform, but the judge commanded him to be beaten off, and he received a blow with a stick, at which I was much grieved; but the Lord continued to grant me strength."\*

\*The *Acts* of the Martyrs tell us that St. Perpetua was favoured with wonderful visions. She had a young brother named Dinocrates, who died when he was only seven years of age, of a most hideous ulcer in the face. She recollected his death during her imprisonment; and having prayed for his repose, saw him in a vision, with the ulcer on his face, having a most squalid appearance, and endeavouring to drink from a vessel which he could not reach. After the vision she knew that her brother was in pain, and continued to pray fervently for his relief. She was accordingly favoured with a second vision, in which she saw him quite clean, refreshing himself with the water, and retaining only a scar where the ulcer had formerly been. "I knew," she says,



"from this vision that he had been released from pain."

Secundulus died in prison of his sufferings, and Saturus had already obtained his crown. Felicitas desired to suffer with the rest, but she was with child, and the law forbade women to be put to death in that state. Her companions therefore prayed for her, and on that very day she was delivered of a daughter. The Saint moaned by reason of her pains, and one of the guards said to her: "Dost thou moan? What wilt thou do when thou shalt be devoured by wild beasts?" She answered: "It is now myself that suffers: but then I shall have Jesus Christ with me, and by His grace I will endure all things for His sake."

Upon the appointed day the Martyrs went forward to their execution with a joy that was manifest to all.

The other Saints having being torn by the wild beasts, Saints Perpetua and Felicitas were wrapped in nets and exposed to a mad cow. St. Perpetua was first attacked, and having been tossed in the air, she fell upon her back. Then sitting up, she perceived her clothes torn, and was endeavouring to cover herself when she was again knocked down; but recovering herself, she stretched forth her hand to raise St. Felicitas, whom she perceived prostrate upon the ground, much hurt. The populace were at length moved to compassion, and the two Saints were led into the centre of the amphitheatre, and dispatched by the gladiators. Thus did they receive, with their companions, the heavenly crown, on the 7th March, in the year 203.

St. Augustine cites the *Acts* of their Martyrdom, and Tertullian and St. Fulgentius have passed the most magnificent encomiums on Saints Perpetua and Felicitas. They are mentioned also in the Canon of the Mass. Their relics are in Rome.

## **Evening Meditation**

### *REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

#### I.

We read in history that several penitents, being enlightened by Divine light to see the malice of their sins, died of pure sorrow for them. Oh, what torment, then, must not the Heart of Jesus endure at the sight of all the sins of the world, all the blasphemies, sacrileges, acts of impurity, and all the other crimes which

would be committed by men after His death, every one of which, like a wild beast, tore His Heart separately by its own malice! Wherefore our afflicted Lord, during His Agony in the Garden, exclaimed: Is this, therefore, O men, the reward that you render Me for My immeasurable love? Oh, if I could only see that, grateful for My affection, you gave up sin and began to love Me, with what delight should I not hasten to die for you! But to behold, after all My sufferings, so many sins; after so much love, such ingratitude--this is what afflicts Me the most, makes Me sorrowful even unto death, and makes Me sweat pure Blood: *And his sweat became as drops of blood trickling down upon the ground.* (Luke xxii. 44). So that, according to the Evangelist, this Bloody Sweat was so copious, that it first drenched all the vestments of our Blessed Redeemer, and then came forth in streams and bathed the ground.

Ah, my loving Jesus, I do not behold in this Garden either scourges or thorns or nails that pierce Thee; how, then, is it that I see Thee all bathed in Blood from Thy head to Thy feet? Alas, my sins were the cruel press which, by dint of affliction and sorrow, forced so much Blood from Thy Heart. I was, then, one of Thy most cruel executioners, who contributed the most to crucify Thee with my sins. It is certain that, if I had sinned less, Thou, my Jesus, wouldst have suffered less. As much pleasure, therefore, as I have taken in offending Thee, so much the more did I increase the sorrow of Thy Heart, already full of anguish. How, then, does not this thought make me die of grief, when I see that I have repaid the love Thou hast shown me in Thy Passion by adding to Thy sorrow and suffering! I, then, have tormented this Heart, so loving and so worthy of love, which has shown so much love to me. My Lord, since I have now no other means left of consoling Thee than to weep over my offences towards Thee, I will now, my Jesus, sorrow for them and lament over them with my whole heart. Oh, give me, I pray Thee, as great sorrow for them as may make me to my last breath weep over the displeasure I have caused Thee, my God, my Love, my All.

II.

*He fell upon his face.* (Matt. xxvi. 39). Jesus, beholding Him-

self charged with the burden of satisfying for all the sins of the world, prostrated Himself, with His face on the ground, to pray for men, as if He were ashamed to raise His eyes towards Heaven, loaded as He was with such iniquities. O my Redeemer, I behold Thee pale and worn out with sorrow; Thou art in the agony of death, and Thou dost pray: *And being in an agony, he prayed the longer.* (Luke xxii. 43). Tell me, my Saviour, for whom dost Thou pray? Ah, Thou didst not pray so much for Thyself at that hour as for me; Thou didst offer to Thy Eternal Father Thy all-powerful prayers, united to Thy sufferings, to obtain for me, a wretched sinner, the pardon of my sins: *Who, in the days of his flesh with a strong cry and tears, offering up prayers and supplications to him that was able to save him from death, was heard for his reverence.* (Heb. v. 7). O my beloved Redeemer, how is it possible that Thou couldst love so much one who has so grievously offended Thee? How couldst Thou embrace such sufferings for me, foreseeing, as Thou didst, all the ingratitude of which I should be guilty towards Thee?

O my afflicted Lord, make me share in that sorrow which Thou didst then have for my sins. I abhor them at this present moment, and I unite this my hatred to the horror that Thou didst feel for them in the Garden. O my Saviour, look not upon my sins; for hell itself would not be sufficient to expiate them, but look upon the sufferings that Thou hast endured for me! O love of my Jesus, Thou art my Love and my Hope. O my Lord, I love Thee with my whole soul, and will always love Thee. I beseech Thee, through the merits of that weariness and sadness which Thou didst endure in the Garden, give me fervour and courage in all works that may contribute to Thy glory. Through the merits of Thy Agony, grant me Thy assistance to resist all the temptations of the flesh and of hell. My God, grant me the grace always to commend myself to Thee, and always to repeat to Thee, with Jesus Christ: *Not as I will, but as thou wilt.* May Thy Divine will, not mine, be ever done. Amen.

## Saturday -- Second Week of Lent

### Morning Meditation

#### MARY'S MARTYRDOM WITHOUT ANY ALLEVIATION

St. Bonaventure asks: "O Lady, tell me--where didst thou stand? Was it only at the foot of the Cross? Ah, much more than this. Thou wert on the Cross itself, crucified with thy Son!" Mary suffered in her heart all that Jesus suffered in His Body. *Who shall heal thee*, O Mary, since that very Son Who alone could give thee consolation was by His sufferings the sole cause of thine.

#### I.

St. Bonaventure remarks that "those wounds which were scattered over the Body of our Lord, were all united in the single heart of Mary." Thus was our Blessed Lady, through the compassion of her loving heart for her Son, scourged, crowned with thorns, insulted, and nailed to the Cross. Whence the same Saint, considering Mary on Mount Calvary, present at the death of her Son, questions her in these words: "O Lady, tell me, where didst thou stand? Was it only at the foot of the Cross? Ah, much more than this, thou wast on the Cross itself, crucified with thy Son." Richard of St. Laurence, on the words of the Redeemer, spoken by Isaias the Prophet: *I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the Gentiles there is not a man with me* (Is. lxiii. 3), says, "It is true, O Lord, that in the work of human redemption Thou didst suffer alone, and that there was not a man who sufficiently pitied Thee; but there was a woman with Thee, and she was Thine own Mother; she suffered in her heart all that Thou didst endure in Thy body."

But all this is saying too little of Mary's sorrows, since she suffered more in witnessing the sufferings of her beloved Jesus than if she herself had endured all the outrages and death of her Son. Erasmus, speaking of parents in general, says that "they are more cruelly tormented by their children's sufferings than by their own." This is not always true, but in Mary it evidently was so; for it is certain that she loved her Son and His life beyond all comparison more than herself or a thousand lives of her own. Therefore, Blessed Amadeus rightly affirms that "the afflicted Mother, at the sorrowful sight of the torments of her beloved

Jesus, suffered far more than she would have done had she herself endured His whole Passion." The reason is evident, for, as St. Bernard says, "the soul is more where it loves than where it lives." Our Lord Himself had already said the same thing: *where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* (Luke xii. 34). If Mary then, by love, lived more in her Son than in herself, she must have endured far greater torments in the sufferings and death of her Son than she would have done had the most cruel death in the world been inflicted upon her.

## II.

The Martyrs suffered under the torments inflicted on them by tyrants; but the love of Jesus rendered their pains sweet and agreeable. St. Vincent was tortured on a rack, torn with pincers, burnt with red-hot iron plates; but, as St. Augustine remarks, "it seemed as if it was one who suffered, and another who spoke." The Saint addressed the tyrant with such energy and contempt for his torments, that it seemed as if one Vincent suffered and another spoke; so greatly did God strengthen him with the sweetness of His love in the midst of all he endured. St. Boniface had his body torn with iron hooks; sharp-pointed reeds were thrust between his nails and flesh; melted lead was poured into his mouth; and in the midst of all this he was heard saying, "I give Thee thanks, O Lord Jesus Christ." A St. Mark and a St. Marcellinus were bound to a stake, their feet pierced with nails; and when the tyrant addressed them, saying: "Wretches, see to what a state you are reduced; save yourselves from these torments," they answered: "Of what pains, of what torments dost thou speak? We never enjoyed so luxurious a banquet as in the present moment, in which we joyfully suffer for the love of Jesus Christ." St. Laurence suffered, but when roasting on the grid-iron, "the interior flame of love," says St. Leo, "was more powerful in comforting his soul than the flame without in torturing his body." Hence love rendered him so courageous that he mocked the tyrant, saying: "If thou desirest to feed on my flesh, a part is sufficiently roasted; turn it, and eat." But how, in the midst of so many torments, in that prolonged death, could the Saint thus rejoice? "Ah!" replies St. Augustine, "inebriated with the wine of Divine love, he felt neither torments nor death."

So that the more the holy Martyrs loved Jesus, the less did they feel their torments and death; and the sight alone of the sufferings of a crucified God was sufficient to console them. But was our suffering Mother also consoled by love for her Son, and the sight of His torments? Ah, no; for this very Son Who suffered was the whole cause of them, and the love she bore Him was her only and most cruel executioner; for Mary's whole Martyrdom consisted in beholding and pitying her innocent and beloved Son, Who suffered so much. Hence, the greater her love for Him the more bitter and inconsolable was her grief. *Great as the sea is thy destruction; who shall heal thee?* (Lam. ii. 13). Ah, Queen of Heaven, love hath mitigated the sufferings of other Martyrs, and healed their wounds; but who hath ever soothed thy bitter grief? Who hath ever healed the too cruel wounds of thy heart? Who shall heal thee, since that very Son Who could give Thee consolation was, by His sufferings, the sole cause of thine, and the love which thou didst bear Him was the whole ingredient of Thy Martyrdom.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *FASTING IN HONOUR OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN*

There are many devout clients of Mary who, to honour her, fast on bread and water on Saturdays, and the Vigils of her Feasts.

It is well known that Saturday is dedicated by the Holy Church to Mary, because, as St. Bernard says, on that day, the day after the death of her Son, she remained constant in Faith. Therefore, Mary's clients are careful to honour her on that day by some particular devotion, and especially by fasting on bread and water, as did St. Charles Borromeo, Cardinal Tolet, and so many others. Nittardo, Bishop of Bamberg, and Father Joseph Arriaga, of the Society of Jesus, took no food at all on that day.

The great graces that the Mother of God has dispensed to those who do this are recorded by Father Auriemma. Let one example suffice: it is that of a famous captain of brigands, who, on account of this devotion, was preserved in life after his head had been cut off, and was thus enabled to make his Confession; for the unfortunate creature was in a state of sin. After Confession he declared that, on account of this devotion, the Blessed Virgin

had obtained for him so great a grace, and immediately expired.

It would not, then, be anything very great, for a person who pretends to be devout to Mary, and particularly for one who has perhaps already deserved hell, to offer her this fast on Saturdays. I affirm that those who practise this devotion can hardly be lost; not that I mean to say that if they die in mortal sin the Blessed Virgin will deliver them by a miracle, as she did this bandit: these are prodigies of Divine mercy which very rarely occur, and it would be the height of folly to expect eternal salvation by such means; but I say, that for those who practise this devotion, the Divine Mother will make perseverance in God's grace easy, and obtain them a good death. All the members of our little Congregation, who are able to do so, practise this devotion. I say those who are unable to do so; and if our health does not permit it, at least we should on Saturdays content ourselves with one dish, or observe an ordinary fast, or abstain from fruit or something for which we have a relish. On Saturdays we should always practise some devotion in honour of our Blessed Lady, receive Holy Communion, or at least hear Mass, visit an image of Mary, wear a hair-cloth, or something of that sort. But at least on the Vigils of her Seven Principal Festivals, her clients should either offer her this fast on bread and water, or honour her otherwise as best they can.

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### I.

From the Scriptures alone it clearly appears how barbarous and inhuman was the scourging of Jesus Christ. For why was it that Pilate should, after the scourging, ever have shown Him to the people, saying, *Behold the man!* were it not that our Saviour was reduced to so pitiable a condition that Pilate believed the very sight of Him would have moved His enemies themselves to compassion, and hindered them from any longer demanding His death? Why was it that in the journey which Jesus, after this, made to Calvary, the Jewish women followed Him with tears and lamentations? *But there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women, who bewailed and lamented him.* (Luke

xxiii. 27). Was it, perhaps, because those women loved Him and believed Him to be innocent? No, the women, for the most part, agree with their husbands in opinion; so that they, too, esteemed Him guilty; but the appearance of Jesus after His scourging was so shocking and pitiable, as to move even those who hated Him to tears; and therefore it was that the women gave vent to their tears and sighs. Why, again, was it that in this journey the Jews took the Cross from off His shoulders, and gave it the Cyrenean to carry? According to the most probable opinion, and as the words of St. Matthew clearly show: *They compelled him to bear his cross.* (Matt. xxvii. 32); or as St. Luke says: *And on him they laid the cross, that he might carry it after Jesus.* (Luke xxiii. 26). Was it, perhaps, that they felt pity for Him, and wished to lessen His pains? No, those guilty men hated Him, and sought to afflict Him to their uttermost. But as the Blessed Denis the Carthusian says, "They feared lest He should die upon the way"; seeing that Our Lord after the scourging was so drained of Blood and so exhausted of strength as to be scarcely able any longer to stand, falling down as He did on His road under the Cross, and faltering as He went at every step, as if at the point of death. Therefore, in order to take Him alive to Calvary, and see Him die upon the Cross, according to their desire, that His name might ever after be one of infamy: *Let us cut him off*, said they (as the Prophet had foretold), *from the land of the living, and let his name be remembered no more* (Jer. xi. 19), -- this was the end for which they constrained the Cyrenean to bear the Cross.

Ah, my Lord, great is my happiness in understanding how much Thou hast loved me, and that Thou dost even now preserve for me the same love which Thou didst bear me then, in the time of Thy Passion! But how great is my sorrow at the thought of having offended so good a God! By the merit of Thy scourging, O my Jesus, I ask Thy pardon. I repent, above every other evil, of having offended Thee; and I purpose rather to die than offend Thee again. Pardon me all the wrongs that I have done Thee, and give me the grace ever to love Thee for the time to come.

## II.

The Prophet Isaias has described more clearly than all



the pitiable state to which He foresaw our Redeemer reduced. He said that His most holy Flesh would have to be not merely wounded, but altogether bruised and crushed to pieces: *But he was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins.* (Isaias liii. 3). For (as the Prophet goes on to say) the Eternal Father, the more perfectly to satisfy His justice, and to make mankind understand the deformity of sin, was not content without beholding His Son pounded piecemeal, as it were, and torn to shreds by the scourges: *And the Lord willed to bruise him in infirmity* (Is. liii.); so that the Blessed Body of Jesus had to become like the body of a leper, all wounds from head to foot: *And we esteemed him as a leper, and one smitten of God.* (Is. liii.).

Behold, then, O my lacerated Lord, the condition to which our iniquities have reduced Thee: "O good Jesus, it is ourselves who sinned, and dost Thou bear the penalty of it?" Blessed for evermore be Thy exceeding charity; and mayest Thou be beloved as Thou dost deserve by all sinners; and, above all, by me, who have done Thee more injury than others.

Jesus one day manifested Himself under His scourging to Sister Victoria Angelini; and, showing her His body one mass of wounds, said to her: "These Wounds, Victoria, every one of them ask thee for love." "Let us love the Bridegroom," said the loving St. Augustine, "and the more He is presented to us veiled under deformity, the more precious and sweet is He made to the bride." Yes, my sweet Saviour, I see Thee all covered with wounds; I look into Thy beautiful Face; but, O my God, it no longer wears its beautiful appearance, but is disfigured and blackened with blood and bruises, and shameful spittings: *There is no beauty in him, nor comeliness: and we beheld him, and esteemed him not.* (Is. liii.). But the more I see Thee so disfigured, O my Lord, the more beautiful and lovely dost Thou appear to me. And what are these disfigurements that I behold but signs of the tenderness of that love which Thou dost bear towards me?

I love Thee, my Jesus, thus wounded and torn to pieces for me; would that I could see myself, too, torn to pieces for Thee, like so many Martyrs whose portion this has been. But if I cannot offer Thee wounds and blood, I offer Thee at least all the pains which it will be my lot to suffer. I offer Thee my heart;

with this I desire to love Thee more tenderly even than I am able. And who is there that my soul should love more tenderly than a God Who has endured scourging and been drained of His Blood for me? I love Thee, O God of love! I love Thee, O Infinite Goodness! I love Thee, O my Love, my All! I love Thee, and I would never cease from saying, both in this life and in the other: I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee. Amen.

## Third Sunday of Lent

### Morning Meditation

#### CONCEALING SINS IN CONFESSION

*He was casting out a devil, and the same was dumb.* (Gospel of Sunday, Luke xi. 14, 28).

Before a man falls into sin, the devil labours to blind him that he may not see the evil he does and the ruin he brings upon himself by sinning against God. After the sin, the enemy seeks to make the sinner dumb, that through shame he may conceal his guilt in Confession. Oh, accursed shame! How many poor souls does it not send to hell! They think more of the shame than of salvation!

#### I.

*Set a door, O Lord, round about my lips.* (Ps. cxl. 3). St. Augustine says that we should keep a door to the mouth that it may be closed against detraction and blasphemies, and all improper words, and that it may be opened to confess the sins we have committed. "Thus," adds the holy Doctor, "it will be a door of restraint, and not of destruction." To be silent when we are impelled to utter words injurious to God or to our neighbour, is an act of virtue; but to be silent in confessing our sins, is the ruin of the soul. After we have offended God, the devil labours to keep the mouth closed, and to prevent us from confessing our guilt. St. Antoninus relates that a holy solitary once saw the devil standing beside certain persons who wished to go to Confession. The solitary asked the fiend what he was doing there. The enemy said in reply: "I now restore to these penitents what I before took away from them. I took away from them shame while they were committing sin; I now restore it that they may have a horror of Confession." *My sores are putrefied and corrupted, because of*

*my foolishness.* (Ps. xxxvii. 6). Gangrenous sores are fatal; and sins concealed in Confession are spiritual ulcers which mortify and become gangrenous.

St. John Chrysostom says that God has made sin shameful that we may abstain from it, and He gives us confidence to confess it by promising pardon to all who accuse themselves of their sins. But the devil does the contrary: he gives confidence to sin by holding out hopes of pardon; but, when sin is committed, he inspires shame in order to prevent the confession of it.

To all who have sinned, I say, that you ought to be ashamed to offend so great and so good a God. But you have no reason to be ashamed of confessing the sins which you have committed. Was it shameful of St. Mary Magdalen to acknowledge publicly at the feet of Jesus Christ that she was a sinner? By her confession she became a Saint. Was it shameful in St. Augustine not only to confess his sins, but also to publish them in a book, that, for his confusion, they might be known to the whole world? Was it shameful in St. Mary of Egypt to confess that for so many years she had led a scandalous life? By their confessions these have become Saints, and are honoured on the Altars of the Church.

## II.

That man who acknowledges his guilt before a secular tribunal is condemned; but in the tribunal of Jesus Christ, they who confess their sins obtain pardon, and receive a crown of eternal glory. "After confession," says St. John Chrysostom, "a crown is given to penitents." He who is afflicted with an ulcer must, if he wish to be cured, show it to a physician: otherwise it will fester and bring on death. The Council of Trent says "that the physician cannot cure an evil of which he is ignorant." If, then, your souls be ulcerated with sin, be not ashamed to confess it; otherwise you are lost. *For thy soul be not ashamed to say the truth.* (Ecclus. iv. 24). But, you say, I feel greatly ashamed to confess such a sin. If you wish to be saved, you must conquer that shame. *For there is a shame that bringeth sin, and there is a shame that bringeth glory and grace.* (Ecclus. iv. 25). According to these words there are two kinds of shame: one of which leads souls to sin, and that is the shame which makes them conceal their sins in Confession;

the other is the confusion which a Christian feels in confessing his sins; and this confusion obtains for him the grace of God in this life, and the glory of Heaven in the next.

St. Augustine says that to prevent the sheep from seeking assistance by its cries, the wolf seizes it by the neck, and thus securely carries it away and devours it. The devil acts in a similar manner with the sheep of Jesus Christ. After having induced them to yield to sin, he seizes them by the throat that they may not confess their guilt; and thus he securely brings them to hell. For those who have sinned grievously, there is no means of salvation but the confession of their sins. But what hope of salvation can he have who goes to Confession and conceals his sins, and makes use of the tribunal of Penance to offend God, and to make himself doubly the slave of Satan? What hope would you entertain of the recovery of a man who, instead of taking the medicine prescribed by his physician, drank a cup of poison? O God! What can the Sacrament of Penance be to those who conceal their sins but a deadly poison which adds to their guilt the malice of sacrilege!

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *THE WICKEDNESS OF OBSCENE CONVERSATION*

*But fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becometh saints; or obscenity or foolish talking.* (Epistle of Sunday. Ephes. v. 1-9).

St. Augustine calls those who speak obscenely "the mediators of Satan," the ministers of the devil, because by their obscene language the demon of impurity gets access to souls which by his own suggestions he could not enter. Of their accursed tongues St. James says: *And the tongue is a fire,... being set on fire by hell.* (James iii. 6). He says that the tongue is a fire kindled by hell, with which they who speak obscenely burn themselves and others. The obscene tongue may be said to be the tongue of the *third person* of which Ecclesiasticus says: *The tongue of a third person hath disquieted many and scattered them from nation to nation.* (Ecclus. xxviii. 16). The spiritual tongue speaks of God, the worldly tongue talks of worldly affairs; but the tongue of a third person is a tongue of hell which speaks of the impurities of the flesh; and this is the tongue that perverts many, and brings them to perdi-

tion.

Speaking of the life of men on this earth, the Royal Prophet says: *Let their way become dark and slippery.* (Ps. xxxiv. 6). In this life men walk in the midst of darkness and in a slippery way. Hence they are in danger of falling at every step unless they cautiously examine the road on which they walk, and carefully avoid dangerous steps--that is, the occasions of sin. Now, if, in treading this slippery way, frequent efforts were made to throw them down, would it not be a miracle if they did not fall? "The mediators of Satan," who speak obscenely, impel others to sin, who, as long as they live on this earth, walk in the midst of darkness, and as long as they remain in the flesh, are in danger of falling into the vice of impurity. Now of those who indulge in obscene language it has been well said: *Their throat is an open sepulchre.* (Ps. v. 11). The mouths of those who can utter nothing but filthy obscenities are, according to St. John Chrysostom, so many open sepulchres of putrefied carcasses. The exhalation which arises from the rotteness of a multitude of dead bodies thrown together into a pit communicates infection and disease to all within reach.

*The stroke of a whip, says Ecclesiasticus, maketh blue mark; but a stroke of a tongue will break the bones.* (Ecclus. xxviii. 21). The wounds of the lash are wounds of the flesh, but the wounds of the obscene tongue are wounds which infect the bones of those who listen to its language. St. Bernardine of Sienna relates that a virgin who led a holy life, on hearing an obscene word from a man, consented to a bad thought, and afterwards abandoned herself to the vice of impurity to such a degree that, the Saint says, if the devil had taken human flesh, he could not have committed so many sins of that kind as she committed.

The misfortune is that the mouths of hell that frequently utter immodest words regard them as trifles, and are careless about confessing them; and when rebuked for them they answer: "I say these words in jest and without malice." In jest! Unhappy man, these jests make the devil laugh, and shall make you weep for eternity in hell. In the first place, it is useless to say that you utter such words without malice; for when you use such expressions, it is very difficult for you to abstain from acts against purity. According to St. Jerome, "He that delights in words is not far

from the act." Besides, immodest words spoken before persons of a different sex, are always accompanied with sinful complacency. And is not the scandal you give to others criminal? Utter a single obscene word, and you may bring into sin all who listen to you. Such is the doctrine of St. Bernard. "One speaks, and he utters only one word; but he kills the soul of a multitude of hearers." A greater sin than if, by one discharge of a blunderbuss, you murdered many persons; because you would then only kill their bodies; but, by speaking obscenely, you kill their souls.

In a word, obscene tongues are the ruin of the world. One of them does more mischief than a hundred devils; because it is the cause of the perdition of many souls. This is not my language; it is the language of the Holy Ghost. *A slippery mouth worketh ruin.* (Prov. xxvi. 28). The ruin of many souls is effected, and more grievous insults are offered to God. They who speak immodestly are the cause of all these crimes. Hence they must render an account to God, and shall be punished for all the sins committed by those who hear them. *But I will require his blood at thy hand.* (Ezech. iii. 18).

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### I.

As the soldiers, however, perseveringly continued their scourging of the innocent Lamb, it is related that one of those who were standing by came forward, and, taking courage, said to them: You have no orders to kill this man as you are trying to do. And, saying this, he cut the cords wherewith the Lord was standing bound. This was revealed to St. Bridget: "Then a certain man, his spirit being moved within him, demanded: Are you going to kill Him in this manner, uncondemned? And forthwith he cut His bonds." But hardly was the scourging ended, than those barbarous men, urged on and bribed by the Jews with money (as St. John Chrysostom avers), inflict upon the Redeemer a fresh kind of torture: *Then the soldiers of the governor taking Jesus into the hall, gathered together the whole band, and stripping him, they put a scarlet cloak about him, and plaiting a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand.* (Matt. xxvii.

27-30). Behold how the soldiers strip Him again; and, treating Him as a mock king, place upon Him a purple garment, which was nothing else but a ragged cloak, one of those that were worn by the Roman soldiers, and called a chlamys; in His hand they place a reed to represent a sceptre, and upon His head a bundle of thorns to represent a crown.

Ah, my Jesus, and art not Thou, then, true King of the universe? And how is it that Thou art now become King of sorrow and reproach? See whither love has brought Thee! O my most lovely God, when will that day arrive whereon I may so unite myself to Thee, that nothing may ever more have power to separate me from Thee, and I may no longer be able to cease from loving Thee! O Lord, as long as I live in this world, I always stand in danger of turning my back upon Thee, and of refusing to Thee my love, as I have unhappily done in time past. O my Jesus, if Thou foreseest that by continuing in life I should have to suffer this greatest of all misfortunes, let me die at this moment, while I hope that I am in Thy grace! I pray Thee, by Thy Passion, not to abandon me to so great an evil. I truly, indeed, deserve it for my sins; but Thou dost deserve it not. Choose out any punishment for me rather than this. No, my Jesus, my Jesus, I would not see myself ever again separated from Thee.

## II.

*And plaiting a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head.* (Matt. xxvii. 29). It was a good reflection of the devout Lanspergius, that this torture of the crown of thorns was one most full of pain; inasmuch as they everywhere pierced into the Sacred Head of the Lord, the most sensitive part, it being from the head that all the nerves and sensations of the body diverge; while it was also that torture of His Passion which lasted the longest, as Jesus suffered from the thorns up to His death, remaining as they did, fixed in His Head. Every time that the thorns on His Head were touched, the anguish was renewed afresh. And the common opinion of authors agrees with that of St. Vincent Ferrer, that the crown was intertwined with several branches of thorns, and fashioned like a helmet or hat, so that it fitted upon the whole of the head, down to the middle of the forehead; according to the revelation made to St. Bridget: "The crown of thorns embraced

His Head most tightly, and came down as low as the middle of the forehead."

O Divine Love, exclaims Salvian, I know not how to call Thee, whether sweet or cruel; seeming, as Thou dost, to have been at one and the same time both sweet and cruel too: "O Love, what to call Thee I know not, sweet or cruel! Thou seemest to be both." Ah, my Jesus, true, indeed, it is that love makes Thee sweet, as regards us, showing Thee forth to us as so passionate a lover of our souls; but it makes Thee pitiless towards Thyself, causing Thee to suffer such bitter torments. Thou wast willing to be crowned with thorns to obtain for us a crown of glory in Heaven: "He was crowned with thorns, that we may be crowned with the crown that is to be given to the elect in Heaven." O my sweetest Saviour, I hope to be Thy crown in Paradise, obtaining my salvation through the merits of Thy sufferings; there will I forever praise Thy love and Thy mercies: "The mercies of the Lord will I for ever sing; yea, I will sing them for ever."

## **Monday -- Third Week of Lent**

### **Morning Meditation**

#### *THE DELUSIONS OF SINNERS*

"God is merciful." Who denies this? Yet, nevertheless how many does not God daily send to hell! God shows mercy; but to whom? *His mercy is towards them that fear him.*

#### I.

The sinner says, "God is merciful." Behold the third very common delusion of sinners, by which great numbers are lost. A learned author declares that the *mercy* of God sends more souls to hell than His *justice*; because these unhappy ones, confiding rashly in God's mercy, continue in sin, and are thus lost. God is merciful. Who denies it? Nevertheless how many does He daily send to hell! He is merciful; but He is also just, and He is therefore obliged to punish those who offend Him. He shows mercy; but to whom? To him that fears Him: *His mercy is towards them that fear him. The Lord hath compassion on them that fear him.* (Ps. cii. 11, 18). But as for those who despise Him, and abuse His mercy only to despise Him the more, He exercises justice in their regard. And with reason. God pardons the sin, but He cannot



pardon the determination to sin. St. Augustine says that he who sins with the intention of repenting afterwards, is not a penitent but a mocker of God. On the other hand, the Apostle tells us that God will not be mocked: *Be not deceived: God is not mocked.* (Gal. vi. 7). It would be mocking God to offend Him as we please and when we please, and then to expect Heaven.

My crucified Jesus, my Redeemer and my God, behold a traitor at Thy feet! I am ashamed to appear before Thee. How often have I mocked Thee, how often have I promised never more to offend Thee! But my promises have all been treacherous; since, when the occasion presented itself, I forgot Thee, and again turned my back on Thee. I thank Thee that my abode at this moment is not in hell; but that Thou permittest me to be at Thy feet instead, and enlightenest me, and callest me to Thy love. Yes, I am resolved to love Thee, my Saviour and my God, and never more to despise Thee. Thou hast borne with me long enough. I perceive that Thou canst bear with me no longer. Unhappy me, if after so many graces I should offend Thee again!

## II.

"But as God has hitherto shown me so many mercies, and has not punished me, so I hope He will show me mercy in future." Behold another delusion. Because, then, God has had compassion on you, therefore is He always to show compassion to you, and never to chastise you? On the contrary, the greater the mercies He has shown you have been, so much the more ought you to tremble lest He should pardon you no more, and chastise you if you offend Him again. *Say not, I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me? For the Most High is a patient rewarder* (Ecclus. v. 4); I have sinned, and have not been punished; for God is patient, but He does not endure for ever. When the limit fixed by Him for the mercies He intends to show a sinner is attained, He then punishes all his sins together. And the longer He has waited for his repentance, so much the more severe will be his punishment; as says St. Gregory: "Those whom He waits for the longest, He punishes the most severely."

If, then, you perceive that you have often offended God, and God has not cast you into hell, you must say: *The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed.* (Lam. iii. 22). Lord, I thank Thee

that Thou hast not sent me to hell, as I deserved. Consider how many have been condemned for less sins than you have committed; and remembering this, endeavour to atone for your offences against God by penance and other good works. The patience that God has had with you ought to animate you not to displease Him still more; but to love and serve Him better than you have done; considering that He has shown you so many mercies, which He has not shown to others.

Lord, I resolutely determine to change my life, and to love Thee as much as I have offended Thee. I rejoice that I have to deal with infinite goodness such as Thine. I repent above all things of having despised Thee as I have done, and I promise Thee all my love in future. Pardon me through the merits of Thy Passion; forget the injuries I have done Thee; and give me strength to be faithful to Thee during the remainder of my life. I love Thee, O my Sovereign Good; and I hope to love Thee always. My dear Lord, I will leave Thee no more. O Mary, Mother of God, bind me to Jesus Christ; and obtain for me the grace never again to depart from His feet. In thee I confide.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH*

#### **ST. BASIL OF ANCYRA, PRIEST AND MARTYR**

(March 22)

St. Basil was a priest of Ancyra, in Galatia, who, during the reign of Constantius, bravely defended the Divinity of the Son of God against the Arians, and converted many from that heresy. Upon the death of Constantius, Julian the Apostate succeeded to the empire, and used all his energies for the re-establishment of idolatry, which at this time had been almost annihilated. St. Basil, on the other hand, struggled with all his might against the impious project, and went through the entire city of Ancyra, exhorting the Christians to preserve themselves from apostasy, and to despise the promises of Julian, whom, he said, God would quickly remove. By this conduct he brought upon himself the hatred of the idolaters, who united with the Arians in persecuting him; but the Saint was not to be deterred from defending the Faith of Jesus Christ.

One day while some of the Gentiles were sacrificing to the

gods, he prayed aloud that the Lord might confound them, in order that no Christian might be seduced by their example. The idolaters, upon hearing this prayer, became infuriated, and one of them, named Macarius, laying violent hands upon him, said: "Who art thou that darest to disturb the people, and to preach against the worship of the gods?" Basil replied: "Not I, but the God of Heaven, with His invincible power, will destroy your false religion." The heathens, more infuriated than ever, dragged him before Saturninus, the governor of the province, saying: "This man has been guilty of sedition, and threatens to overturn the altars of the gods."

Saturninus, turning to him, said: "Who art thou that showest so much rashness?" Basil answered: "I am a Christian, and glory in being so." "If then thou art a Christian," said Saturninus, "why dost thou not act like a Christian?" Basil: "Thou art right; a Christian ought to appear such in all his actions." Saturninus: "Why hast thou raised the people and blasphemed the emperor as the follower of a false religion?" Basil: "I blaspheme not the emperor nor his religion; but I say that in Heaven there is a Ruler Whom the Christians adore as the only true God, and Who can in one moment destroy your false worship." Saturninus: "What canst thou say against the religion of the emperor?" Basil was about to reply, but Saturninus interrupted him, saying: "All reply is useless; thou must obey the emperor." Basil: "I never yet failed to obey the Emperor of Heaven." Saturninus: "Who is this Emperor of Heaven?" Basil: "He that dwelleth in Heaven and beholdeth all things; while your emperor commands only upon earth, and is a man like the rest, and will shortly fall into the hands of the Great King."

The governor, irritated at this answer, ordered that the Saint should be suspended, and torn with iron hooks; but while Basil was returning thanks to God, he asked him whether he would sacrifice. The Saint replied: "I have placed all my confidence in the King of kings; nor is it in the power of man to change me." The tyrant, perceiving that the executioners had fatigued themselves, sent him to prison; and one Felix, a bad Christian, who met him by the way, advised him to obey the emperor, but our Saint answered: "Depart from me, O impious wretch! Enveloped

as thou art in the darkness of sin, how canst thou see the light?"

The Emperor Julian was at this time at Pessinunte, celebrating the festival of the goddess Cybele, who was said to be the mother of the gods. Here Saturninus informed him of what had taken place regarding Basil. The apostate, hearing that he possessed great influence, sent two other apostates, Elpidius and Pegasus, to gain him over. When the latter went to the prison to speak to him, the Saint said: "Traitor! why hast thou renounced Jesus Christ and thy hopes of salvation? After having been cleansed in the waters of Baptism, how couldst thou stain thyself with idolatry? After having been fed with the Flesh of Jesus Christ, how canst thou sit at a feast of demons? Thou wert the disciple of truth, and art now become a master of perdition, to the eternal loss of thy own soul. What wilt thou do when the Lord shall come to judge thee?" Then raising his eyes to Heaven, he exclaimed: "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to deliver me from the snares of the devil." Pegasus, covered with confusion, related the affair to Elpidius, and they both proceeded to inform the governor, who again caused Basil to be put to torture. When the Saint was placed upon the rack, he said: "Impious tyrant, thou mayest exercise all thy cruelty, but so long as Jesus Christ is with me, I never will change."

## **Evening Meditation**

### *REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

#### I.

As St. Laurence Justinian says, with St. Peter Damian, the thorns were so long that they penetrated even to the brain: "The thorns perforating the brain." While the gentle Lamb let Himself be tormented according to their will, without speaking a word, without crying out, but closely compressing His eyes through the anguish, He frequently breathed forth, at that time, bitter sighs, as is the wont of one undergoing a torture which has brought him to the point of death, according as was revealed to the Blessed Agatha of the Cross: "He very often closed His eyes, and uttered piercing sighs, like those of one about to die." So great was the quantity of the Blood which flowed from the Wounds upon His Sacred Head, that upon His Face there was no appear-

ance of any other colour save that of blood, according to the revelation of St. Bridget: "So many streams of Blood rushing down over His Face, and filling His hair, and eyes, and beard, He seemed to be nothing but one mass of Blood." And St. Bonaventure adds that the beautiful Face of the Lord was no longer seen, but it appeared rather the face of a man who had been scarified: "Then might be seen no longer the Face of the Lord Jesus, but that of a man who had undergone excoriation."

Ah, cruel Thorns, ungrateful creatures, wherefore do ye torment your Creator thus? But to what purpose, asks St. Augustine, dost thou find fault with the thorns? They were but innocent instruments--our sins, our evil thoughts, were the wicked thorns which afflicted the head of Jesus Christ: "What are the thorns but sinners?" Jesus having one day appeared to St. Teresa crowned with thorns, the Saint began to compassionate Him; but the Lord made answer to her: "Teresa, compassionate Me not on account of the Wounds which the thorns of the Jews have produced; but commiserate Me on account of the wounds which the sins of Christians occasion Me."

Therefore, O my soul, thou also didst then inflict torture upon the venerable Head of thy Redeemer by thy many consentings to evil: *Know thou and behold how grievous and bitter it is for thee to have left the Lord thy God.* (Jer. ii. 19). Open now thine eyes, and see, and bitterly bewail all thy life long the great evil thou hast done in so ungratefully turning thy back upon thy Lord and God. Ah, my Jesus! no, Thou hast not deserved that I should have treated Thee as I have done. I have done evil; I have been in the wrong: I am sorry for it with all my heart. Oh, pardon me, and give me a sorrow which may make me bewail all my life long the wrongs that I have done Thee. My Jesus, my Jesus, pardon me, wishing, as I do, to love Thee for ever.

## II.

*And bowing the knee before him, they derided him, saying: Hail, King of the Jews! And spitting upon him, they took the reed, and struck his head.* (Matt. xxvii. 29. 30). St. John adds: *And they gave him blows.* (John xix. 3). When those barbarians had placed upon the head of Jesus that crown of torture, it was not enough for them to press it down as forcibly as they could with their hands, but

they took a reed to answer the purpose of a hammer, that so they might make the thorns penetrate the more deeply. They then began to turn Him into derision, as if He were a mock king; first of all saluting Him on their bended knee as King of the Jews; and then, rising up, they spit into His Face, and buffet Him with shouts and jests of scorn. Ah, my Jesus, to what art Thou reduced! Had anyone happened by chance to pass that place and seen Jesus Christ so drained of Blood, clad in that ragged purple garment, with that sceptre in His hand, with that crown upon His head, and so derided and ill-treated by the low rabble, what would he ever have taken Him to be but the vilest and most wicked man in the world! Behold the Son of God become at that time the disgrace of Jerusalem! O men, hereupon exclaims Blessed Denis the Carthusian, if we will not love Jesus Christ because He is good, because He is God, let us love Him at least for the many pains which He has suffered for us: "If we love Him not because He is good, because He is God, let us at least love Him because He has suffered so many things for our salvation."

Ah, my dear Redeemer, take back a rebellious servant who has run away from Thee, but who now returns to Thee in penitence. While I was fleeing from Thee and despising Thy love, Thou didst not cease from following after me to draw me back to Thyself; and therefore I cannot fear that Thou wilt drive me away now that I seek Thee, value Thee, and love Thee above everything. Make known to me what I have to do to please Thee; wishing, as I do, to do it all. O my most lovely God, I wish to love Thee in earnest; and I desire to give Thee no more displeasure. Aid me with Thy grace. Let me not leave Thee more. Mary, my hope, pray to Jesus for me. Amen.

## **Tuesday -- Third Week of Lent**

### **Morning Meditation**

#### *DELUSIONS OF SINNERS*

"But I am young," you say, "and later on I will give myself to God." Do you not know that God counts not years but the sins of each? You are young; but into how many sins have you fallen? *Evil-doers shall be cut off.*

# I.

"But I am young; God compassionates my youth: later on I will give myself to God." We now come to another delusion. You are young. But do you not know that God counts not years, but the sins of each one? You are young. But how many sins have you fallen into? There may be many old people who have not been guilty even of the tenth part of the sins you have committed. And do you not know that God has fixed the number and the measure of the sins which He will pardon in each one? *The Lord waiteth patiently that when the day of judgment shall come, he may punish them (the nations) in the fulness of their sins.* (2 Mach. vi. 14). That is to say, God has patience, and waits up to a certain point; but when the measure of the sins which He has determined to pardon is full, He no longer pardons, but chastises the sinner, either by a sudden death in the state of damnation in which he then is, or by abandoning him to his sin--a punishment worse than death: *I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be wasted.* (Is. v. 5). If you have a piece of land which you have encompassed with a hedge of thorns, cultivated for many years, and expended much money upon, and you see that after all it yields no fruit, what do you do? You take away the hedge and leave it to desolation. Tremble lest God should do the same to you. If you continue to sin, gradually you will cease to feel remorse of conscience; you will think no more of eternity nor of your soul; you will lose almost all light; you will lose all fear. Behold the hedge is taken away, behold God has already abandoned you.

My dear Redeemer, prostrate at Thy feet I thank Thee for not having abandoned me after so many sins. What numbers, who have offended Thee less than I have, will never receive the light Thou now givest me. I perceive that truly Thou desirest my salvation; and I desire to be saved chiefly to please Thee. I desire to sing the many mercies Thou hast shown me for all eternity in Heaven. I hope that now, at this hour, Thou hast already pardoned me; but even should I be in disfavour with Thee, because I have not known how to repent of my offences against Thee as I ought, I now repent of them with all my soul, and grieve for them above all other evils. Pardon me in Thy mercy, and

increase in me more and more sorrow for having offended Thee, my God, Who art so good.

## II.

Let us now come to the last delusion I will mention. You say: "It is true that by sin I lose the grace of God, and I have condemned myself to hell; it may be that for this sin I shall be damned; but it may also be that I shall afterwards confess it, and be saved." True, I admit that you may yet be saved; for, after all, I am not a prophet, and cannot say for certain that after this sin God will no longer show mercy to you. But you cannot deny that, after so many graces which the Lord has bestowed on you, you will very likely be lost if you now return to offend Him. It is said in the Scriptures: *A hard heart shall fare evil at the last.* (Ecclus. iii. 27); *Evil-doers shall be cut off* (Ps. xxxvi. 9): evil-doers shall at last be cut off by Divine justice. *What things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap* (Gal. vi. 8): he that sows in sins, in the end shall reap only pains and torments. *I have called and you refused ... I also will laugh in your destruction and will mock.* (Prov. i. 24, 26): I have called thee, says God, and thou hast mocked Me; but I will mock thee at the hour of death. *Revenge is mine, and I will repay in due time* (Deut. xxxii. 35): vengeance is Mine, and I will repay when the time is come. Thus, then, do the Scriptures speak of obstinate sinners; such is what reason and justice require. You say to me: "But perhaps after all, I shall be saved." And I repeat, Yes, perhaps; but what folly, I also say, to rest your eternal salvation upon a *perhaps*, and upon a *perhaps* so uncertain! Is this an affair to be placed in such peril?

O my Jesus, give me sorrow! I will give up sin. I wish to save my soul. O Jesus, give me love. I love Thee above all things, but I still love Thee too little; I wish to love Thee much; and I ask this love of Thee, and hope for it from Thee. Hear me, my Jesus; for Thou hast promised to hear those who call upon Thee. O Mary, Mother of God, all assure me that thou never sendest away disconsolate those who recommend themselves to thee. O my hope after Jesus, I fly to thee, and in thee I trust; recommend me to thy Son and save me.



## Spiritual Reading

### HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

#### ST. BASIL OF ANCYRA (*continued*)

The emperor, having arrived at Ancyra, summoned the Martyr before him, and inquired his name. The Saint replied: "I am a Christian. This is my principal name; but I am generally called Basil. Now, if I shall have preserved the name of a Christian without blemish, Jesus Christ will reward me on the Day of Judgment with eternal glory." Julian: "Do not thus miserably deceive thyself, continuing to believe in Him Who was put to death under Pontius Pilate." Basil: "No, emperor, I am not deceived, but thou hast deceived thyself, Who by thy apostasy hast forfeited thy right to Heaven. I continue to believe in Jesus Christ Whom thou hast renounced, although He placed thee upon a throne. He will, however, quickly hurl thee thence, that thou mayest know the power of the God Whom thou hast despised." Julian: "Madman, thou art raving; it shall not befall me as thou wouldst." Basil: "Thou hast forgotten Jesus Christ, and He shall never again remember Thee in His mercy. He that is the Emperor of all shall despoil thee of the authority thou hast, and cause thee to expire in agony; nor shall thy body find burial." (This prediction was shortly afterwards fulfilled).

Julian, infuriated at the Martyr's speech, said: "I had designed to discharge thee unmolested; but, since thy temerity hath gone so far as to reproach me, I now command that there be torn, every day, from off thy body, seven pieces of flesh." This barbarous command was quickly put into execution by the Count Frumentinus to whom the charge was given. Our Saint endured it with great fortitude; and, when he had been entirely lacerated, he desired to speak with the emperor. The Count, believing that he was induced by the torture to sacrifice to the gods, made known his desire to Julian, who commanded him to be brought to the temple of Esculapius. Upon being presented to the emperor in the temple, the Saint said: "Where, sir, are the persons who are wont to accompany thee? Have they not foretold to thee the motive of this my visit?" Julian: "I suppose thou hast returned to thy senses, and art willing to adore the majesty of the gods." Basil: "Not so; I am come to make thee know that

thy gods are but blind and deaf statues, the worshipping of which is punished in hell." Then taking a piece of his torn flesh, he cast it in the emperor's face, saying: "Take this, O Julian, since such food pleaseth thee. To me death is a gain, and Jesus is my life and my strength; in Him I believe, and for His sake I am willing to suffer."

The Christians looked with satisfaction upon the constancy of Basil, and the glorious testimony he had given to the Faith; but equal to their joy was the fury of Frumentinus at his disappointment. He therefore ordered the executioners to tear the Saint with irons until his bones and bowels should be laid bare. During the infliction of this sentence the holy Martyr prayed thus: "Be Thou forever blessed, O Lord, Who giveth strength unto the weak that put their trust in Thee. Mercifully vouchsafe to look upon me, and grant me the grace faithfully to consummate my sacrifice, that I may be made worthy of Thy eternal kingdom."

On the following day the emperor departed from Ancyra without granting an order to Frumentinus, who, having summoned Basil before him, exclaimed: "O, thou most rash and obdurate of mortals! Wilt thou at last yield to the emperor, or terminate thy days amid the most excruciating torture?" Basil replied: "Dost thou not recollect to what state thou didst reduce my body yesterday, when its mangled appearance drew tears from all who beheld it? Now it hath pleased Jesus Christ to heal me, as thou seest. Make this known to thy emperor, in order that he may understand the power of that God Whom he hath abandoned to become the slave of the devil; but God will also abandon him, and he shall die in his sins." Frumentinus replied: "Thou art mad; but if thou wilt not sacrifice, I shall cause thy entire body to be pierced with red-hot spikes." The Saint answered: "I have not been afraid, as thou knowest, of the threats of the emperor; think now whether thy words can strike me with terror."

Although Frumentinus was aware that the constancy of Basil was not to be overcome, he nevertheless caused the irons to be heated, and the Saint's shoulders to be pierced through. During this most agonising torture, the Saint prayed thus: "I

thank Thee, O Lord, my God, Who hast delivered my soul from hell. Preserve Thy blessed spirit within me, in order that, having overcome these torments, I may offer to Thee the sacrifice of my life, and become an heir to everlasting bliss, through the promises of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whose merits I beseech Thee to receive my soul in peace, since I have continued to the end to confess Thy Name, Who livest and reignest, world without end. Amen." Having finished this prayer, the Saint, as though falling into a sweet sleep, in the midst of his tortures, placidly rendered his soul to God, on the 28th of June, in the year 362.

### **Evening Meditation**

#### *REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

##### I.

Pilate, seeing the Redeemer reduced to that condition, so moving, as it was, to compassion, thought that the mere sight of Him would have softened the Jews. He therefore led Him forth into the balcony; he raised up the purple garment, and, exhibiting to the people the body of Jesus all covered with wounds and gashes, he said to them, Behold the Man: *Pilate therefore went forth again and saith to them: Behold, I bring him forth unto you, that you may know that I find no cause in him. Jesus, therefore, came forth, bearing the crown of thorns and the purple garment; and he saith to them: Behold the man.* (John xix. 4, 5). *Behold the man!*--as though he would have said: Behold the man against whom you have laid an accusation before me, and who wanted to make Himself a King. I, to please you, have sentenced Him, innocent though He be, to be scourged-- 'Behold the Man, not honoured as a king, but covered with disgrace.' Behold Him now, reduced to such a state that He wears the appearance of a man that has been flayed alive; and He can have but little life left in Him. If, with all this, you want me to condemn Him to death, I tell you that I cannot do so, as I find not any reason for condemning Him. But the Jews, on beholding Jesus thus ill-treated, waxed more fierce: *When, therefore, the chief priests and servants saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him! Crucify him!* (John xix. 6). Pilate seeing that they could not be pacified, washed his hands in the presence of the people, saying: *I am innocent of the blood of this just man; look*

*you to it.* And they made answer, *His blood be upon us, and upon our children.* (Matt. xxvii. 24, 25).

O my beloved Saviour, Thou art the greatest of all kings; yet now I behold Thee the most reviled of all mankind. If this ungrateful people knows Thee not, I know Thee; and I adore Thee as my true King and Lord. I thank Thee, O my Redeemer, for all the outrages Thou hast suffered for me; and I pray Thee to give me a love for contempt and pains, since Thou hast so lovingly embraced them. I blush at having in time past loved honours and pleasures so much, that for their sake I have often gone so far as to renounce Thy grace and Thy love. I repent of this above every other evil. I embrace, O Lord, all the pains and ignominies which will come to me from Thy hands. Do Thou bestow upon me that resignation which I need. I love Thee, my Jesus, my Love, my All.

## II.

But while Pilate from the balcony was exhibiting Jesus to that populace, at the self-same time the Eternal Father from Heaven was presenting to us His beloved Son, saying, in like manner: *Behold the man.* Behold this Man, Who is My only-begotten Son, Whom I love with the same love wherewith I love Myself: *This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.* Behold the Man, your Saviour, Him Whom I promised, and for Whom you were anxiously waiting. Behold the Man Who is nobler than all other men, become the Man of sorrows. Behold Him, and see to what a pitiable condition He has reduced Himself through the love which He has borne towards you, and in order to be, at least out of compassion, beloved by you again. Oh, look at Him, and love Him; and if His great worth move you not, at least let these sorrows and ignominies which He suffers for you move you to love Him.

Ah, my God and Father of my Redeemer, I love Thy Son, Who suffers for love of me; and I love Thee Who with so much love hast abandoned Him to so many pains for me. Oh, look not on my sins, by which I have so often offended Thee and Thy Son: *Look upon the face of thy Christ.* Behold Thine Only-begotten, all covered with wounds and shame in satisfaction for my faults and for His merits pardon me, and never let me again offend

Thee. *His blood be upon us.* The Blood of this Man, so dear unto Thee, Who prays to Thee for us, and impetrates Thy mercy, let this descend upon our souls, and obtain for us Thy grace. O my Lord, I hate and abhor all that I have done to displease Thee; and I love Thee, O infinite Goodness, more than I love myself. For love of this Thy Son give me Thy love, to enable me to conquer every passion, and to undergo every suffering in order to please Thee.

## **Wednesday--Third Sunday after Lent**

### **Morning Meditation**

#### *NOTHING MORE PRECIOUS THAN TIME*

There is nothing more precious than time; but by many there is nothing less valued. At the hour of death, to obtain even one short hour men would give all they possess--wealth, honours, pleasures,--but this hour shall not be given them. They will weep and say: O fools that we have been! O time for ever lost!

#### **I.**

There is nothing more precious than time; but there is nothing less valued and more despised by men in the world. Lamenting over this, St. Bernard goes on to say: "The days of salvation pass, and no one reflects that for him that day vanishes and returns no more." You will see that gambler, who night and day loses his time in play. If you ask him: What art thou doing? he replies: We are passing the time. You will see that other vagabond loitering for whole hours at the corner of a street, looking at the passers-by, or speaking immodestly or on idle things. If you ask him: What art thou doing? he will reply: I am passing the time. Poor blind creatures who lose so many days, but days that return no more!

O despised time, thou wilt be desired above all things by worldlings at the hour of death. Then will they desire another year, another month, another day; but they will not obtain it. They will then be told there is no more time. How much would each of these then give for another week, another day, to put in better order the affairs of his conscience! "To obtain even one little hour," says St. Laurence Justinian, "they would give all they possess--wealth, honours, pleasures." But this hour shall not

be given to them. Quickly, the priest who assists them will say, quickly depart from this world; there is no more time. "Depart, O Christian soul, from this world."

Ah, my Jesus, Thou hast devoted Thy whole life to the salvation of my soul. There was not a moment of it in which Thou didst not offer Thyself for me to the Eternal Father, to obtain my pardon and my eternal salvation; and of the many years I have been in the world, how many have I spent in Thy service? Alas, all that I can remember having done, all fills me with remorse of conscience. The evil has been great; the good has been too little and full of imperfections, of lukewarmness, of self-love, and of distractions. Ah, my Redeemer, all has been thus because I have forgotten how much Thou hast done for me. I have forgotten Thee, but Thou didst not forget me; Thou hast pursued me while I fled from Thee, and hast so often called me to Thy love.

## II.

Therefore does the Prophet exhort us to remember God and to obtain His grace before the light fails us: *Remember thy Creator... before the sun and the light be darkened.* (Eccles. xii. 23). How great is the distress of a traveller who perceives that he has lost his way, when night has already set in, and it is too late to repair his mistake! Such at the hour of death will be his distress who has lived many years in the world, but has not lived for God: *The night cometh, when no man can work.* (John ix. 4). Death will then be for him that night in which he can no longer do anything: *He hath called against me the time.* (Lam. i. 15). Conscience will then recall to him how much time he has had, and he has spent it to the destruction of his soul; how many calls, how many graces he has received from God for his sanctification, and he has not chosen to profit by them; and then he will find the way of doing any good closed against him. Upon which he will weep and say: Oh, fool that I have been! Oh, time for ever lost! Oh, my lost life! Oh, lost years, in which I might have become a Saint, but have not; and now there is no more time! But of what avail will tears and lamentations be when the scene closes, the lamp is on the point of being extinguished, and the dying man is approaching that awful moment on which eternity depends?

Behold me here, my Jesus; I will no longer resist Thee. Shall

I wait till Thou entirely forsakest me? No. I repent, my Sovereign Good, of having separated myself from Thee by sin. I love Thee, O Infinite Goodness, worthy of infinite love. Ah, do not permit me any more to lose the time Thou givest me in Thy mercy. Ah, remind me always, my beloved Saviour, of the love Thou hast borne me, and the pains Thou hast suffered for me. Make me forget all things, that during the remainder of my life I may only think of loving and pleasing Thee. I love Thee, my Jesus, my Love, my All. I promise Thee, whenever I shall call it to mind, to make acts of love of Thee. Give me holy perseverance. I confide wholly in the merits of Thy Blood. And I confide in thy intercession, O my dear Mother Mary.

### **Spiritual Reading**

*HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH*

ST. IRENAEUS, BISHOP OF SIRMIMUM

(March 25)

It is believed that St. Irenaeus was born in the city of which he afterwards became bishop; and, although it is probable that his parents were pagans, he professed the Faith of Christ from his childhood. He married at an early age, and had many children, whom he left young behind him at the time of his Martyrdom. This Saint gave such extraordinary examples of virtue, that he deserved to be made Bishop of Sirmium.\* From the time he received that charge, he ceased not to combat the enemies of the Faith, and to defend his flock from their artifices, until he terminated a great career in the glory of Martyrdom.

\*In the primitive times the Church was composed only of converts. It was not unusual to see married men raised to the dignity of the priesthood and even to that of the episcopate; but these were obliged to live afterwards in perpetual continence. The ministers of the altar are consecrated to God, and can no longer belong to anyone save God alone.--Ed.

The edicts of the Emperor Diocletian against the Christians were published in Sirmium in the year 304, and Probus, the governor of Lower Pannonia, was most indefatigable in putting them into execution. The ecclesiastics, and particularly the bishops, were the first objects of his unholy zeal; for he thought that by striking the pastors he could the more easily disperse the flock

of Jesus Christ.

Irenaeus was accordingly arrested, and brought before Probus, who said to him: "Obey the imperial edicts, and sacrifice to the gods." The Saint replied "The Scripture saith that whosoever sacrifices to false gods shall be exterminated" (Deut. xiii.). Probus: "The princes have commanded that all Christians shall sacrifice to the gods, or be tortured." Irenaeus: "But I have been commanded to suffer all tortures rather than deny my God, and sacrifice to demons." Probus: "Either sacrifice, or I will put thee to the torture." Irenaeus: "In doing so, thou wilt please me; for thus I shall be made a sharer in the Passion of my Saviour."

Hereupon the governor commanded that he should be tortured; and, seeing that he suffered much, said: "What dost thou say now, Irenaeus? Wilt thou now sacrifice?" The Saint replied: "I sacrifice, by my confession, to my God, to whom I have always sacrificed."

During the torments of St. Irenaeus, his father, his wife and children, his domestics and friends came to implore of him to obey the emperors. His children embraced his feet, crying out: "Father, if thou hast no pity for thyself, have pity, at least, on us." The wife, with many tears, besought him not to leave her disconsolate, while his friends exhorted him not to throw away his life in the vigour of manhood. But the Saint, like an immovable rock upon which the waves lose their strength, armed himself against their assaults with the words of the Saviour: *But he that shall deny me before men, I will also deny him before my father who is in heaven.* (Matt. x. 33). To their importunities he returned not a single word of reply, but sighed only for the consummation of his Martyrdom. Probus then said to him: "Irenaeus, abandon this thy folly; sacrifice to the gods, and destroy not thyself in the prime of life." The Saint answered: "It is that I may not destroy myself for all eternity that I refuse to sacrifice." He was then taken down and sent to prison, where he had to endure various tortures for several days.

After some time, Probus, seated upon his tribunal, ordered that the holy bishop should be again brought before him, and, upon his appearance, said: "Irenaeus, now at length sacrifice, and free thyself from the torments which otherwise await thee."



The Saint replied: "Do that which thou art commanded to do, and do not at all imagine that I am likely to obey thee." Probus, enraged at this answer, caused him to be scourged in his presence, during which infliction the Saint said: "From my childhood I have adored the one only God Who has always assisted and comforted me, and I cannot adore gods made by the hands of men." Probus: "Let the torments which thou hast already suffered satisfy thee; free thyself from death." Irenaeus: "I do free myself from death, when, by the pains which I suffer, I gain eternal life."

The governor then asked him, whether he had a wife, children or parents alive; but Irenaeus answered that he had not, adding: "I say I have not, because Jesus Christ hath declared that whosoever loveth father or mother, wife or children, more than Him, is not worthy of Him." (Matt. x. 37). Probus: "Sacrifice at least for thy children's sake," Irenaeus: "My children have God to provide for them." Probus: "Do not oblige me to put thee again to the torture." Irenaeus: "Do thy pleasure; but thou shalt see what constancy my Lord Jesus Christ will give me to overcome all thy arts."

Probus then ordered Irenaeus to be cast into the river; but the Saint, hearing the sentence, exclaimed: "I thought, that, after so many threats, thou wouldst have caused me to suffer many tortures, and to be cut to pieces; I beseech thee to do so, that thou mayest perceive how Christians, who have Faith in God, despise death."

Probus, enraged at these words, ordered that the Saint should be beheaded, and then cast into the river. The holy bishop, perceiving that his end was approaching, returned thanks to Jesus Christ for having given him the necessary fortitude, and for calling him, by such a death, to the participation of His glory. When he arrived at the bridge of Diana, which was the place selected for the execution, he threw off his garments and prayed thus: "O Lord Jesus Christ, Who didst vouchsafe to die for the salvation of the world, I beseech Thee that Thy Angels may receive my soul; since I most willingly suffer death for the honour of Thy Name, and the edification of Thy Church. Receive me into Thy glory for Thy mercy's sake, and strengthen my flock

in Thy holy Faith." His head was then struck off, and his body thrown into the river Save.

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### I.

*Go forth, ye daughters of Sion, and behold King Solomon in his diadem, wherewith his mother crowned him on the day of his espousals, and on the day of the joy of his heart.* (Cant. iii. 11). Go forth, ye souls redeemed, ye daughters of grace, go forth and see your gentle King, on the day of His death (the day of His joy, for thereon He made you His spouses, giving up His life upon the Cross), crowned by the ungrateful synagogue, His mother, with a crown; not indeed one of honour, but one of suffering and shame: "Go forth," says St. Bernard, "and behold your King in a crown of poverty and misery." O most beautiful of all mankind! O greatest of all monarchs! O most lovely of all spouses! to what a state do I see Thee reduced, covered with wounds and contempt! Thou art a Spouse, but a Spouse of Blood: "To me Thou art a Spouse of Blood"; it being by means of Thy Blood that Thou hast willed to espouse Thyself to our souls. Thou art a King, but a King of suffering and a King of love; it being by sufferings that Thou hast willed to gain our affections.

O most beloved Spouse of my soul, would that I were continually calling to mind how much Thou hast suffered for me, that so I might never cease from loving and pleasing Thee! Have compassion upon me, who have cost Thee so much. In requital for so many sufferings endured by Thee, Thou art content if I love Thee. Yes, I do love Thee, Infinite Loveliness, I love Thee above every thing; yet it is but little that I love Thee. O my beloved Jesus, give me more love, if Thou wouldst that I should love Thee more. I desire to have a very great love for Thee. Such a wretched sinner as I am, ought to have been burning in hell ever since the moment in which I first grievously offended Thee; but Thou hast borne with me even until this hour, because Thou dost not wish me to burn with that miserable fire, but with the blessed fire of Thy love. This thought, O God of my soul, sets me all on fire with the desire of doing all that I can to please Thee.

Help me, O my Jesus; and since Thou hast done so much, complete the work, and make me wholly Thine.

## II.

But the Jews going on to insult the governor, crying out, *Away with him! away with him! crucify him!* Pilate said to them, *Shall I crucify your king?* And they made answer, *We have no king but Caesar.* (John xix. 15). The worldly-minded, who love the riches, the honours, and the pleasures of earth, refuse to have Jesus Christ for their King; because, as far as this earth is concerned, Jesus was but a King of poverty, shame, and sufferings. But if such as these refuse Thee, O my Jesus, we choose Thee for our only King, and we make our protestations that "we have no King but Jesus." Yes, most lovely Saviour, "Thou art my King"; Thou art and hast for ever to be my only Lord.

True King, indeed, art Thou of our souls; for Thou hast created them, and redeemed them from the slavery of Satan: *Thy kingdom come.* Exercise, then, Thy dominion, and reign for ever in our poor hearts; may they ever serve and obey Thee! Be it for others to serve the monarchs of earth, in hope of the good things of this world. Our desire is to serve only Thee, our afflicted and despised King, in hope only of pleasing Thee, without any earthly consolations. Dear to us, from this day forth, shall shame and sufferings be, since Thou hast been willing to endure so much of them for love of us. Oh, grant us the grace to be faithful to Thee; and to this end bestow upon us the great gift of Thy love. If we love Thee, we shall also love the contempt and the sufferings which were so much beloved by Thee; and we shall ask Thee for nothing but that which Thy faithful and loving servant St. John of the Cross asked of Thee: "Lord, to suffer and be despised for Thee; Lord, to suffer and be despised for Thee!" O Mary, my Mother, intercede for me. Amen.

## Thursday--Third Week of Lent

### Morning Meditation

*"WALK WHILE YOU HAVE THE LIGHT."*

Death is not the time for *making our preparation*, but the time to find ourselves already prepared. *Be ye ready!* At the hour of death we can do nothing. What is done is done. And what are

we doing? We know for certain that ere long, and maybe at any hour, our most important affair, the affair of our eternal salvation, will have to be decided, and we lose time.

I.

*Walk whilst you have the light.* (John xii. 35). We must walk in the way of the Lord during life, whilst we have light, because in death we lose that light. Death is not the time for preparation, but to find ourselves already prepared: *Be ye ready.* At the hour of death we can do nothing; what then is done is done. O God, if a person were told that ere long a trial would take place on which his life or all his property depended, what haste would he make to procure an able counsel to plead his cause, and to find means for obtaining favour! And what do we do? We know for certain that ere long, and maybe at any hour, our most important affair, that is to say the affair of our eternal salvation, will have to be decided, and we lose time.

Some will say: I am young; later I will give myself to God. But remember, I reply, that the Lord cursed the fig-tree that He found without fruit, although it was not the season for fruit, as the Gospel remarks: *It was not the time for figs.* (Mark xi. 13). By this Jesus wished to signify that men should at all times, even in youth, bring forth the fruit of good works, otherwise they will be cursed, and bring forth no more fruit in future. *May no man hereafter eat fruit of thee any more for ever.* Thus did our Redeemer say to that tree, and thus does He curse whoever is called by Him and resists. The devil considers the whole of our life as short, and he therefore loses not a moment in tempting us: *The devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time.* (Apoc. xii. 12). Our enemy, then, loses no time in trying to destroy us; and shall we delay to save our souls?

Another will say: But what harm do I do? O God, and is there, then, no harm in losing time in play, in useless conversations, that are of no profit to the soul? Has God, then, given you this time merely that you should waste it? No, says the Holy Ghost: *Defraud not thyself of the good day.* (Ecclus. xiv. 14). The labourers mentioned by St. Matthew did no evil; they only lost time; and for this they were rebuked by the master of the vineyard: *Why stand you here all the day idle?* (Matt. xx. 6).

No, my God, I will no longer lose the time which Thou givest me in Thy mercy. I deserve now to be weeping fruitless tears in hell. I thank Thee for having preserved my life; I will live only for Thee during the remainder of my days. If I were now in hell, I should weep, but in despair and unavailingly. I will weep over my offences against Thee; and in weeping I am certain of Thy pardon, as the Prophet assures me: *Weeping thou shalt not weep; he will surely have pity on thee.* (Is. xxx. 19). If I were in hell, I could never more love Thee; and now I love Thee, and hope always to love Thee. If I were in hell, I could not ask of Thee more graces; but now I hear Thee say: *Ask, and you shall receive.* Since, then, I still have time to beg for Thy graces, I ask of Thee two. O God of my soul, give me perseverance in Thy grace, and give me Thy love; and then do with me what Thou wilt.

## II.

On the Day of Judgment, Jesus Christ will demand an account of every idle word. All time that is not spent for God is lost time. Therefore the Lord thus exhorts us: *Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly: for neither work, nor reason...shall be in hell, whither thou art hastening.* (Eccles. ix. 10). The venerable Sister Jane of the Most Holy Trinity, a Teresian nun, said that there is no tomorrow in the life of Saints; tomorrow is only in the life of sinners, who always say, By-and-by, by-and-by; and thus they go on till death arrives. *Behold, now is the acceptable time.* (2 Cor. vi. 2). *Today if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts.* (Ps. xciv. 8). Today God calls on you to do good; do it today, because tomorrow either there may be no more time, or God may no longer call on you.

If in the past you have unfortunately spent your time in offending God, endeavour, like King Ezechias, to weep over it during the remainder of your life: *I will recount to thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul.* (Is. xxxviii. 15). God gives you life in order that you may repair lost time: *Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.* (Ephes. v. 16). Commenting upon this, St. Anselm says: "Thou wilt redeem the time, if thou dost what thou hast neglected to do." St. Jerome says of St. Paul, that although he was the last of the Apostles, yet he was the first in merit, on account of what he did after he was called. Let us reflect, were there

nothing else, that in each moment we can increase our store of eternal goods. If you were allowed to acquire as much land as you could walk round in a day, or as much money as you could count in a day, what haste would you not make! And you can acquire in a moment eternal treasures, and yet you lose time. Say not that you can do tomorrow that which you can do today, because this day will be lost to you and will return no more. St. Francis Borgia turned to God with holy affections when others spoke of worldly affairs; so that when his opinion was asked, he knew not what to reply; being admonished of this, he said: "I prefer being thought dull of intellect to losing my time."

O my God, grant that in every remaining moment of my life I may always recommend myself to Thee, my Jesus, and say: Lord, help me; Lord have mercy on me; grant that I may never more offend Thee; grant that I may love Thee. Mary, my most holy Mother, obtain for me the grace to recommend myself always to God, and to ask of Him perseverance and His holy love.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH*

#### ST. APIAN AND ST. AEDESIUS, BROTHERS

(April 2 and 8)

St. Apian was born in Lycia, of rich and noble parents who sent him to Berytus, to study the humanities; and, notwithstanding that the youths of that city were exceedingly corrupt, Apian preserved himself from contamination. At the age of eighteen years, he returned to his father's house; but finding that the family had continued idolaters, he retired to Caesarea, in Palestine, where he was most hospitably received into the house of the celebrated Eusebius, who afterwards became bishop of that city. Under this great master he studied the Sacred Scriptures, and practised those austerities that prepared him for the glorious end which he made.

At this time, in the year 306, the Emperor Galerius Maximian was not only persecuting the Christians, but searching for them with the closest scrutiny. He caused the families to be enrolled, and each individual to be summoned, that he might either sacrifice or be put to death. Apian prepared himself for this trial, and having understood that the governor was about to offer

a solemn sacrifice to the gods, he went, on the appointed day, to the temple. Finding himself influenced by a special inspiration from Heaven, he passed the guards, approached the impious altar, and, while the governor was raising his hand to pour out a libation of wine before the idol, he seized his arm, and earnestly exhorted him to desist from the impiety of offending the true God by sacrificing to demons and images.

The soldiers rushed upon Apian, as though they would tear him to pieces; and, having beaten him most cruelly, brought him to prison, where they put him to the torture of the stocks for twenty-four hours. Upon the following day he was brought before the governor, who, having in vain sought to gain him over by promises and threats, ordered that his sides should be torn with iron hooks, until the bones and bowels should be laid bare. He was then buffeted upon the face until he became so deformed that he could not be recognised by those who had formerly known him. The tyrant, perceiving that these torments made no impression upon the Saint, caused linen, steeped in oil, to be rolled round his legs, and then to be set on fire. It is easy to conceive that the Saint suffered most excruciating torture from the new infliction, yet he endured it with undiminished fortitude. The governor, after three days, finding him armed with the same constancy, ordered him to be thrown into the sea.

Eusebius, an eye-witness, relates that upon the execution of this sentence the city was shaken with an earthquake, and the sea became violently agitated, and cast the body back upon the shore before the gates of Caesarea. St. Apian was not quite twenty-nine years of age at the time of his Martyrdom, which took place in the year 306.

St. Aedesius, who was the brother of St. Apian, not only according to the flesh, but equally so in Faith and Piety, also applied himself to the study of philosophy, which served to separate him still more from the world, and unite him to Jesus Christ. In this same persecution he frequently confessed His Adorable Name, and suffered long imprisonment and various punishments, which he endured with Christian fortitude. He was sent to labour in the mines of Palestine, from which he was subsequently released; but finally, one day, in Alexandria, per-

ceiving a judge pronouncing cruel sentences against the Christians, and delivering over holy virgins to the lusts of abandoned young men, he went forward and spoke with such force against these acts of injustice, that, as Eusebius says, he covered the persecutors with confusion, and received from them the crown of Martyrdom. Like his brother, he was horribly tortured and afterwards cast into the sea.

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### I.

Pilate was going on making excuses to the Jews to the effect that he could not condemn that innocent One to death, when they worked upon his fears by telling him: *If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar's friend.* (John xix. 12). And hence the miserable judge, blinded by his fear of losing Caesar's favour, after having so often recognised and declared the innocence of Jesus Christ, at last condemned Him to die by crucifixion: *Then, therefore, he delivered him to them to be crucified.* (John xix. 16). O my beloved Redeemer, St. Bernard hereupon bewails, what crime hast Thou committed that Thou shouldst have to be condemned to death, and that death the death of the Cross? "What hast Thou done, O most innocent Saviour, that the judgment upon Thee should be such? Of what crime hast Thou been guilty?" Ah, I well understand, replies the Saint, the reason for Thy death; I understand what has been Thy crime: "Thy crime is Thy love." Thy crime is the too great love which Thou hast borne to men; it is this, Pilate, that condemns Thee to die. No, adds St. Bonaventure, I see no just reason for Thy death, O my Jesus, save the excess of the affection which Thou bearest to us: "I see no cause for death but the superabundance of love." Ah, so great an excess of love, goes on St. Bernard, how strongly does it constrain us, O loving Saviour, to consecrate all the affections of our hearts unto Thee! "Such love wholly claims for itself our love." O my dear Saviour, the mere knowledge that Thou dost love me should be sufficient to make me live detached from everything, in order to study only how to love Thee and please Thee in all things: "Love is strong as death." If love is as strong as death, oh, by Thy



merits, my Saviour, grant me such a love for Thee as shall make me hold all earthly affections in abhorrence. Give me thoroughly to understand that all my good consists in pleasing Thee, O God, all Goodness and all Love! I curse that time in which I loved Thee not. I thank Thee for that Thou dost give me time in which to love Thee. I love Thee, O my Jesus, infinite in loveliness, and infinitely loving. With my whole soul do I love Thee, and I assure Thee that I would wish to die a thousand deaths rather than ever again cease from loving Thee.

## II.

The unjust sentence of death is read over to Jesus, Who stands condemned; He listens to it, and humbly accepts it. No complaint does He make of the injustice of the judge; no appeal does He make to Caesar, as did St. Paul, but, all gentle and resigned, He submits Himself to the decree of the Eternal Father, Who condemns Him to the Cross for our sins: *He humbled himself, being made obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross.* (Philipp. ii. 8). And, for the love which He bears to man, He is content to die for us: *He loved me, and delivered himself for me.* (Gal. ii. 20).

O my merciful Saviour, how much do I thank Thee! How deeply am I obliged to Thee! I desire, O my Jesus, to die for Thee, since Thou hast so lovingly accepted of death for me. But if it is not granted me to give Thee my blood and life at the hands of the executioner, as the Martyrs have done, I, at least, accept with resignation the death which awaits me; and I accept of it in the manner, and at the time, which shall please Thee. Henceforth do I offer it up to Thee in honour of Thy Majesty, and in satisfaction for my sins. I pray Thee, by the merits of Thy death, to grant me the happiness to die in Thy grace and love.

## Friday--Third Week of Lent

### Morning Meditation

*"MY LIFE IS CUT OFF AS BY A WEAVER."*

Oh, how many whilst they are busy weaving, that is, preparing and executing the worldly projects they have devised with so much care, are surprised and cut off by death! O God, of what use are riches, possessions, or kingdoms in death when nothing is

needed but a coffin and a simple garment to cover the body! *My life is cut off as by a weaver; whilst I was yet beginning, he cut me off.*

I.

King Ezechias said, with tears, *My life is cut off as by a weaver; whilst I was yet but beginning, he cut me off.* (Is. xxxviii. 12). Oh, how many, whilst they are busy weaving--that is, preparing and executing the worldly projects which they have devised with such care--are surprised by death, which cuts all short! By the light of that last candle,\* all things of this world vanish; applause, amusements, pomps, and grandeurs. Great secret of death, which makes us see that which the lovers of this world do not see! The most enviable fortunes, the most exalted dignities, the proudest triumphs, lose all their splendour when they are viewed from the bed of death. The ideas of certain false happiness, which we have formed to ourselves, are then changed into indignation against our own madness. The dark and gloomy shades of death cover and obscure all, even royal dignities.

\*A blessed candle is usually lighted and placed in the hand or by the bed of the dying.--Ed

At present our passions make the things of this earth appear different from what they really are; death tears away the veil, and shows them in their true light, to be nothing but smoke, dirt, vanity and misery. O God, of what use are riches, possessions, or kingdoms, in death, when nothing is needed but a coffin, and a simple garment to cover the body? Of what use are honours, when nothing remains of them but a funeral procession, and pompous obsequies, which will not avail the soul if it be lost? Of what use is beauty, if nothing remains after it but worms, stench, horror, even before death, and after it a little fetid dust?

O God of my soul, O Infinite Goodness, have pity on me who have so greatly offended Thee. I already knew that in sinning I should lose Thy grace, and I chose to lose it. Oh, tell me what I must do to regain it. If Thou desirest that I repent of my sins, I do indeed repent with my whole heart, and I wish I could die of grief. If Thou wilt that I hope for pardon, behold, I hope for it through the merits of Thy Blood.

II.

*He hath made me as it were a by-word of the people, and I am an*

*example before them.* (Job xvii. 6). That rich man, that minister, that general dies, and he will then everywhere be spoken of: but if he has led a bad life, he will become a by-word of the people; and, as a warning to others, he will be held up as an instance of the vanity of the world, and also of Divine Justice. In the grave his body will be mingled with the corpses of the poor: *The small and the great are there.* (Job iii. 19). What has the beautiful formation of his body availed him, since now it is but a heap of worms? What has the authority he possessed availed him, since now his body is thrown into a grave to rot, and his soul has been cast into hell to burn? Oh, what a misfortune, to serve for others as a subject for these reflections, and not to have made them to his own profit! Let us, then, be persuaded that the proper time for repairing a disordered conscience is not the hour of death, but during life. Let us hasten to do now that which we cannot do then. All passes quickly and ends. *The time is short.* Therefore let us so act that everything may serve towards attaining eternal life.

I leave all, I renounce all the pleasures and riches that the world can give me, and I love Thee above every other good, O my most amiable Saviour. If, O Lord, Thou desirest that I demand graces of Thee, I ask for two: permit me not to offend Thee any more, and grant that I may love Thee; and then do with me as Thou wilt. Mary, my hope, obtain for me these two graces; I hope for them through thee.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH*

##### ST. JUSTIN, PHILOSOPHER

(April 13)

St. Justin was one of those glorious Saints that have rendered the Church illustrious by their extraordinary learning, as well as by their eminent virtues. He wrote in defence of Catholic truth against pagans, Jews, and heretics, and presented to the Emperors and Roman Senate two famous "Apologies," wherein he vindicates the innocence of the Christians, and proves that the crimes imputed to them were mere calumnies of the pagans. By the sanctity of his life, and the zeal and energy of his preaching, he converted many infidels, and finally terminated his brilliant career by a glorious Martyrdom.

St. Justin was born about the beginning of the second century at Neapolis,\* the capital of Samaria, of Greek parents, who were idolaters. Having gone through the usual elementary course of studies, he found himself inspired with a great desire to know something about the Great Cause, or Creator of all. Having in vain sought for truth among the Stoics, Peripatetics, Pythagoreans, and those of the Platonic school, God was pleased to satisfy his yearnings after a wonderful manner. Having wandered one day into a solitary place in order that he might with more tranquillity enjoy his meditations, he met with an old man of very venerable appearance, who told him that if he wished to arrive at a knowledge of the true God, he should leave the study of philosophy, and begin to read the Prophets, who in their writings had manifested to man the Mysteries of God, and announced Jesus Christ, His Son, through Whom alone we can arrive at the knowledge of the true God, "But," continued this venerable personage, "above all things, pray to the Lord to illuminate thy mind, because these things are not to be understood except by those unto whom God hath given the knowledge of them." Having pronounced these words, he disappeared.

\*The ancient Sichem, now called Napleus

After this interview, Justin applied himself continually to the reading of the Holy Scriptures, from which he derived that blessed knowledge which made him embrace the Faith and receive the Sacrament of regeneration about the year 133, being then about thirty years of age. The constancy and fortitude of the Martyrs in suffering tortures and laying down their lives for Jesus Christ, as he himself confesses, contributed much to his conversion, from which time he dedicated himself entirely to the love of Jesus Christ, and the advancement of His Religion. To this end he received the Holy Order of Priesthood,\* and exerted himself continually in the conversion of infidels and heretics, considering himself called by God to the defence of His Church. Hence he used to say: "Since I have obtained from God the grace to understand the Scriptures, I labour to make them understood by others also, lest my neglect should be punished at the tribunal of God." And again: "I am determined to manifest the truth, although I should be cut to pieces."

\*The clerical character of St. Justin is by no means an incontrovertible point. The silence of the ancient authors with regard to his ordination has induced some to consider him a layman, as they think that so important a circumstance, had it taken place, could not have been omitted by early writers. His preaching, teaching, catechizing, etc., would proclaim him a deacon, at least; and it is hard to believe that if such a person at all entered the clerical state, the Church would have failed to promote him to the priesthood.--Ed.

Having proceeded to Rome, he instructed many in the doctrines of the Christian Faith; and there, about the year 150, composed and presented to the Emperor Antoninus Pius, and to the Roman Senate, his first "Apology," wherein he demonstrates the truth of the doctrines, and the sanctity of life, which the Christians professed. He adds that many of them had lived in a state of inviolate purity for sixty or seventy years; and that Christians were so enamoured of this angelic virtue, that they either live in perpetual continency, or embrace the marriage state for the holy purpose of bringing up children in the love and service of God; their desires being placed in the joys of eternal life, which they expect through the death of Jesus Christ.

In testimony of the truth of the Christian Faith, he brings forward the fulfilment of the Prophecies, which had been preserved by the Jews, the avowed enemies of the Christians. "We have seen," says the Saint, "those Prophecies fulfilled in our own days, by the Birth of Jesus Christ from a Virgin; in His preaching and miracles; in His Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven; in the reprobation of the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem; in the conversion of the Gentiles, and the establishment of the Church throughout the entire world. These Prophecies, so perfectly fulfilled, must convince us that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God, Who will come one day to judge mankind, as hath been foretold, and as we believe."

The Church in those days kept concealed from the uninitiated the celebration of the most Holy Mysteries; but St. Justin thought it necessary to explain them, in order to contradict the infamous calumnies of secret lewdness and infanticide, which were being circulated against the Christians. Wherefore, hav-

ing explained the sacred ceremonies of Baptism, he proceeds to speak of the Eucharist in the following terms: "He that presides in the assembly is presented with bread and a chalice of wine, with water; whereupon, in the Name of the Son and the Holy Ghost, he renders glory to the Father. And by these gifts doth he make thanksgiving, which all the faithful confirm by the word 'Amen'. The prayers, praises, and thanksgiving being terminated, the Deacons take of the bread and the wine, mixed with water, over which all these holy prayers have been recited, and having distributed them among those present, they carry some to the absent also. This food is by us called *Eucharist*; of which no one can partake who believeth not our doctrines, and who hath not been cleansed from sin in the laver of regeneration. This is not common food or drink; but as Jesus Christ, our Saviour, was, for our Redemption, by virtue of the Divine Word, composed of flesh and blood; so we are aware that, by virtue of the prayer containing His Divine words, the food by which we are nourished is the Flesh and Blood of the *Word Incarnate*." Thus we see that the present doctrine of the Catholic Church is that which was believed and practised in the Apostolic times, in which our Saint lived. It is believed that although this "Apology" of St. Justin did not cause the persecution to cease, it made a favourable impression on the Emperor Antoninus Pius, as is inferred from his letter, written to the cities of Asia Minor in favour of the Christians, and recorded by Eusebius.

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### I.

Pilate delivers over the innocent Lamb into the hands of those wolves, to do with Him what they will. *But he delivered Jesus up to their will.* (Luke xxiii. 25). These ministers of Satan seize hold of Him fiercely; they strip Him of the purple garment, as is suggested to them by the Jews, and put His own raiment again upon Him: *They stripped him of the purple garment, and clothed him in his own raiment, and led him away to crucify him.* (Matt. xxvii. 31). And this they did, says St. Ambrose, in order that Jesus might be recognised, at least, by His apparel; His beautiful

Face being so much disfigured with Blood and Wounds, that in other apparel it would have been difficult for Him to have been recognised as the person He was: "They put on Him His own raiment, that He might the better be recognised by all; since, as His Face was all bloody and disfigured, it would not have been an easy matter for all to have recognised Him." They then take two rough beams, and of them they quickly construct the Cross, the length of which was fifteen feet, as St. Bonaventure says, with St. Anselm, and they lay it upon the shoulders of the Redeemer.

But Jesus did not wait, says St. Thomas of Villanova, for the executioner to lay the Cross upon Him; of His own accord He stretched forth His hands, and eagerly laid hold of it, and placed it upon His own wounded shoulders: "He waited not till the soldier should lay it upon Him, but He laid hold of it joyfully." Come, He then said, come, My beloved Cross; it is now three-and-thirty years that I am sighing and searching for thee. I embrace thee, I clasp thee to My Heart, for thou art the altar upon which it is My will to sacrifice My Life out of love for My flock.

Ah, my Lord, how couldst Thou do so much good to one who has done Thee so much evil? O God, when I think of Thy having gone so far as to die under torments to obtain for me the Divine friendship, and that I have so often voluntarily lost it afterwards through my own fault, I would that I could die of grief! How often hast Thou forgiven me, and I have gone back and offended Thee again! How could I ever have hoped for pardon, were it not that I knew that Thou didst die in order to pardon me? By this Thy death, then, I hope for pardon, and for perseverance in loving Thee. I repent, O my Redeemer, of having offended Thee. By Thy merits, pardon me, who promise never to displease Thee more. I prize and love Thy friendship more than all the good things of this world. Oh, let it not be my lot to go back and lose it! Inflict on me, O Lord, any punishment rather than this. O my Jesus, I am not willing to lose Thee any more; no, I would sooner be willing to lose my life: I wish to love Thee always.

## II.

The officers of justice come forth with the prisoners condemned; and in the midst of these also moves forward unto

death the King of Heaven, the only-begotten Son of God, laden with His Cross: *And bearing his own cross, he went forth to that place which is called Calvary.* (Jo. xix. 17). Do ye, too, O Blessed Seraphim, sally forth from Heaven, and come and accompany your Lord, Who is going to Calvary, there to be executed, together with the malefactors, upon a gibbet of infamy.

O horrifying sight! A God executed! Behold that Messias Who but a few days before had been proclaimed the Saviour of the world, and received with acclamations and benedictions by the people, who cried out: *Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord.* (Matt. xxi. 9); and, after all, to see Him as, bound, ridiculed, and execrated by all, He moves along, laden with a Cross, to die the death of a villain! A God executed for men! And shall we find any man who loves not this God? O my Eternal Lover, late is it that I begin to love Thee: grant that during the remainder of my life I may make amends for the time that I have lost. I know, indeed, that all I can do is but little in comparison of the love which Thou hast borne me; but it is at least my wish to love Thee with my whole heart. Too great a wrong should I be doing Thee if, after so many kindnesses, I were to divide my heart in twain, and give part of it to some object other than Thyself. From this day forth I consecrate unto Thee all my life, my will, my liberty: dispose of me as Thou pleasest. I beg Paradise of Thee, that there I may love Thee with all my strength. I wish to love Thee exceedingly in this life, that I may love Thee exceedingly for all eternity. Aid me by Thy grace: this I beg of Thee, and hope for, through Thy merits.

## **Saturday--Third Week of Lent**

### **Morning Meditation**

*THE GREATER MARY'S LOVE, THE GREATER HER SORROWS.*

In other Martyrs, says Richard of St. Victor, the greatness of their love soothed the pains of their Martyrdom, but in the case of the Blessed Virgin, the greater her love was, the greater were her sufferings, and the more cruel was her Martyrdom. Where there is the greatest love there also is the greatest grief.



## I.

As other Martyrs, as Diez remarks, are all represented with the instrument of their sufferings--a St. Paul with a sword, a St. Andrew with a cross, a St. Laurence with a gridiron--Mary is represented with her dead Son in her arms; for Jesus Himself, and He alone, was the instrument of her Martyrdom, by reason of the love she bore Him. Richard of St. Victor confirms in a few words all that I have now said: "In other Martyrs, the greatness of their love soothed the pains of their Martyrdom; but in the Blessed Virgin, the greater was her love, the greater were her sufferings, the more cruel was her Martyrdom."

It is certain that the more we love a thing, the greater is the pain we feel in losing it. We are more afflicted at the loss of a brother than at the loss of a beast of burden; one is more grieved at the loss of a son than at the loss of a friend. Now, Cornelius a Lapide says that "to understand the greatness of Mary's grief at the death of her Son, we must understand the greatness of the love she bore Him." But who can ever measure that love? Blessed Amadeus says that "in the heart of Mary were united two kinds of love for Jesus--supernatural love, by which she loved Him as her God, and natural love by which she loved Him as her Son." So that these two loves became one; but so immense a love, that William of Paris even says that the Blessed Virgin "loved Him as much as it was possible for a pure creature to love Him." Hence Richard of St. Victor affirms that "as there was no love like her love, so there was no sorrow like her sorrow." And if the love of Mary towards her Son was immense, immense also must have been her grief in losing Him by death. "Where there is the greatest love," says Blessed Albert the Great, "there also is the greatest grief."

## II.

Let us now imagine to ourselves the Divine Mother standing near her Son expiring on the Cross, and justly applying to herself the words of Jeremias, thus addressing us: *O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow.* (Lam. i. 12). O you who spend your lives upon earth, and pity me not, stop a while to look upon me, now that I behold my beloved Son dying before my eyes; and then see if, amongst all those who

are afflicted and tormented, a sorrow is to be found like unto my sorrow. "No, O most suffering of all mothers," replies St. Bonaventure, "no more bitter grief than thine can be found; for no son more dear than thine can be found." Ah, "there never was a more amiable son in the world than Jesus," says Richard of St. Laurence; nor has there ever been a mother who more tenderly loved her son than Mary! But since there never has been in the world a love like unto Mary's love, how can any sorrow be found like unto Mary's sorrow?"

Therefore, St. Ildephonsus did not hesitate to assert, "to say that Mary's sorrows were greater than all the torments of the Martyrs united, was to say too little." And St. Anselm adds, that "the most cruel tortures inflicted on the holy Martyrs were trifling, or as nothing in comparison with the Martyrdom of Mary." St. Basil of Seleucia also writes, "that as the sun exceeds all the other planets in splendour, so did Mary's sufferings exceed those of all the other Martyrs." The learned Father Pinamonti concludes with a beautiful sentiment. He says that so great was the sorrow of this tender Mother in the Passion of Jesus, that she alone could compassionate adequately the death of a God made Man.

## **Spiritual Reading**

### *HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH*

#### ST. JUSTIN, PHILOSOPHER (continued)

St. Justin composed other works in defence of Catholic doctrine, against the Marcionites and Valentinians; and also his Dialogue with Trypho, against the obduracy of the Jews. Marcus Aurelius having succeeded Antoninus Pius in the empire, the persecution was renewed; and one, Crescens, who, although styling himself a Cynic philosopher, was in reality a very shallow fellow, took occasion to exclaim loudly against the Christians. St. Justin, in public dispute, frequently convicted him of the most violent malice and the greatest possible ignorance of the doctrine and practices of the Christians, and was induced to publish, and present to the emperor, his second "Apology," in which he defends his religion against the calumnies of Crescens and others.

In showing that Christians had been unjustly put to death, he relates that a married couple had both been guilty of incon-

tinency; the woman, having been converted to the Christian Religion, used all her endeavours to withdraw her husband from his shameful practices; but he, instead of amending, accused her and one Ptolemy, who had been the means of her conversion, of being Christians. The Prefect, Urbicus, sentenced them to death; whereupon a certain Christian, named Lucius, exclaimed: "With what conscience, O Urbicus, dost thou condemn a man who hath been guilty of no crime?" Lucius, together with another Christian, received a similar sentence.

A very short time after the publication of this discourse, St. Justin was apprehended, together with six other Christians of his acquaintance, and brought before Rusticus, the Prefect of Rome, who exhorted him to obey the imperial edicts. The Saint replied: "No one can be reproved or condemned for obeying the precepts of our Saviour, Jesus Christ."

The Prefect asked him what kind of learning he professed. Justin answered that he had learned the doctrines of various sects, and had finally embraced Christianity, although it was despised by those who were led away by errors and false opinions. "Unhappy wretch!" exclaimed the prefect, "dost thou then delight in this discipline?" Justin answered: "Yes, because it teaches me the true doctrine." Rusticus: "Which is this doctrine?" Justin: "The true doctrine which we profess is to believe in one only God, the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and to confess Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who was foretold by the Prophets, the Preacher of salvation unto men, and the Master of those who happily observe the Divine precepts. But neither have I a tongue to express nor a mind to conceive anything worthy of His infinite dignity; for to do so should need the mind and the Spirit of the Prophets, who, inspired by God, foretold His coming."

The Prefect asked him where the Christians were in the habit of assembling. Justin replied: "Where they please and where they can. Dost thou imagine, perchance, that we all assemble in the same place? The God of the Christians is not confined to a place; He is invisible, and fills both Heaven and earth; and is everywhere adored and praised by the faithful." "But I wish to know," rejoined Rusticus, "where thou and thy disciples assem-

ble." The Saint answered: "As for myself, I dwell at the Timothean baths: this is the second time I have come to Rome, and I am scarcely acquainted with any other place in the city; and if any one should wish to seek me, I am ready to communicate to him the doctrines of truth." Rusticus: "Thou art then, a Christian?" Justin: "Yes; I am a Christian."

The Prefect then turned to St. Justin's companions, and interrogated them, one after another, concerning their Faith. They all confessed themselves Christians, and manifested a desire to die for Jesus Christ. Rusticus then said to Justin: "Tell me, thou who dost believe that thou hast the true wisdom, whether thou art persuaded that thou shalt ascend into Heaven, after I shall have caused thee to be scourged and beheaded." The Saint replied: "If I shall suffer these punishments, I hope to receive the reward which is prepared for those who observe the commandments of Christ." The Prefect asked: "Dost thou, then, really imagine that thou shalt ascend into Heaven?" "This I do not only imagine, but I know it," replied the Saint, "and am so fully assured of it that I entertain no doubt whatever."

Finally the Prefect, turning to all those Confessors of Jesus Christ, said to them: "Go ye together, and all sacrifice to the gods." Justin, answering for all, replied: "No man in his senses could abandon Religion to become a participator in impiety." The prefect hereupon threatened that their non-compliance would be followed by the most unrelenting tortures. Justin said: "There is nothing which we more earnestly desire than to endure torments for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, and thus attain unto salvation; for this it is that will enable us to present ourselves with confidence at the tribunal of that Judge before Whom all the world must necessarily appear." To this the other Martyrs assented, adding: "Do quickly what thou art about. We are Christians, and will never sacrifice to idols."

The Prefect then announced against them the following sentence: "Those who have not wished to sacrifice to the gods, or obey the edict of the Emperor, shall first be scourged, and afterwards beheaded, in pursuance of the law." The Martyrs were forthwith led to the place of execution, where, the sentence being carried into effect, they received the glorious crown of

Martyrdom, in 167, or the following year. Their bodies were privately carried away by the Christians, who gave them honourable interment.

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### I.

Imagine to yourself, O my soul, that you meet Jesus as He passes along in this sorrowful journey. As a lamb borne along to the slaughter-house, so is the loving Redeemer unto death: *He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter.* (Is. liii. 7). So drained of Blood is He and wearied out with His torments, that for very weakness He can scarcely stand. Behold Him, all torn with wounds, with that bundle of thorns upon His head, with that heavy Cross upon His shoulders, and with one of those soldiers dragging Him along by a rope. Look at Him as He goes along, with Body bent double, with knees all a-tremble, dripping with His Blood; and so painful is it to Him to walk, that at every step He seems ready to die.

Put the question to Him: O Divine Lamb, hast Thou not yet had Thy fill of sufferings? If it is by them that Thou dost aim at gaining my love, oh, let Thy sufferings end here, for I wish to love Thee as Thou dost desire. No, He replies, I am not yet content: then only shall I be content when I see Myself die for love of you. And whither, O my Jesus, art Thou going now? I am going, He replies, to die for you. Hinder Me not: this only do I ask of, and recommend to you, that, when you shall see Me actually dead upon the cross for you, you will keep in mind the great love I have borne you; bear it in mind, and love Me.

O my afflicted Lord, how dear did it cost Thee to make me comprehend the love which Thou hast had for me! But what benefit could ever have resulted to Thee from my love, that Thou hast been willing to expend Thy Blood and Thy life to gain it? And how could I, after having been bound by so great love, have been able so long to live without loving Thee, and unmindful of Thy affection? I thank Thee, O God, that now Thou dost give me light to make me know how much Thou hast loved me. O infinite Goodness, I love Thee above every good. Would,

too, that I had the power of offering a thousand lives in sacrifice unto Thee, willing as Thou hast been to sacrifice Thine own Divine life for me. O grant me those aids to love Thee which Thou hast merited for me by so many sufferings! Bestow upon me that sacred fire which Thou didst come to enkindle upon earth by dying for us. Be ever reminding me of Thy death, that I may never forget to love Thee.

## II.

*The government is upon his shoulders.* (Is. ix. 6). The Cross, says Tertullian, was precisely the noble instrument whereby Jesus Christ made acquisition of so many souls; since, by dying thereon, He paid the penalty due to our sins, and thus rescued from hell, and made us His own. *Who his own self bore our sins in his body upon the tree.* (1 Peter ii. 24). If God, then, O my Jesus, burdened Thee with all the sins of men,--*The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all* (Is. lii. 6),--I, with my own sins, added to the weight of the Cross that Thou didst bear to Calvary.

Ah, my sweetest Saviour, Thou didst even then foresee all the wrongs that I should do Thee; yet, notwithstanding, Thou didst not cease from loving me, or from preparing for me all the mercies which Thou hast since employed towards me. If, then, to Thee I have been dear, most vile and ungrateful sinner as I am, who have so much offended Thee, good reason is there why Thou shouldst be dear to me, Thou, my God, infinite in beauty and goodness, Who hast loved me so much. Ah, would that I had never displeased Thee. Now, my Jesus, do I know the wrong that I have done Thee. O ye accursed sins of mine, what have you done? You have caused me to sadden the loving Heart of my Redeemer, that Heart Which has loved me so much. O my Jesus, forgive me, repenting, as I do, of having done injury unto Thee. From henceforth it is Thou Who art to be the only object of my love. I love Thee, O Infinite Loveliness, with all my heart; and I resolve to love none else but Thee. Pardon me, O Lord, and give me Thy love; I ask Thee for nothing more: "Give me only Thy love, together with Thy grace," I say unto Thee with St. Ignatius, "and I am rich enough."

## Fourth Sunday of Lent

## Morning Meditation

### THE TENDER COMPASSION OF JESUS TOWARDS SINNERS

The Lord wrought the miracle of the multiplication of food recorded by St. John through compassion for the bodily needs of those poor people. But far more tender is His compassion for the necessities of the souls of poor sinners who are deprived of Divine grace. O infinite love of our God towards sinners, exclaims St. Bernard, to redeem a slave, neither has the Father spared His Son, nor the Son Himself!

#### I.

Through the bowels of His mercy towards men who groaned under the slavery of sin and Satan, our most loving Redeemer descended from Heaven to earth, to redeem and save them from eternal torments by His own death. Such was the language of St. Zachary, the father of the Baptist, when the Blessed Virgin, who had already become Mother of the Eternal Word, entered his house. *Through the bowels of the mercy of our God, in which the Orient from on high hath visited us.* (Luke i. 78).

Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, Who came into the world to obtain salvation for us His sheep, has said: *I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly.* (Jo. x. 10). Mark the expression, *more abundantly*, which signifies that the Son of Man came on earth not only to restore us to the life of grace we lost, but to give us a better life than that which we forfeited by sin. Yes; for as St. Leo says, the benefits which we have derived from the death of Jesus are greater than the injury which the devil has done us by sin. The same doctrine is taught by the Apostle who says that, *where sin abounded, grace did more abound.* (Rom. v. 20).

But, my Lord, since Thou didst resolve to take human flesh, would not a single prayer offered by Thee be sufficient for the redemption of all men? What need, then, was there of leading a life of poverty, humiliation, and contempt for thirty-three years, of suffering a cruel and shameful death on an infamous gibbet, and of shedding all Thy Blood by dint of torments? I know well, answers Jesus Christ, that one drop of My Blood, or a simple prayer, would be sufficient for the salvation of the world; but neither would be sufficient to show the love which I bear to men:

and therefore, to be loved by men when they should see Me dead on the Cross for the love of them, I have resolved to submit to so many torments and to so painful a death. *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep...I lay down my life for my sheep.* (Jo. x. 11-15).

## II.

O men! O men! what greater proof of love could the Son of God give us than to lay down His life for us His sheep? *In this we have known the charity of God: because he hath laid down his life for us.* (1 Jo. iii. 16). No one, says the Saviour, can show greater love to his friends than to give his life for them. *Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* (Jo. xv. 13). But Thou, O Lord, hast died not only for friends, but for us who were Thy enemies by sin. *When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.* (Rom. v. 10). O infinite love of our God, exclaims St. Bernard; "to spare a slave neither the Father spared the Son, nor the Son Himself." To pardon us, who were rebellious servants, the Father would not pardon the Son, and the Son would not pardon Himself, but, by His death, has satisfied the Divine justice for the sins which we have committed.

When Jesus Christ was near His Passion, He went one day to Samaria; the Samaritans refused to receive Him. Indignant at the insult offered by the Samaritans to their Master, St. James and St. John, turning to Jesus, said: *Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?* (Luke ix. 54). But Jesus, Who was all sweetness, even to those who insulted Him, answered: *You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of Man came not to destroy souls, but to save.* He severely rebuked the disciples. What spirit is this, He said, which possesses you? It is not My spirit: Mine is the spirit of patience and compassion; for I am come, not to destroy, but to save the souls of men: and you speak of fire, of punishment, and of vengeance. Hence, in another place, He said to His disciples: *Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart.* (Matt. xi. 29). I do not desire you to learn of Me to chastise, but to be meek, and to bear and pardon injuries.

## Spiritual Reading

HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH

ST. SIMEON, ARCHBISHOP OF SELEUCIA\* AND



## COMPANIONS

(April 21)

Ecclesiastical history informs us that the Faith of Jesus Christ was preached in Persia by the Apostles themselves, and the number of Christians in that kingdom was consequently very considerable during the reign of Sapor, about the middle of the fourth century. The Magians, or priests of the Persian religion, became alarmed at the spread of Christianity, and, together with the Jews, induced Sapor to persecute the faithful.

\*He is also styled Bishop of Ctesiphon, a city built by the Parthians, on the bank of the river Tigris, opposite to that upon which the ancient Seleucia, now Bagdad, stood.

St. Simeon was, at that time, Archbishop of Seleucia, and his zealous solicitude for his flock caused him to be regarded as the principal defender of the Christian Faith. In order to effect his ruin, his enemies represented to Sapor that he was in continual correspondence with the Roman emperor, to whom, they said, he revealed the most important concerns of the state. Sapor lent a willing ear to these calumnies, and, regarding Simeon as his enemy, resolved not only upon his death, but upon the total extermination of the Christians in his dominions. He began by confiscating their property; and finding that they bore this with patience, he ordered that the clergy who would not abjure Jesus Christ should be beheaded, and that all Christian churches should be levelled to the ground.

The holy bishop was arrested and brought before the tyrant; but, lest it should be thought that he was about to ask pardon for having preached the Christian religion, he did not comply with the Persian custom of prostration, although he had frequently done so on former occasions. Sapor, enraged at this omission, asked him why he refused to render him the homage to which his rank entitled him. The Saint answered: "When I, on former occasions, appeared in thy presence, I was not led to deny the true God, and therefore refused not to comply with the usual ceremonies; but now I cannot do so, as being called upon to defend my God and my religion." The king exhorted him to adore the sun, declaring that great riches and honours would be the reward of his obedience; while his own death, and the extermi-

nation of the Christians, would inevitably be the consequence of non-compliance. The Saint, having given the most decided refusal, was sent to prison in the hope that he would be thus induced to change his resolution.

While St. Simeon was being led to prison, Usthazades, the aged Lord chamberlain, prostrated himself before him. But the holy prelate, despising this mark of veneration, and turning his back upon him, reprimanded him because though being a Christian he had adored the sun. The apostate wept bitterly at this rebuke, and throwing off his white robes, dressed himself in mourning. Thus clothed he sat at the king's gate, and, with many tears, frequently exclaimed: "Wretch that I am! If Simeon my friend, treats me thus harshly for my fault, and turns away his face from me, what am I to expect from that God Whom I have denied?"

Sapor, being informed of the affliction of the courtier, sent for him, and inquired whether any calamity had befallen him. The other replied: "Ah! would to God that all calamities had befallen me, and not that which is the cause of my grief! I weep because I did not die long ago, but live to behold that sun, which, to please thee, I have adored. I deserve a double death—one for having denied Jesus Christ, and another for having deceived thee." He then protested in the most solemn manner that he would never, henceforward, deny his God. The king became infuriated at these words, and believing that the Christians had turned his head, swore that he would put them all to death; entertaining, however, some compassion for the poor old man, he did all he could to gain him over. Usthazades, notwithstanding, continued to protest that he never again would be so foolish as to give to creatures the honour due to the Creator; and Sapor, finding that his constancy was invincible, ordered him to be beheaded.

While he was being led to execution, he asked a friend to request of Sapor, that, in consideration of his past services, he would order him to be preceded by a crier, who would proclaim to the people that Usthazades had not been condemned for any crime, but merely for being a Christian, and having refused to abandon his God.\* Sapor the more willingly acceded to his wish

as he was anxious to terrify the Christians by showing them that he would not tolerate the profession of their religion, even in an old man who had served him so faithfully.

\*The happy penitent was too much afflicted at his apostasy to be solicitous for his honour, and seems to have made this request in order that the real cause of his death being made public, the scandal which he had given might be repaired. --Ed.

The king then turned his thoughts towards St. Simeon, and again endeavoured to gain him over; but seeing that all his arts were ineffectual, he commanded him to be beheaded. As a last resource, however, he ordered the heads of one hundred Christians be first struck off in presence of the Saint, who, far from being intimidated, exhorted the sufferers to constancy by telling them how glorious was their lot in acquiring the rewards of eternal life by dying for their Saviour. After the Martyrdom of these hundred Christians, the holy bishop was beheaded on Good Friday, and thus united his death to that of Jesus Christ.

Together with the bishop were beheaded two venerable priests of his church, Ananias and Abdechalas. Pusicius, the prefect of the king's workmen, seeing that Ananias, in preparing to receive the stroke, was trembling, exclaimed: Father, shut thy eyes for one moment, and thou shalt instantly see the light of Christ."

These words proclaimed Pusicius to be a Christian; he was accordingly arrested and brought before the king, whom he upbraided with his cruelty towards the Christians. Sapor, enraged at his freedom of speech, caused him to be put to death in a strange and most cruel manner--his tongue was pulled out, not from his mouth, but through an incision made in his neck. His virgin daughter, who had consecrated herself to God, was also arrested and put to death.

All these holy Martyrs died about the year 344.

## **Evening Meditation**

### *REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

I.

*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself...and follow me.* (Matt. xvi. 24). Since, then, O my Redeemer, Thou dost go

before me with Thy Cross, innocent as Thou art, and dost invite me to follow Thee with mine, go forward, for I will not abandon Thee. If, in time past, I have abandoned Thee, I confess that I have done wrong. Give me now what Thou wilt, embracing it, as I do, whatsoever it be, and willing, as I am, to accompany Thee with it even unto death: *Let us go forth from the camp, bearing his reproach.* (Heb. xiii. 13). And how, O Lord, can it be possible for us not to love sufferings and shame for Thy love, Who for our salvation didst love them so much!

But since Thou dost invite us to follow Thee, yea, it is our wish to follow Thee and to die with Thee: give us only the strength to carry it out. This strength we ask of Thee, and hope for, by Thy merits. I love Thee, O my most lovely Jesus, I love Thee with all my soul, and I will never abandon Thee more; enough for me has been the time in which I have gone astray from Thee. Bind me now to Thy Cross. If I have despised Thy love, I repent of it with all my heart; and I now prize it above every good.

## II.

Ah, my Jesus, and who am I that Thou wishest to have me as a follower of Thine, and commandest me to love Thee, and if I will not love Thee, threatenest me with hell? And why, I will say to Thee with St. Augustine, shouldst Thou hold out to me that threat of eternal miseries? For what greater misery could befall me than that of not loving Thee, O most lovely God, my Creator, my Redeemer, my Paradise, my All? I see that, as a just chastisement for my offences against Thee, I have justly deserved to be condemned to the inability of ever loving Thee more; but because Thou dost still love me, Thou dost continue to command me to love Thee, evermore repeating to my heart, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." I thank Thee, O my Love, for this sweet precept; and in order to obey Thee, I do love Thee with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my mind. I repent of not having loved Thee in time past. At this moment I would rather choose to undergo every suffering than live without loving Thee, and I purpose evermore to seek Thy love. Help me, O my Jesus, to be ever making acts of love towards Thee, and to depart out

of this life while making an act of love, that so I may come to love Thee, face to face, in Paradise, where I shall ever after love Thee without imperfection and without interruption, with all my powers, for all eternity.

O Mother of God, pray for me. Amen.

## Monday--Fourth Week of Lent

### Morning Meditation

#### *GOD THREATENS SINNERS WITH AN UNHAPPY DEATH.*

It is a terrible subject for our consideration that God does nothing but threaten sinners with a bad death. *I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock.* It is true that in whatever hour the sinner is converted, God has promised to pardon him, but God has not said that in death the sinner shall be converted. On the contrary, He has often declared that the sinner shall die in his sins. *You shall die in your sins.*

I.

It is a terrible subject for our consideration that God does nothing but threaten sinners with an unhappy death: *Then they shall call upon me, and I will not hear.* (Prov. i. 28). *Will God hear his cry when distress shall come upon him?* (Job xxvii. 9). *I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock.* (Prov. i. 26). God laughs when He will not show mercy. *Revenge is mine, and I will repay them in due time, that their foot may slide; the day of destruction is at hand.* (Deut. xxxii. 35). In many other places God threatens the same; and yet sinners live on in peace, as secure as if God had certainly promised them Paradise. It is true, that in whatever hour the sinner is converted, God has promised to pardon him; but He has not said that in death the sinner shall be converted; on the contrary, He has often declared that he who lives in sin shall die in sin: *You shall die in your sins.* (John viii. 21). He has said that he who seeks Him at the hour of death shall not find Him: *You shall seek me and shall not find me.* (John vii. 34). We must, then, seek God when He can be found: *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found.* (Is. lv. 6). Yes; because a time will come when He will not be found. Poor sinners! Poor blind ones, who wait to be converted till the hour of death, when there will be no more time for con-

version. "The wicked," says Oleaster, "will not learn to do good till there is no more time for doing it." God wishes to save all, but He punishes the obstinate.

If perchance some unhappy sinner were to be seized with apoplexy, and deprived of his senses, what compassion would it not excite in all to see him dying without the Sacraments, and without a sign of repentance! And what joy would everyone experience if he came to himself again, begged for absolution, and made acts of contrition! But is he not mad, who, having time to do this, continues in sin, or returns to sin, and runs the risk of being surprised by death, when he perhaps may, or perhaps may not, repent? It is terrible to see a man die suddenly; and yet how many voluntarily incur the peril of dying thus, and of dying in sin!

Ah, my God, who would have had so much patience with me as Thou hast had! If Thy goodness were not infinite, I should despair of pardon. But I have to deal with a God Who died to obtain my pardon and my salvation. Thou commandest me to hope, and I will hope. If my sins alarm and condemn me, Thy merits and Thy promises give me courage. Thou hast promised Thy grace to whoever returns to Thee: *Return ye and live.* (Ezech. xviii. 32). Thou hast promised to embrace whoever turns to Thee: *Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you.* (Zach. i. 3). Thou hast said Thou *canst not despise an humble and contrite heart.* (Ps. 1.). Behold me, Lord; I come again to Thee; I turn to Thee; I acknowledge that I deserve a thousand hells; and I repent of having offended Thee. I firmly promise never again to offend Thee, and always to love Thee.

## II.

*Weight and balance are judgments of the Lord.* (Prov. xvi. 11). We keep no account of the graces God bestows on us; but the Lord keeps an account of them and measures them; and when He sees them despised up to a certain point, He leaves the sinner in his sin, and in this state permits him to die. Miserable indeed is he who defers his repentance till death. "The repentance demanded of the sick is also itself sickly," says St. Augustine. St. Jerome says, "that out of a hundred thousand sinners who continue in sin till their death, scarcely one merits indulgence from God in death."

St. Vincent Ferrer says, "that it would be a greater miracle if habitual evil-livers had a good end, than to raise the dead to life." What sorrow, what repentance, can he conceive at the hour of death, who until then has loved sin? Bellarmine relates that having gone to assist a certain dying person, and having exhorted him to make an act of contrition, he replied that he did not know what contrition was. Bellarmine endeavoured to explain it to him; but the sick man said: "Father, I do not understand you; I am not capable of these things." And thus he died, "leaving clear signs of his damnation," as is recorded in the writings of Bellarmine. The just punishment of the sinner, says St. Augustine, will be, that having forgot God in his lifetime, he shall forget himself in death: "He is most justly struck, who having forgotten God in his lifetime, dies forgetful of himself." *Be not deceived*, says the Apostle, *God is not mocked: for what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall he reap corruption.* (Gal. vi. 7). It would be mocking God to live despising His laws, and then to receive a reward and eternal glory; *but God is not mocked.* That which we sow in this life we shall reap in the next. He who sows forbidden pleasures of the flesh shall reap nothing but corruption, misery, and eternal death.

Dear Christian, that which is said for others is said likewise for you. Tell me, if you were now at the point of death, given over by your physicians, all your senses failing, and in your last agony, would you not then pray fervently to God to grant you another month, another week, to settle the affairs of your conscience? God gives you now this time. Return Him thanks, quickly repair the evil you have done, and take every means to restore yourself to a state of grace, and be so found when death comes; for then there will be no more time to remedy the past.

Ah, my God, do not permit me to live any longer ungrateful for so much goodness. Eternal Father, through the merits of the obedience of Jesus Christ, Who died to obey Thee, grant that I may obey Thy will until death. I love Thee, O my Sovereign Good; and through the love that I bear Thee, I will obey Thee in all things. Give me holy perseverance; give me Thy love, and I ask nothing more of Thee. Mary, my Mother, intercede for me.

## Spiritual Reading

### *HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH*

ST. ADALBERT, BISHOP OF PRAGUE (April 23)

St. Adalbert was born in Bohemia, of noble parentage, about the middle of the tenth century. His father, a Slavonian, sent him to study at Magdeburg, under the care of the Archbishop Adalbert,\* who placed him in a school, under the direction of a holy monk named Odericus, where the pupils, by serious attention to their studies and most exemplary morals, edified one another.

\*This prelate, charmed with the happy disposition of his pupil, conceived for him the tenderness of a father, and gave him his name in admitting him to the Sacrament of Confirmation. Young Adalbert was a child of the Blessed Virgin. While yet an infant, he was attacked by an illness that reduced him to the last extremity. His parents then carried him to the church and placed him on the the Altar of the Blessed Virgin and promised to consecrate him to the service of God if he should recover his health. Their prayers were heard.--Ed.

Adalbert, having remained nine years in this school, made considerable progress in human sciences, but still more in the Science of the Saints; for whatever time was allowed for recreation, he spent in holy prayer, in relieving the poor, and visiting the sick. Having made a copious collection of books, consisting chiefly of the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, he returned to Bohemia, and entered the ecclesiastical state at Prague. Diethmar, Bishop of that city, was greatly enamoured of his virtue, and ordained him subdeacon. About this time Bishop Diethmar died.

An assembly was held to propose a successor, at which the prince of Bohemia and other grandees were present, and, by unanimous consent, Adalbert was chosen. Notwithstanding all his reluctance, and his pleas of unworthiness and youth, he was obliged to accept the onerous charge; and the election having met the approval of the emperor, our Saint received the episcopal consecration at the hands of Villegisus, Archbishop of Mayence. He immediately proceeded to Prague, to take possession of his See, and was received amid the acclamations of the people.



In assuming the government of his Church, his extraordinary piety became manifest; for on all Festivals he distributed alms, and supported twelve poor persons continually. He slept upon the bare floor, or upon sackcloth, and passed a considerable part of the night in prayer. His continual preaching, and frequent visits to the sick and those in prison, manifested how totally he was devoted to the glory of God and the welfare of his flock.

But they treated his admonitions with an obstinacy surpassing the enthusiasm with which they had at first hailed his arrival; and Adalbert accordingly resolved to leave them, having first consulted, and obtained permission from Pope John XV. His first intention was to make a pilgrimage on foot to the Holy Land; but on his arrival at Monte Cassino, the Abbot and some of the monks induced him to remain with them for some time, until it became known who he was; whereupon the holy bishop proceeded to Rome, and by the advice of the Pope, received the religious habit in the monastery of St. Alexis, in the year 900. Here he lived in tranquillity for three years and a half, until the Duke of Bohemia, moved by the wretched state of the Church at Prague, induced the Pope to send him back.

Upon his return, the most ample promises of obedience were made, but never fulfilled. So the Saint again abandoned his rebellious flock, and went to preach the Gospel to the idolaters of Hungary. His success, here, was not proportionate to his zeal; and the Bohemians continuing as obstinate as ever, he again returned to his monastery at Rome.

He was obliged by the Pope to repair a second time to Prague. The Saint set out in obedience to this command; but being informed that his ungrateful flock had shown their implacable hatred of him by murdering his brothers, he requested the Duke of Poland to ascertain whether they were willing to receive him. The Bohemians replied: "Adalbert is a Saint and we are sinners; so it is impossible to expect that we can live quietly together." The Saint took this as a sufficient exoneration from the solicitude of the Church, and went to undertake the conversion of the pagans who were then in Prussia.

After he had suffered many hardships on this mission, the idolaters one day assembled in great numbers, and demanded of

him why he had entered their country. The Saint replied that he had come for their salvation, and exhorted them to abandon the worship of idols, and to adore the true God. But the barbarians were displeased at his words, and Siggo, the priest of the idols, ran him through the breast with his lance, whereupon the others rushed upon him also, while the Saint, raising his hands to Heaven, prayed to the Lord for their conversion. The inhuman wretches placed his head upon a pole, and bore it away amid shouts of exultation. His Martyrdom took place on the 23rd April, of the year 997, and the Lord honoured him by many subsequent miracles.

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### I.

Behold, here we are at the Crucifixion, at that last torture, which brought death to Jesus Christ; here we are at Calvary, converted into a theatre for the display of Divine love, where a God departs this life in an ocean of sufferings: *And when they had come to the place which is called Calvary, they crucified him there.* (Luke xxiii. 33). The Lord having, with great difficulty, at length reached the top of the Mount alive, they violently, and for the third time, tear His clothes off Him, sticking as they did, to the sores upon His wounded Flesh, and they throw Him down upon the Cross. The Divine Lamb stretches Himself out upon that bed of torment; He reaches forth to the executioners His hands and His feet to be nailed; and raising His eyes to Heaven, He offers up to His Eternal Father the great sacrifice of His life for the salvation of men. After the nailing of one of His hands, the nerves shrunk, so that they had need of main force and ropes, as was revealed to St. Bridget, to draw the other hand and the feet up to the places where they were to be nailed; and this occasioned so great a tension of the nerves and veins that they broke asunder with a violent convulsion: "They drew my hands and my feet with a rope to the places of the nails, so that the nerves and veins were stretched out to the full and broke asunder"; in-somuch that all His bones might have been numbered, as David had already predicted: *They pierced my hands and my feet, they num-*

*bered all my bones.* (Ps. xxi. 17, 18). Ah, my Jesus, by what power was it that Thy hands and Thy feet were nailed to this wood, but by the love Thou didst bear to men! Thou, by the pain of Thy pierced hands, wert willing to pay the penalty due to all the sins of touch that men have committed; and, by the pain of Thy feet, Thou wert willing to pay for all the steps by which we have gone our way to offend Thee. O my crucified Love, with these pierced hands give me Thy benediction! Oh, nail this ungrateful heart of mine to Thy feet, that so I may no more depart from Thee, and that this will of mine, which has so often rebelled against Thee, may remain ever steadily fixed in Thy holy love. Grant that nothing but Thy love, and the desire of pleasing Thee, may move me. Although I behold Thee suspended upon this gibbet, I believe Thee to be the Lord of the world, the true Son of God, and the Saviour of mankind. For pity's sake, O my Jesus, never abandon me again at any period of my life; and more especially at the hour of my death, in those last agonies and struggles with hell, do Thou assist me, and strengthen me to die in Thy love. I love Thee, my crucified Love, I love Thee with all my heart.

## II.

St. Augustine says there is no death more bitter than that of the Cross: "Among all the different kinds of death, there was none worse." Because, as St. Thomas observes, those who are crucified have their hands and their feet pierced through, parts which, being entirely composed of nerves, muscles, and veins, are the most sensitive to pain--and the very weight of the body itself which is suspended from them, causes the pain to be continuous and ever-increasing in its intensity up to the moment of death. But the pains of Jesus were far beyond all other pains; for, as the angelic Doctor says, the body of Jesus Christ, being perfectly constituted, was more quick and sensitive to pain-- that Body which was fashioned for Him by the Holy Spirit, expressly with a view to His suffering as He foretold, and as the Apostle testifies: *A body thou hast fitted to me.* (Heb. x. 5). Moreover, St. Thomas says that Jesus Christ took upon Himself an amount of suffering so great, as to be sufficient to satisfy for the temporal punishment merited by the sins of all mankind. Tiepoli tells us that, in the Crucifixion, there were dealt twenty-eight strokes of

the hammer upon His hands and thirty-six upon His feet.

O my soul, behold thy Lord, behold thy Life, hanging upon that tree: *And thy life shall be, as it were, hanging before thee.* (Deut. xxviii. 66). Behold how, upon that gibbet of pain, fastened by those cruel nails, He finds no place of rest. Now He leans His weight upon His hands, now upon His feet; but on what part soever He leans, the anguish increases. He turns His afflicted Head, now on one side, now on the other: if He lets it fall towards His breast, the hands, by the additional weight, are rent the more; if He lowers it towards His shoulders, the shoulders are pierced with thorns; if He leans it back upon the Cross, the thorns enter the more deeply into the Head. Ah, my Jesus, what a death of bitterness is this that Thou art enduring! O my crucified Redeemer, I adore Thee on this throne of ignominy and pain. Upon this Cross I read it written that Thou art a King: *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.* But apart from this title of scorn, what is the evidence that Thou dost give of being a King? Ah, these hands transfixed with nails, this Head pierced with thorns, this throne of sorrow, this lacerated Flesh, make me well know that Thou art King, but a King of love! With humility, then, and tenderness do I draw near to kiss Thy sacred feet, transfixed for love of me; I clasp in my arms this Cross, on which Thou, being made a victim of love, was willing to offer Thyself in sacrifice for me to the Divine justice: *being made obedient unto death, the death of the cross.* O blessed obedience which obtained for us the pardon of our sins! And what would have become of me, O my Saviour, hadst Thou not paid the penalty for me? I thank Thee, O my Love, and by the merits of this sublime obedience do I pray Thee to grant me the grace of obedience in every thing to the Divine will. All that I desire Paradise for is that I may love Thee for ever with all my strength.

## **Tuesday--Fourth Week of Lent**

### **Morning Meditation**

#### *AT THE POINT OF DEATH*

Oh, how much depends on the last moment of our life, on our last breath! An eternity of delights or an eternity of torments! A life of happiness or a life for ever miserable! What folly, there-

fore, for the sake of a short, wretched pleasure to run the risk of dying a bad death and entering upon a life of misery that will never end.

## I.

If you were now at the point of death, already in your agony and almost breathing your last, and about to appear before the Divine Tribunal, what would you not wish to have done for God? And what would you not give for a little more time to make your salvation more secure? Woe to me, if I did not make use of the light that is now given me, and amend my life! *He hath called against me the time.* (Lam. i. 15). The time which is now granted me by the mercy of God will be a great torment and a subject of bitter remorse to me at the hour of death, when time for me shall be no more.

O Jesus, Thou didst spend Thy whole life for my salvation, and I have been many years in the world, and yet what have I hitherto done for Thee? Alas! all that I have done gives me only pain and remorse of conscience.

Child of God, the Lord now gives you time; be then resolved. In what way will you spend it? What do you wait for? Do you wait to see that last candle which will show you your neglect, and for the time when there will be no remedy? Do you wait to hear that "Go forth" which must be obeyed without demur?

O my God, I will no longer abuse the light Thou affordest me, but which I have hitherto so much abused. I thank Thee for this fresh admonition which may be the last Thou wilt ever give me. But since at present Thou thus enlightenest me, it is a mark that Thou hast not yet abandoned me, and art desirous of showing me mercy. My beloved Saviour, I am sorry above all things for having so often despised Thy graces and neglected Thy calls and inspirations. I promise with Thy help nevermore to offend Thee.

## II.

O God, how many Christians die in the greatest uncertainty as to their salvation, and tormented with the thought that they have had time to serve Thee, and are now come to the end of their life, and no more time is left them for any good works! They are sensible that now all that remains to them is to render

a strict account of the many graces and inspirations bestowed upon them by God, and they know not what to answer.

O Lord, I will not die in such torments. Say what Thou requirest of me, make known to me the way of life in which I should walk, and I will obey Thee in all things. Hitherto I have despised Thy commands, but I am now sorry for it with my whole heart, and love Thee above all things. O Mary, refuge of sinners, recommend my soul to thy Divine Son.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH*

#### SS. EPIPODIUS AND ALEXANDER OF LYONS

Both these Saints were of noble family. Epipodius was a native of Lyons, and Alexander a Grecian by birth. From their first studies together in the same school, they contracted the closest friendship, which was strengthened and increased by the mutual practice of those Christian virtues in which they had been reared by their parents. These two Saints were in the flower of their age, and both unmarried, when the persecution of Marcus Aurelius was raging, particularly at Lyons, where the slaughter of the faithful was so great that the pagans thought they had succeeded in extinguishing the Christian Religion there.

Epipodius and Alexander were betrayed by a servant, and denounced as Christians to the governor, who ordered them to be arrested. Having heard of this order, they fled from the city, in compliance with the Gospel counsel, and having taken refuge in the cottage of a poor Christian widow, remained concealed there for some time. They were, however, discovered, and most unexpectedly arrested; and, after three days, brought before the governor, to whom they acknowledged that they were Christians. The pagans loudly demanded their death, whereupon the governor said: "Then the temerity of the Christians in despising the gods and the edicts of the emperor still continues. We have put to death numbers of these rash people, leaving their bodies unburied, and still there are found some to speak of Christ! What audacity is this of yours to profess a religion forbidden by the emperor! But you shall shortly pay the penalty."

He sent Alexander to prison, and offered enticements to Epipodius, who, he thought, might be more easily perverted,

as he was the younger of the two. He first spoke to him with kindness, saying: "It is a pity that thou, who art a young man, shouldst be anxious to perish, through obstinacy in the religion of this false sect. We adore the gods, who are adored by all the people and their rulers, and the worship which we render them allows us to lead a life of pleasure. But ye Christians adore a crucified man, who loves to see his followers afflicted by penance, and debarred from every enjoyment. What benefits can he bestow on his followers, who could not save himself from the death to which the Jews condemned him? Abandon, my son, this sect, and enjoy the pleasures which are permitted to us."

Epipodius answered: "The pity which thou dost manifest in my regard is in reality a cruelty, since, to live as pagans live, is productive of eternal death; while, on the contrary, to die for Jesus Christ is the greatest of all blessings. Thou knowest that Christ hath died upon a Cross, but knowest not that He hath risen again, being both God and Man, and that He hath thus opened to His followers the gates of eternal life, to lead them thither from this short and miserable existence, that they may reign with Him in Heaven for ever. Thou understandest not the truth of the Christian Faith, but thou shouldst well understand that the pleasures of the body cannot satisfy souls that have been created by God for immortality. We deny to our bodies the pleasures of this life to save the souls eternally. Thou believest that existence terminates with this life; while we, on the contrary, are assured that the termination of this present miserable existence is only the beginning of a happy state of being that knows no end."

The governor, although somewhat moved by this discourse, gave way to the impulse of anger, and ordered the executioners to strike the Saint upon the mouth; but the Saint, bleeding from the blows, courageously said: "I confess that Christ, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost is the true and only God; and it is but reasonable that I should resign my soul to Him Who has created and redeemed me. I do not thereby lose my life, but change it for a better one. It matters little in what manner my body may be destroyed, so that my soul return to Him that gave it."

The governor ordered him to be stretched upon the rack,

and two executioners to tear his sides with iron hooks. The people tumultuously exclaimed that the Saint should be delivered up to them, that they might stone him; and the governor, fearing that his authority might be set at naught by their seizing on the prisoner, ordered that his head be immediately struck off, and the holy youth thus hastened to the enjoyment of the crown.

Upon the death of St. Epipodius, the governor summoned his companion, Alexander, before him, and said: "It is yet in thy power to avoid the death to which others have been consigned. I imagine that thou art the only Christian remaining; if, therefore, thou art desirous to save thy life, thou must honour and sacrifice to the gods." Alexander, encouraged by the Martyrdom of his companion, answered: "I thank my God that the mention of the deaths of my brethren only confirms my desire of imitating their example. Dost thou imagine that their souls have died with their bodies? No; they have gone to the enjoyment of Heaven. Thou art deceived, thinking that thou canst extinguish the Christian Faith, which hath been so established by God, that it is propagated by the death of the faithful. Those whom thou believest to have killed are now in enjoyment of Heaven, which they shall continue to enjoy for all eternity; while, on the contrary, thou and the objects of thy adoration shall be cast into the fire of hell to suffer for all eternity. I am a Christian, like my brother Epipodius, who is now reigning in Heaven. Do therefore to my body as it pleaseth thee; for my soul shall be received by that God Who created it."

The governor, infuriated at these words, ordered three executioners to scourge the Saint most cruelly, who, while imploring the Divine assistance, continued to suffer with fortitude. The governor, perceiving that this protracted butchery of the Saint's body made no impression upon his constancy, asked him if he would still continue obstinate. Alexander answered: "I shall never change my resolution, because it is in the keeping of a God Who is omnipotent, unlike thy gods who are devils."

The governor said: "The Christians are so mad as to believe that they can acquire glory by sufferings. This man, therefore, shall be punished as he deserves." He then ordered the Saint to be crucified; but his body had been so lacerated, that his entrails



were visible, and he was but a short time fastened to the Cross when He consummated his Martyrdom, and went to receive the reward of so much suffering.

The triumph of these two Saints is believed to have taken place in the month of April, in the year 178. The Christians privately carried away their bodies, and buried them upon a little hill, which afterwards became celebrated, as many miraculous cures were there wrought during the pestilence which afflicted the city of Lyons, shortly after the death of these Saints.\*

\*Alban Butler adds that St. Eucherius, Bishop of Lyons, wrote the panegyric of these Saints, in which he says that the dust of their tomb was distributed over the whole country for the benefit of the sick. The virtue of this dust is also attested by St. Gregory of Tours. He says that their bodies in the Sixth Century lay deposited with the body of St. Irenaeus, under the altar of the Church of St John, that at present bears the name of St. Irenaeus. The relics of St. Epipodius and St. Alexander were discovered and solemnly translated in 1410.--Ed.

## **Evening Meditation**

### *REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

#### I.

Behold the King of Heaven, Who, hanging on that gibbet, is now on the point of giving up the ghost. Let us, too, ask of Him, with the Prophet: *What are those wounds in the middle of thy hands?* (Zach. xiii. 6). Tell me, O my Jesus, what are these wounds in the middle of Thy hands? The Abbot Rupert makes answer for Jesus: "They are the memorials of charity, the price of Redemption." They are tokens, says the Redeemer, of the great love which I bear towards you; they are the payment by which I set you free from the hands of your enemies, and from eternal death. Do thou, then, O faithful soul, love thy God, Who has had such love for thee; and if thou dost at any time feel doubtful of His love, turn thine eyes, says St. Thomas of Villanova, turn thine eyes to behold that Cross, those pains, and that bitter death which He has suffered for thee; for such proofs will assuredly make thee know how much thy Redeemer loves thee: "The Cross testifies, the pains testify, the bitter death which He had endured

for thee testifies this." And St. Bernard adds, that the Cross cries out, every Wound of Jesus cries out, that He loves us with a true love: "The Cross proclaims, the Wounds proclaim, that He truly loves."

O my Jesus, how do I behold Thee weighed down with sorrow and sadness! Ah, too much reason hast Thou to think that while Thou dost suffer even to die of anguish upon this wood, there are yet so few souls that have the heart to love Thee! O my God, how many hearts are there at the present moment, even among those that are consecrated to Thee, who either love Thee not, or love Thee not enough! O beautiful flame of love, thou that didst consume the life of a God upon the Cross, oh, consume me, too; consume all the disorderly affections which live in my heart, and make me live burning and sighing only for that loving Lord of mine, Who, for love of me, was willing to end His life, consumed by torments, upon a gibbet of ignominy! O my beloved Jesus, I wish ever to love Thee, and Thee alone, alone; my only wish is to love my Love, my God, my All.

## II.

*Thine eyes shall behold thy teacher.* (Is. xxx. 20). It was promised to men that with their own eyes they should see their Divine Master. The whole life of Jesus was one continuous example and school of perfection; but never did He better inculcate His own most excellent virtues than from the pulpit of His Cross. There what an admirable instruction does He give us on patience, more especially in time of infirmity; for with what constancy does Jesus upon the Cross endure with most perfect patience the pains of His most bitter death. There, by His own example, He teaches us an exact obedience to the Divine precepts, a perfect resignation to God's will; and, above all, He teaches us how we ought to love. Father Paul Segneri, the Younger, wrote to one of his penitents that she ought to keep these words written at the foot of the crucifix: "See what it is to love."

It seems as though our Redeemer from the Cross said to us all, "See what it is to love," whenever, in order to avoid something that is troublesome, we abandon works that are pleasing in His sight, or at times even go so far as to renounce His grace and His love. He has loved us even unto death, and came not

down from the Cross till after He had left His life thereon. Ah, my Jesus, Thou hast loved me even unto dying for me; and I too wish to love Thee even unto dying for Thee. How often have I offended and betrayed Thee in time past! O my Lord, revenge Thyself upon me; but let it be the revenge of pity and love. Bestow upon me such a sorrow for my sins as may make me live in continual grief and affliction through pain at having offended Thee. I protest my willingness to suffer every evil for the time to come, rather than displease Thee. And what greater evil could befall me than that of displeasing Thee, my God, my Redeemer, my Hope, my Treasure, my All.

## **Wednesday--Fourth Week of Lent**

### **Morning Meditation**

*"IF THE TREE FALL TO THE SOUTH OR THE NORTH... THERE SHALL IT BE."*

Of what avail is it to torment yourself, as some do, saying: Who knows if I am to be amongst the reprobate or the saved? When the tree is cut down, where does it fall? It falls on the side to which it leans. To which side do you incline? What life do you lead? Preserve yourself in the grace of God and avoid sin, and you will be saved.

I.

*If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in what place soever it shall fall, there shall it be.* (Eccles. xi. 3). Wheresoever the tree of your soul shall fall, there shall you have to remain for all eternity. There is no middle way; either king for ever in Heaven, or slave for ever in hell. Either blessed for ever in the ocean of delights, or for ever despairing in a pit of torments. St. John Chrysostom, reflecting upon the glutton in the Gospel, who was esteemed happy by the world because he was rich, but who was afterwards buried in hell; and upon Lazarus, who, on the contrary, was esteemed miserable because he was poor, but who was afterwards happy in Heaven, exclaimed: *"O infelix felicitas! O unhappy happiness, which dragged the rich man into eternal misery! O felix infelicitas! O happy unhappiness, which conducted the poor man into everlasting joy!"*

Ah, my God, have pity on me! I already knew that in sinning

I condemned myself to an eternity of pain, and yet I was content to oppose Thy will, and to incur this pain; and for what? For a wretched gratification. Ah, my Lord, pardon me; for I repent with all my heart! I will never more oppose myself to Thy holy will. Unhappy me, if Thou hadst taken me while leading a bad life, I should now have been condemned to dwell forever in hell, to hate Thy will. But I now love it, and will always love it. Teach me, and give me strength henceforth, to perform Thy holy will. I will never more oppose Thee, O Infinite Goodness; and I only ask this favour, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; grant me to do Thy will perfectly, and I ask nothing more.

## II.

Of what avail is it to torment yourself as some do, saying: "Who knows whether I am amongst the reprobate or the predestined?" When the tree is cut down, where does it fall? It falls on the side to which it inclines. My brother, to which side do you incline? What life do you lead? Endeavour to incline always towards the south, preserve yourself in the grace of God, fly from sin; thus will you save yourself and be amongst the Elect. And, in order to avoid sin, bear always in mind the great thought of eternity, emphatically called by St. Augustine, "the great thought." This thought has caused so many in the flower of youth to give up the world and to live in deserts, to attend only to their souls; and they have saved them. Now that they are saved, they assuredly rejoice, and will rejoice for all eternity.

A certain lady, who lived unmindful of God, was converted by Blessed John of Avila, by his merely saying to her: "Lady, think upon these two words, *always* and *never*." Father Paul Segneri was deprived for many nights of sleep by a single thought he once had of eternity, and from that time he adopted a more rigorous mode of life. Drexelius relates that this thought of eternity caused a certain bishop to lead a saintly life, repeating always to himself, "Each moment I stand at the gate of eternity." A certain monk shut himself up in a cave, and there did nothing but exclaim: *O eternity, O eternity!* "He who believes in eternity," said the same Blessed Father Avila, "and does not become a Saint ought to be confined in a madhouse."

And what dost Thou desire, O my God, but my welfare and

my salvation? Ah, Eternal Father, hear me for the love of Jesus Christ, Who has taught me to pray always to Thee; and in His Name I ask it: Thy will be done, Thy will be done, Thy will be done. O happy me, if I live during the remainder of my life, and end my life, doing Thy will! O Mary, blessed art thou who didst always perform the will of God perfectly; obtain for me, by thy merits, that I may do it at least during the remainder of my days.

## **Spiritual Reading**

### *HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH*

#### ST. VITALIS OF RAVENNA (April 28)

The holy Martyr Vitalis was a citizen of Milan, of noble descent; the entire family were Christians, and his conduct was most exemplary. He had served in the army of the emperor, and was consequently on terms of friendship with Paulinus, the consul, trusting to whose favour he assisted the persecuted Christians, succoured them in their need, and visited them in their prisons or in the caverns where they lay concealed.

Paulinus was a great enemy of the Christians, but, not knowing that Vitalis was one, invited him to travel to Ravenna. On their arrival, our Saint heard that a certain Christian named Ursicinus, by profession a physician, had been condemned to torture, and seemed frightened at the approach of death. Vitalis, leaving the consul, ran to the spot, and finding Ursicinus almost ready to yield, exclaimed: "How is this, my friend? Thou hast the crown almost within thy grasp. Having already suffered so much, wilt thou miserably lose it? To avoid these short pains, wilt thou cast thyself into everlasting torments? Thou hast cured the maladies of others, wilt thou now condemn thyself to eternal death? Enliven thy Faith. Have confidence in Jesus Christ! Bravely consummate the sacrifice of thyself!" Upon this exhortation, the constancy of Ursicinus revived; and he gave his life for Jesus. Upon which Vitalis carried off his body and respectfully interred it.

Information having been given to Paulinus of all that had passed, he said to Vitalis: "How, then! Art thou mad, to have acted as thou hast, not being a Christian?" The Saint instantly replied: "Nay, but I am a Christian, and am proud to be so. Nor am I mad either. He is mad who gives to wicked men the honour

due to God. There is but one only God: this God we adore, and we glory in dying for His sake."

Paulinus loved Vitalis, but his hatred of the Christians prevailed over this feeling, and he ordered Vitalis to be imprisoned; who, finding himself in the company of other Confessors, made such manifestation of his joy that Paulinus became infuriated, and commanded all his joints to be dislocated on the rack, and his sides to be torn with iron hooks. During these tortures the holy Martyr ceased not to preach Jesus Christ, whereupon he was thrown into a ditch and buried alive beneath showers of stones, on the 27th April, of the year 171, according to Baronius.

As St. Vitalis expired, one of the priests of Apollo, who had incensed the tyrant against him, was possessed by a devil; full of rage, he cried out: "Thou tormentest me, O Vitalis! Thou burnest me!" Seven days after he cast himself into a river and was drowned.

The relics of this Saint are deposited in a magnificent church at Ravenna, built upon the place of his Martyrdom.

On the day dedicated to the honour of St. Vitalis, commemoration is made of his wife, St. Valeria, who, while returning from Ravenna after the death of her husband, was so beaten and maltreated by the pagans for her faith, that she expired on the second day after her arrival at Milan. She is also honoured as a Martyr.

## **Evening Meditation**

### *REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

#### I.

*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself. But this he said, signifying what death he should die. (Jo. xii. 32).* Jesus Christ said that when He should have been lifted up upon the Cross, He would, by His merits, by His example, and by the power of His love, draw towards Himself the loving affection of all souls: "He drew all the nations of the world to His love, by the merit of His Blood, by His example, and by His love." Such is the commentary of Cornelius a Lapide. St. Peter Damien tells us the same: "The Lord, as soon as He was suspended from the Cross, drew all men to Himself through a loving desire."

And who is there, Cornelius a Lapide goes on to say, "who will not reciprocate the love of Christ, Who dies out of love for us?" Behold, O redeemed souls (as Holy Church exhorts us), behold your Redeemer upon that Cross where His whole form breathes love and invites you to love Him: His Head bent downwards to give us the kiss of peace, His arms stretched out to embrace us, His Heart open to love us: "His whole figure," as St. Augustine says, "breathes love, and challenges us to love Him in return: His Head bent downwards to kiss us, His hands stretched out to embrace us, His bosom open to love us."

Ah, my beloved Jesus, how could my soul have been so dear in Thy sight, beholding as Thou didst, the wrongs that Thou wouldst have to receive at my hands! Thou, in order to captivate my affections, wert willing to give me the extremest proofs of love. Come ye Scourges, ye Thorns, Nails, and Cross, which tortured the Sacred Flesh of my Lord, come and wound my poor heart; be ever reminding me that all the good I have received, and all that I hope for, comes to me through the merits of His Passion. O Thou Master of love, others teach by word of mouth, but Thou upon this bed of death, dost teach by suffering; others teach from interested motives, Thou from affection, asking no recompense excepting my salvation. Save me, O my Love, and let my salvation be the bestowal of the grace ever to love and please Thee; the love of Thee is my salvation.

## II.

While Jesus was dying upon the Cross, the men who were around Him never ceased to torment Him with reproaches and insults. Some said to Him: *He saved others, himself he cannot save.* Others: *If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross.* And Jesus, while these are outraging Him, what is He doing upon the Cross? He is, perhaps, praying the Eternal Father to punish them? No; He is praying Him to pardon them: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* (Luke xxiii. 34). Yes, says St. Thomas; to show forth the immense love which He had for men, the Redeemer asked pardon of God for His very crucifiers: "To show forth the abundance of His charity, He asked pardon for His persecutors." He asked it, and obtained it; for, when they had seen Him dead, they repented of their sin: *They returned*

*smiting their breasts.*

Ah, my dear Saviour, behold me at Thy feet: I have been one of the most ungrateful of Thy persecutors; do Thou likewise pray Thy Father to pardon me my sins. True, indeed, it is that the Jews and executioners knew not what they were doing when they crucified Thee; but I well knew that, in sinning, I was offending a God Who had been crucified, and had died for me. But Thy Blood and Thy death have merited even for me, the Divine mercy. I cannot feel doubtful of being pardoned; after I see Thee die to obtain pardon for me. Ah, my sweet Redeemer, turn towards me one of those looks of love wherewith Thou didst look upon me, when dying for me upon the Cross! Look upon me, and pardon me all the ingratitude which I have shown to Thy love. I repent, O my Jesus, of having despised Thee. I love Thee with all my heart; and, at the sight of Thy example, because I love Thee, I love all those likewise who have offended me. I wish them all possible good, and I purpose to serve them, and to assist them to the utmost of my power, for love of Thee, O my Lord, Who hast been willing to die for me, who have so much offended Thee.

## **Thursday--Fourth Week of Lent**

### **Morning Meditation**

*"MAN SHALL GO INTO THE HOUSE OF HIS ETERNITY."*

The Prophet says: *shall go*, to denote that each one shall go into that house which he himself chooses. Oh, how much pains do men not take to build themselves a convenient, airy, and healthy dwelling, reflecting that they will have to inhabit it during the whole of their lives! And why, then, are men so careless in regard to the house in which they shall have to dwell for eternity?

I.

*Man shall go into the house of his eternity.* (Eccles. xii. 5). The Prophet says *shall go* to denote that each one shall go into that house which he chooses; he will not be carried there, but he shall go of his own accord. It is certain that God wishes every one to be saved; but He will not force us to be saved. He has placed before each of us life and death, and that which we choose shall be given to us: *Before man is life and death, good and evil; that which he*



*shall choose shall be given to him.* (Ecclus. xv. 18). Jeremias likewise says that the Lord has given us two ways in which to walk--one the way of Heaven, and the other of hell: *Behold I set before you the way of life and the way of death.* (Jer. xxi. 8).

It is for us to choose. But how can he who chooses to walk in the way of hell ever find himself arrived in Heaven? All sinners desire to be saved; and in the meantime they condemn themselves to hell, saying: "I hope to save myself." But who, says St. Augustine, is so mad as to take poison with the hope of being cured? "No one wishes to fall sick with the hope of being cured." And yet so many Christians, like madmen, kill their souls by sinning, saying, "Hereafter I will think of a remedy." O delusion, which has sent so many to hell!

Let us not be mad, as these are; let us remember that eternity is at stake. How much pains do men take to build themselves a convenient, airy, and healthy habitation, reflecting that they will have to inhabit it during the whole of their lives! And why, then, are they so careless with regard to that habitation in which they will have to dwell forever?

There is, then, O my God, no middle way: I must either be for ever happy, or for ever miserable; plunged either in an ocean of delights or of torments; either with Thee in Heaven, or for ever at a distance and separated from Thee in hell. And this hell, I know for certain that I have often merited it; but I also certainly know that Thou dost pardon him who repents, and deliverest from hell whoever hopes in Thee. Thou assurest me of it; *He shall cry to me ... I will deliver him, and will glorify him.* (Ps. xc. 15). Make haste, then, O Lord -- make haste and pardon me, and deliver me from hell. I grieve for having offended Thee, O my Sovereign Good above every other evil. Make haste to restore me to Thy favour, and give me Thy holy love. Were I now in hell I could no longer love Thee; I should be compelled to hate Thee for ever. Ah, my God, what hast Thou done to me, that I should hate Thee? Thou hast loved me even unto death; Thou art worthy of infinite love. O Lord, do not permit me ever again to be separated from Thee.

II.

"The business for which we strive is eternity," says St. Eu-

cherius. The choice is not between a house more or less convenient, more or less airy, but between an abode replete with every delight amidst the friends of God, or a pit of every torment with the infamous crew of the wicked, of heretics, and idolaters. And for how long? Not for twenty or forty years, but for all eternity. This is a most important matter, not an affair of small moment; it is one upon which all depends. When Blessed Thomas More was condemned to death by Henry VIII, his wife Louisa endeavoured to persuade him to consent to the will of Henry; upon which he said to her: "Tell me, Louisa, --you see that I am now live?" His wife answered: "You might yet live twenty years more." "Ah, foolish woman," he replied, "for already old, --how many years think you I might still twenty years more, then, of life on this earth you would have me lose an eternity of happiness, and condemn myself to an eternity of pain!"

O God, give me light. If eternity were a doubtful thing, if it were only a probable opinion, still we ought to make it our whole study to live well, in order not to expose ourselves to the danger of being eternally miserable, should this opinion perchance prove true. But no, it is not doubtful, but certain; it is not an opinion, but a truth of Faith: *Man shall go into the house of his eternity*. Alas! it is the want of Faith, says St. Teresa, that is the cause of so many sins, and of the damnation of so many Christians. Let us, then, always reanimate our Faith by saying, *I believe in the life everlasting*; I believe that after this life there is another life which never ends. And with this thought ever before our eyes, let us adopt every means to secure our eternal salvation. Let us frequent the Sacraments; let us every day make Meditation and reflect upon eternal life; let us fly dangerous occasions; and if it be necessary to leave the world, let us leave it, because no precautions can be too great to secure the great point of eternal salvation. "No security is too great where an eternity is at stake," says St. Bernard.

I love Thee, O my Jesus, and will ever love Thee. *Who shall separate me from the charity of Christ?* Ah, my Jesus, sin alone can separate me from Thee; ah, by that Blood which Thou hast shed for me, do not permit it; let me rather die. My Queen and my Mother, aid me by thy prayers; obtain for me death, and a

thousand deaths, rather than that I ever again be separated from the love of thy Son.

## **Spiritual Reading**

### *HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE FAITH*

ST. THEODORA, VIRGIN, AND ST. DIDYMUS (April 28)

St. Theodora, a native of Alexandria, was descended from noble and opulent Christian parents; she was born towards the close of the third century, and at the early age of sixteen years was distinguished for her beauty. Desirous of having Jesus Christ alone for her Spouse, she made a vow of perpetual virginity, and her many admirable virtues made her a model of perfection to the other Christian virgins of her acquaintance. No sooner were the edicts of Diocletian against the Christians published in Egypt, than our Saint was inflamed with the holy desire of sacrificing her life for Jesus Christ, and by prayer commenced to prepare herself for the great struggle, and to make frequent offerings of herself to God.

She was amongst the first of those who were arrested, and being presented to the judge Proculus, who was much struck with her beauty, was asked whether she was a slave or a free woman; the Saint replied that she was a Christian, having been freed by Christ from the slavery of the devil, and that she was also born of what the world called free parents. The tyrant having discovered she was of noble birth, inquired why she had not married. St. Theodora replied that she had abstained from marriage that she might live only for Jesus Christ her Saviour. "But dost thou not know," continued the judge, "that it hath been commanded by the emperor that all shall sacrifice to the gods, or else be condemned to the most infamous punishments?" "And thou also knowest very well," rejoined the Saint, "that God is careful of those that serve Him, and defends them from contamination." Proculus continued to persuade her to sacrifice to the gods, threatening that otherwise the imperial edicts should be enforced. The Saint answered as before, adding that she was consecrated to Jesus Christ, and would not abandon Him though she were torn to pieces. "I am no longer my own," said she, "but His: He will defend me."

"Thou shalt pay dearly for thy obstinacy," said the judge; "what madness to place thy trust in a man who could not free himself from the death of the Cross!" "Yes," replied the Saint, "my confidence is placed in Jesus Christ Who hath suffered death to grant life unto us; He will preserve me from all evil. I fear neither torments nor death; but, on the contrary, I long to die for love of my God Who died for me."

"But thou art of noble birth," said the judge, "and shouldst not dishonour thy family with eternal infamy." Theodora answered: "My glory is to confess the Name of Jesus Christ my Saviour; He hath given me both honour and nobility; He knoweth how to preserve His dove from the hawk."

"Thou dost but trifle," said Proculus; "instantly sacrifice to our gods--be not insane." "I would indeed be insane," said Theodora, "if I were to sacrifice to devils and gods of brass or marble." Exasperated by this answer, the judge caused her to be buffeted, and said: "Thou wilt charge us with this dishonour; but thou shouldst not have dishonoured our gods." "I do not complain," said the Saint, "but rather rejoice at the opportunity of bearing insult for my Saviour."

"I shall give thee," said the tyrant, "three days to deliberate; after which, if thou wilt remain obdurate, punishment awaits thee." Theodora replied, "Thou mayest look on these three days as already expired; thou shalt find me the same then as now." The three days having expired, and the Saint still being constant in her Faith, Proculus said that he was bound to obey the edict, and commanded her to be conducted whither he had threatened.

Upon entering the infamous place the Saint fervently recommended herself to Jesus Christ, and was heard; for Didymus, habited like a soldier, mingled in the crowd, and obtained admission to the room where she was. Upon seeing him, Theodora fled from him, but Didymus said to her: "Fear me not, Theodora; I am not such a one as thou supposest; I have come to save thy honour and to set thee free. Let us change habits; take thou my clothes and depart; I will remain here in thine." Theodora did as she was desired, and in her disguise joyfully departed from that place of infamy; holding down her head, she passed undis-

covered through the midst of the crowd.

The prefect being informed of this, sent for Didymus, and asked him why he had so acted. He replied that it was in consequence of an inspiration from God. He was then commanded to sacrifice to the gods, and to make known where Theodora was. He replied that as to Theodora he knew not, and as to sacrificing to the gods--the judge had better put in force the imperial edict, since he would never sacrifice to devils, though he should be cast into a furnace. The prefect, incensed at this declaration, commanded that he should be beheaded, and that his body should afterwards be burned.

Didymus accordingly went to the place of execution, but at the same moment Theodora arrived, and with holy emulation contended for the crown. Didymus said; "It is mine, because on me hath the sentence been pronounced." Theodora replied: "I was willing that thou shouldst save my honour, but not my life. I abominated infamy, but did not shrink from death. If thou hast intended to deprive me of Martyrdom, thou hast deceived me." Finally the judge ordered them both to be decapitated, and thus both received the crown of Martyrdom.

The original acts of this glorious Martyrdom are transcribed by Ruinart.

## **Evening Meditation**

### *REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

#### I.

*Remember me*, said the Good Thief to Thee, O my Jesus; and he had the consolation of hearing these words from Thee: *This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.* (Luke xxiii. 43). Be mindful of me, say I likewise unto Thee; be mindful, O Lord, that I am one of those sheep for whom Thou didst give Thy life. Give me, too, the consolation of feeling that Thou, dear Jesus, dost forgive me, vouchsafing me a great sorrow for my sins. Do Thou, O great Priest, Who didst sacrifice Thyself for love of Thy creatures, have compassion upon me. From this day forth do I sacrifice to Thee my will, my senses, my satisfactions, and all my desires. I believe that Thou, my God, didst die, crucified for me. Let Thy Divine Blood, I pray Thee, flow also upon me; let it wash me

from my sins. Let it inflame me with holy love, and make me all thine own. I love Thee, O my Jesus, and I wish that I could die, crucified, for Thee, Who didst die crucified for me.

O Eternal Father, I have offended Thee; but behold Thy Son, Who, hanging upon this Tree, makes satisfaction to Thee for me with the sacrifice which He offers Thee of His Divine Life. I offer Thee His merits, which are all mine, for He has made them over to me; and, for love of this Thy Son, I pray Thee to have mercy upon me. The greatest mercy which I ask of Thee is, that Thou wouldst give me Thy grace, which, miserable wretch that I am, I have so often wilfully despised. I repent of having outraged Thee, and I love Thee, I love Thee, my God, my All; and, to please Thee, I am ready to endure every shame, every pain, every sorrow, and every kind of death.

## II.

St. Laurence Justinian says that the death of Jesus was the most bitter and painful of all the deaths that men have ever died; since the Redeemer died upon the Cross without any, even the slightest, alleviation: "He was crucified wholly without any alleviation of suffering." In the case of other sufferers, the pain is always mitigated, at all events, by some consoling thought; but the pain and sorrow of Jesus in His sufferings was pure pain, pure sorrow, without mitigation: "The extent of the suffering of Christ appears to us from the purity of its pain and sorrow," says the angelic Doctor. And hence St. Bernard, when contemplating Jesus dying upon the Cross, utters this lamentation: O my Jesus, when I behold Thee upon this Tree I find nothing in Thee from head to foot but pain and sorrow. "From the sole of Thy foot to the crown of Thy head I find nothing but pain and grief."

O my sweet Redeemer, O Love of my soul, wherefore wouldst Thou shed all Thy Blood? Wherefore sacrifice Thy Divine life for an ungrateful worm like me? O my Jesus, when shall I so unite myself to Thee, as never more to be able to separate myself from Thee, or to cease from loving Thee? Ah, Lord, as long as I live in this world I stand in danger of denying Thee my love, and of losing Thy friendship, as I have done in times past. O my dearest Saviour, if, by continuing in life, I shall have to suffer this great evil, by Thy Passion, I pray Thee, let me die at this

moment, while, as I hope, I am in Thy grace. I love Thee, and I wish to love Thee always.

## **Friday--Fourth Week of Lent**

(The Feast of St. Patrick, March 17)

### **Morning Meditation**

#### *ZEAL FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS*

St. Augustine says that the zeal for the salvation of souls, and for the growth of Divine charity in the souls of men, springs from love. He, then, the Saint adds, that has not zeal shows he does not love God, and he that loves not God is lost. "If you wish to honour God," says St. Laurence Justinian, "you cannot do better than labour for the salvation of souls." "Give me ten zealous priests," St. Philip Neri used to say, "and I will convert the world." What did not a St. Francis Xavier do single handed in the East? What did not a St. Patrick, a St. Vincent Ferrer do in Europe? God wishes priests to be the very saviours of the world.\*

\*St. Patrick was another St. Paul in apostolic zeal for souls. In his famous Confession, which he wrote before his death, he prays: "Wherefore may it never happen to me from my God that I should ever lose his people whom He hath purchased at the ends of the earth ... And if I ever accomplished anything good for the sake of my God Whom I love, I ask Him to grant me that I may shed my blood ... for His Name's sake, even though I should want for burial, or my corpse be most miserably divided limb from limb for the dogs and wild beasts, or the birds of the air should devour it."

I.

To understand how ardently God desires the salvation of souls, it is enough to consider what He has done for the redemption of man. Jesus Christ clearly expressed this desire when He said: *I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!* (Luke xii. 50). Jesus felt as if fainting away through the ardour with which He longed to see the work of the Redemption accomplished, so that men might be saved. From this St. John Chrysostom justly infers that there is nothing more acceptable to God than the salvation of souls. And before him St. Justin had said that nothing is so pleasing to

God as to labour to make others better. Our Lord once said to a holy priest: "Labour for the salvation of sinners, for this is most pleasing to Me." So dear is this work to God that as Clement of Alexandria says, the salvation of man is God's sole concern. Hence, addressing a priest, St. Laurence Justinian says: "If you wish to honour God you can do no better than to labour for the salvation of souls." According to St. Bernard, a soul is more valuable in the eyes of God than the whole world. And, according to St. John Chrysostom, you please God more by converting a single soul, than by giving all your goods to the poor. Tertullian asserts that the salvation of one sheep that has strayed is as dear as that of the whole flock. St. Paul wrote: *I live in the faith of the Son of God who loved me and delivered himself for me.* (Gal. ii. 20). By these words is signified, as St. John Chrysostom says, that Jesus Christ would have died as soon for a single soul as for all men. And this Our Lord gives us to understand by the Parable of the Lost Groat. "He calls together all the Angels," says St. Thomas, "not that men, but that He Himself may be congratulated, as if man were God's God, and His own Divine salvation depended on man; and as if without man He could not be happy."

Alas, my Jesus, my Redeemer, how few there are who have the true Faith! O God, the greater part of mankind lies buried in the darkness of infidelity and heresy! Thou didst humble Thyself to death, even to the death of the Cross, for the salvation of men, and these very men ungratefully refuse to know Thee. Ah, I beseech Thee, Almighty God, supreme and Infinite Good, make Thyself known, make Thyself loved by all men.

## II.

Zeal, as St. Augustine says, springs from love, and, therefore, according to St. John Chrysostom, God can have no better proof of our fidelity and affection than our zeal for the welfare of our neighbour. The Saviour three times asked St. Peter if he loved Him: *Simon, son of John, lovest thou me?* (Jo. xxi. 17). When assured of Peter's love, Jesus Christ asked him for nothing else in proof of his love than to take care of souls: *He said to him: Feed my sheep.* (Jo. xxi. 17). St. John Chrysostom says: "The Lord might have said: If you love Me, cast away your money, fast, macerate yourself with labours. But no; He says *Feed my sheep.*"



After reading the *Lives* of the Martyrs and of the holy workers in God's vineyard, St. Teresa said that she envied these latter more than the former on account of the great glory they that labour for the salvation of sinners give to God. St. Catharine of Sienna used to kiss the ground trodden by priests who were engaged in saving souls. And such was her zeal for the salvation of sinners that she desired to be placed at the mouth of hell, that no soul might enter that abode of torments. And what are we doing? We see so many souls perishing and shall we remain idle spectators of their perdition?

St. Paul said that to obtain the salvation of his neighbours he would have consented to be separated for a time from Jesus Christ: *For I wished myself to be anathema from Christ for my brethren.* (Rom. ix. 3). St. Bonaventure declared he would have accepted as many deaths as there were sinners in the world that all might be saved. St. Ignatius used to say that he would rather live uncertain of his own eternal lot than die with a certainty of salvation, provided he could continue to assist souls. St. Augustine teaches: *Animam salvasti.; animam tuam praeordinasti.* By saving the soul of another, you have predestined your own. And St. James has written: *He must know that he who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way, shall save his (own) soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins.* (James v. 20).

Jesus once said to the Venerable Seraphina de Capri: "Assist Me, O my daughter, to save souls by your prayers." To St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi He said: "See, Magdalen, how Christians are in the hands of the devil. Unless My elect by their prayers deliver them, they shall be devoured." Hence the Saint said to her Religious: "My sisters, God has not separated us from the world only for our own good, but also for the benefit of sinners." And, on another occasion, she said: "We have to render an account of so many souls lost. Had we recommended them to God with fervour, they would not, perhaps, be damned."

O my Lord Jesus Christ, how can I thank Thee enough for calling me to do the same work Thou didst Thyself on earth; namely, to help with my poor efforts in the salvation of souls. How have I deserved this honour after having offended Thee so grievously and been the cause of others also offending Thee? I

will serve Thee with all my strength. Behold, I offer Thee all my labour, and even my blood, to obey Thee. I desire nothing but to see Thee loved by all as Thou deservest.

Most holy Mary, my advocate, who lovest souls so much, assist me.

## Spiritual Reading

### THE PREACHING OF GOD'S WORD

Holy Scripture teaches us that good morals, like Faith, are propagated and cultivated by preaching. Jesus Christ has declared that to save men His Passion alone was not sufficient, but that preaching was also necessary in order that men might do penance for their sins and amend their lives: *And thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead on the third day: and that penance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all nations.* (Luke xxiv. 46). For this reason, therefore, He commanded His disciples to go out into the whole world, to teach not only the Mysteries all men should believe, but also the Commandments that they should keep: *Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.* (Mark xvi. 15). *Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.* (Matt. xxviii. 20). In obedience to this command the Apostles preached, and their preaching produced fruit in the entire world, as is testified by St. Paul: *In the word of the truth of the gospel, which is come unto you, as also it is in the whole world, and bringeth forth fruit and groweth, even as it doth in you, since the day you heard it.* (Col. i. 5). And this came to pass because the Lord co-operated in making successful their zeal: *And they going forth preached everywhere, the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with signs that followed.* (Mark xvi. 20).

The Lord declares that as the rain renders the earth fruitful and makes it produce wheat, in the same way the word of God does not remain sterile; it produces in souls fruits of good works: *And as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and return no more thither, but soak the earth, and water it, and make it to spring, and give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be, which shall go forth from my mouth: it shall not return to me void; but it shall do whatsoever I please, and shall prosper in the things for which I sent it.* (Is. lv. 10,11). St. Paul adds that the word of God is so

efficacious that it penetrates the hearts more than a two-edged sword: *For the word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword; and reaching into the divisions of the soul and the spirit.* (Heb. iv. 12). By the word *anima*--soul--we understand the inferior part of man, which is called *animal*; and by the word *spiritus*--spirit--we understand the superior part, which is called *spiritual*. Hence the word of God prevents the superior part from uniting with the inferior part, as happens among the wicked in whom the inferior drags down the superior part; so that holy preaching, or rather, the grace that comes by preaching, separates the inferior part from the superior, and prevents the superior part from being dragged down, and thus directs all the actions and all the desires of men.

St. Paul, moreover, writes: *It pleased God by the foolishness of our preaching to save them that believe.* (1 Cor. i. 21). He says, *By the foolishness of preaching*: this is because the Mystery of the Redemption, which the Apostles preached, was regarded as foolishness by the Gentiles, just as we read in the same chapter of St. Paul: *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness.* (1 Cor. i. 23). The Apostle then declares that it is by means of the preaching of such folly that the Lord has wished to save believers. Now, in order to save men, they must be led not only *to believe* the Truths of Faith, but also *to do* what Faith teaches; for Faith alone without works cannot save any one. Hence the Apostle assures us, in another text already cited, that the Faith of Jesus Christ produced fruits of good works in the whole world: *It is in the whole world, and bringeth forth fruit.* (Col. i. 6).

Origen also attests that in his time in all parts of the world those that had abandoned their divinities as well as the laws of their country, and consequently their wicked morals, in order to follow the law of Jesus, were innumerable. Hence the Apostles, as the fruit of their preaching, had the consolation of seeing the Gentiles not only despise and trample under foot their gods, but also extirpate the vices which were inveterate for so many centuries, abhor earthly pleasures, renounce the riches and the honours of the world, in order to embrace sufferings, opprobrium, poverty, persecution, exile, tortures, and death.

And in after years, as we know from ecclesiastical history, holy labourers were sent by the Sovereign Pontiff and by other bishops to preach the Gospel in various kingdoms. In the fourth century St. Ireneus was sent to France. In the fifth, St. Palladius was sent to Scotland, and St. Patrick to Ireland. In the sixth, St. Gregory sent St. Augustine to England. In the seventh, St. Eligius was sent to Flanders, St. Kilian to Franconia, Ss. Swidbert and Willibrord to Holland. In the eighth century, Gregory the Second sent St. Boniface to Germany, St. Wulfran to Friesland, and St. Hubert to Brabant. In the ninth, St. Ascanius was sent to Denmark and Sweden, and St. Methodius to Bohemia, Moravia, and Bulgaria. In the tenth, St. Maynard was sent to Livonia, and St. Ottone to Pomerania. In the thirteenth century, the Pope sent Dominicans and Franciscans to Greece, Armenia, Ethiopia, Tartary, and Norway.

Finally, we know that in later times immense numbers have been converted from paganism in the East Indies and Japan by St. Francis Xavier, and in the West Indies by St. Louis Bertrand. I abstain from mentioning the many provinces of infidels and heretics which were converted by missionaries.

To prove the necessity and utility of holy preaching, it suffices to recall to mind what the Apostle says: *How then, shall they call on him in whom they have believed? Or how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard! Or how shall they hear without a preacher?* (Rom. x. 14).

## Evening Meditation

### REFLECTIONS AND AFFECTIONS ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

#### I.

Jesus, by the mouth of the Prophet, made lamentation that, when dying upon the Cross, He went in search of some one to console Him, but found none: *And I looked for one to comfort me, and I found none.* (Ps. lxxviii. 21). The Jews and the Romans, even while He was dying, uttered against Him their execrations and blasphemies. The Most Holy Mary--yes, she stood beneath the Cross, in order to afford Him some relief, had it been in her power to do so; but this afflicted and loving Mother by the sorrow which she suffered through sympathy with His pains, only

added to the affliction of this her Son, Who loved her so dearly. St. Bernard says that the pains of Mary all went towards increasing the torments of the Heart of Jesus: "The Mother being filled with it, the ocean of her sorrow poured itself back upon the Son." So that the Redeemer, in beholding Mary sorrowing thus, felt His soul pierced more by the sorrows of Mary than by His own; as was revealed to St. Bridget by the Blessed Virgin herself: "He, on beholding me, grieved more for me than for Himself." Whence St. Bernard says, "O good Jesus, great as are Thy bodily sufferings, much more dost Thou suffer in Thy Heart through compassion for Thy Mother."

What pangs, too, must not those loving Hearts of Jesus and Mary have felt when the moment arrived in which the Son, before breathing His last, had to take leave of His Mother! Behold what the last words were with which Jesus took His leave in this world of Mary: "Mother, behold thy son"--assigning to her John, whom, in His own place, He left her for a son.

O Queen of Sorrows, things given as memorials by a beloved son at the hour of his death, how very dear they are, and never do they slip away from the memory of a mother! Oh, bear it in mind, that thy Son, Who loved thee so dearly, has, in the person of John, left me, a sinner, to thee for a son. For the love which thou didst bear to Jesus, have compassion on me. I ask thee not for the good things of earth: I behold thy Son dying in such great pains for me; I behold thee, my innocent Mother, enduring also for me such great sufferings; and I see that I, a miserable being, who deserve hell on account of my sins, have not suffered anything for love of thee--I wish to suffer something for thee before I die. This is the grace that I ask of thee; and with St. Bonaventure, I say to thee, that if I have offended thee, justice requires that I should have suffering as chastisement; and if I have been serving thee, it is but reasonable that I should have suffering as a reward: "O Lady, if I have offended thee, wound my heart for justice' sake; if I have served thee, I ask thee for wounds as my recompense." Obtain for me, O Mary, a great devotion to, and a continual remembrance of the Passion of thy Son; and, by that pang which Thou didst suffer on beholding Him breathe His Last upon the Cross, obtain for me a good

death. Come to my assistance, O my Queen, in that last moment; make me die, loving and pronouncing the sacred Names of Jesus and of Mary.

## II.

Jesus, seeing that He found no one to console Him upon this earth, raised His eyes and His Heart to His Father, craving relief from Him. But the Eternal Father, beholding the Son clad in the garment of a sinner, replied: No, My Son, I cannot give Thee consolation, now that Thou art making satisfaction to My justice for all the sins of men; it is fitting that I too should abandon Thee to Thy pains, and let Thee die without solace. And then it was that our Saviour, crying out with a loud voice, said, My God, my God, and why hast Thou too abandoned Me? *Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying: My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?* (Matt. xxvii. 46). In his explanation of this passage, Blessed Denis the Carthusian says that Jesus uttered these words with a loud cry to make all men understand the greatness of the pain and sorrow in which He died. And it was the will of the loving Redeemer, adds St. Cyprian, to die bereft of every consolation, to give proof to us of His love, and to draw to Himself all our love: "He was left in dereliction, that He might show forth His love towards us, and might attract our love towards Himself."

Ah, my beloved Jesus, Thou art in the wrong to make Thy lamentation, saying, My God, My God, why hast Thou abandoned Me? "Why," dost Thou say? And why, I will say to Thee, hast Thou been willing to undertake to pay our penalty? Didst Thou not know that for our sins we had already deserved to be abandoned by God? With good reason, then, is it that Thy Father has abandoned Thee, and leaves Thee to die in an ocean of sufferings and griefs. Ah, my Redeemer, Thy dereliction gives me both affliction and consolation: it is afflicting to me to see Thee die in such great pain; but it is consoling, in that it encourages me to hope that, by Thy merits, I shall not remain abandoned by the Divine mercy, as indeed I well deserve, for having myself so often abandoned Thee in order to follow my own humours. Make me understand that, if to Thee it was so hard to be deprived, even for a brief interval, of the sensible Presence of God, what my pain would be if I were to be deprived of God

for ever. Oh, by this dereliction of Thine, suffered with so much pain, forsake me not, O my Jesus, especially at the hour of my death! Then, when all shall have abandoned me, do not Thou abandon me, my Saviour. Ah, my Lord, Who wert so desolate Thyself, be Thou my comfort in my desolations! Already do I understand that, if I shall love Thee without consolation, I shall content Thy Heart the more. But Thou knowest my weakness; help me by Thy grace, and then grant me perseverance, patience, and resignation.

## **Saturday--Fourth Week of Lent**

### **Morning Meditation**

#### *MARY SUFFERS FOR OUR SALVATION.*

Why, O Lady, asks St. Bonaventure, didst thou also go to sacrifice thyself on Calvary? Was a crucified God not sufficient to redeem us, that thou, His Mother, shouldst also be crucified with Him? The death of Jesus was more than enough to redeem the world, but His good Mother, for the love she bore us, wished to help in the cause of our salvation.

#### **I.**

St. Bonaventure, addressing this Blessed Virgin, says: "And why, O Lady, didst thou also go to sacrifice thyself on Calvary? Was a crucified God not sufficient to redeem us, that thou, His Mother, wouldst also go to be crucified with Him?" Indeed, the death of Jesus was more than enough to save the world, and an infinity of worlds; but this good Mother, for the love she bore us, wished also to help the cause of our salvation by the merit of her sufferings which she offered for us on Calvary. Therefore, Blessed Albert the Great says that, as we are under great obligations to Jesus for His Passion endured for our love, so also are we under great obligations to Mary for the Martyrdom which she voluntarily suffered for our salvation in the death of her Son. I say voluntarily, since, as St. Agnes revealed to St. Bridget, "our compassionate and benign Mother was satisfied rather to endure any torment than that our souls should not be redeemed, and be left in their former state of perdition." And, indeed, we may say that Mary's only relief in the midst of her great sorrow in the Passion of her Son, was to see the lost world redeemed by His

death, and men who were His enemies reconciled with God. "While grieving she rejoiced," says Simon of Cassia, "that a Sacrifice was offered for the redemption of all, by which He Who was angry was appeased."

## II.

So great a love, then, on the part of Mary deserves our gratitude, and that gratitude should be shown by at least meditating upon and pitying her in her sorrows. But she complained to St. Bridget that very few did so, and that the greater part of the world lived in forgetfulness of them: "I look around upon all who are on earth, to see if by chance there are any who pity me, and meditate upon my sorrows; and I find that there are very few. Therefore, my daughter, though I am forgotten by many, at least do thou not forget me; consider my anguish, and imitate, as far as thou canst, my grief." To understand how pleasing it is to the Blessed Virgin that we should remember her dolours, we need only know that, in the year 1239 she appeared to seven devout clients of hers (afterwards Founders of the Religious Order of the Servites), with a black garment in her hands, and desired them, if they wished to please her, often to meditate on her sorrows: for this purpose, and to remind them of her sorrows, she expressed her desire that in future they should wear that mourning dress. Jesus Christ Himself revealed to the Blessed Veronica de Binasco, that He is, as it were, more pleased in seeing His Mother compassionated than Himself; for thus He addressed her: "My daughter, tears shed for My Passion are dear to Me; but as I loved My Mother Mary with an immense love, the meditation of the torments which she endured at My death are even more agreeable to Me."

Wherefore the graces promised by Jesus to those who are devoted to the dolours of Mary are very great.

## Spiritual Reading

### *GRACES PROMISED TO THOSE WHO ARE DEVOUT TO THE DOLOURS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN*

Pelbart relates that it was revealed to St. Elizabeth that, after the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin into Heaven, St. John the Evangelist desired to see her again. The favour was granted him; his dear Mother appeared to him, and with her Jesus Christ



also appeared. The Saint then heard Mary ask her Son to grant some special grace to all those who are devoted to her dolours. Jesus promised her four principal favours: 1st, that those who before death invoked the Divine Mother in the name of her sorrows should obtain true repentance of all their sins; 2nd, that He would console them in their tribulations, and protect them especially at the hour of death; 3rd, that He would impress upon their minds the remembrance of His Passion, and that they should have their reward for it in Heaven; 4th, that He would commit such devout clients into the hands of Mary, with the power to dispose of them in whatever manner she might please, and to obtain for them all the graces that she might desire. In proof of this, let us see, in the following example, how greatly devotion to the dolours of Mary aids in obtaining eternal salvation.

In the Revelations of St. Bridget, we read that there was a rich man, as noble by birth as he was vile and sinful in his habits. He had given himself, by an express compact, as a slave to the devil; and for sixty successive years had served him, leading such a life as may be imagined, and never approached the Sacraments. Now this prince was dying; and Jesus Christ, to show him mercy, commanded St. Bridget to tell her confessor to go and visit him and exhort him to confess his sins. The confessor went, and the sick man said he did not require Confession, as he had often approached the Sacrament of Penance. The priest went a second time; but this poor slave of hell persevered in his obstinate determination not to confess. Jesus again told the Saint to desire the confessor to return. He did so; and on the third occasion told the sick man the revelation made to the Saint, and that he had returned so many times because our Lord, Who wished to show him mercy, had so ordered. On hearing this, the dying man was touched, and began to weep: "But how," he exclaimed, "can I be saved? I, who for sixty years have served the devil as his slave, and have my soul burdened with innumerable sins?" "My son," answered the Father, encouraging him, "doubt not; if you repent of them, on the part of God I promise you pardon." Then, gaining confidence, he said to the confessor, "Father, I looked upon myself as lost, and already despaired of salvation; but now I feel a sorrow for my sins, which

gives me confidence; and since God has not yet abandoned me, I will make my confession." In fact, he made his Confession four times on that day, with the greatest marks of sorrow, and on the following morning received Holy Communion. On the sixth day, contrite and resigned, he died. After his death, Jesus Christ again spoke to St. Bridget and told her that the sinner was saved; that he was then in Purgatory, and that he owed his salvation to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin His Mother; for the deceased, although he had led so wicked a life, had nevertheless always preserved devotion to her dolours, and, whenever he thought of them, pitied her.

### Evening Meditation

*JESUS MAKES HIS TRIUMPHANT ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM.*

#### I.

The time of His Passion being now at hand, our Redeemer departed from Bethany to go to Jerusalem. On drawing nigh to that ungrateful city, He beheld it and wept: *Beholding the city he wept over it.* (Luke xix. 41). He wept because He foresaw its ruin, which would be the consequence of the stupendous crime of taking away the life of the Son of God, of which that people would shortly be guilty. Ah, my Jesus and my God, when Thou wert then weeping over that city, Thou wert weeping also over my soul, beholding the ruin I have brought upon myself by my sins, constraining Thee to condemn me to hell, even after Thy having died to save me. Oh, leave it to me to weep over the great evil of which I have been guilty in despising Thee, the greatest Good of all, and do Thou have mercy upon me.

Jesus Christ enters into the city: the people go forth to meet Him with acclamations and rejoicings; and, in order to do Him honour, some of them strew branches of palms along the road, whilst others spread out their garments for Him to pass over. Oh, who would ever then have said that that Lord, now recognised as the Messias, and welcomed with so many demonstrations of respect, the next time that He appeared along the selfsame ways, would be under sentence of death, and with a Cross upon His shoulders! Ah, my beloved Jesus, these people now receive Thee with acclamations, saying: *Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is*

*he that cometh in the name of the Lord!* (Matt. xxi. 9). Glory to the Son of David! Blessed be He Who cometh in the Name of God for our salvation! And then they will raise their voices insultingly to Pilate to take Thee out of the world, and cause Thee to die upon a Cross: *Away with him! Away with him!* Crucify Him! Go, my soul, and do thou also lovingly say to Him: *Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!* Blessed for ever be Thou Who art come, O Saviour of the world; for otherwise, we had all been lost. O my Saviour, save me!

## II.

When the evening, however, was come, after all those acclamations, there was no one found who would invite Him to lodge in his house; so that He was obliged to retrace His steps to Bethany. O my beloved Redeemer, if others will not give Thee a welcome, I desire to welcome Thee into my poor heart. At one time, I, unhappily, expelled Thee from my soul; but I now esteem having Thee with me more than the possession of all the treasures of earth. I love Thee, O my Saviour; what power shall ever be able to separate me from my love of Thee? Sin only; but from this sin it is Thine to deliver me by Thy help, O my Jesus; and thine too by thy intercession, O Mary, my Mother.

## Passion Sunday Morning Meditation

### *THE LOVE JESUS SHOWED IN HIS PASSION*

Jesus, by His Passion and Death, says a devout writer, gave us the greatest possible proof of His love, beyond which there remained for Him nothing He could do to show how much He loved us: "The biggest proof of love was that which He showed forth at the end of His life on the Cross." The Passion of Jesus is even said to be an excess. Oh, that all men, then, loved Thee, my most lovely Jesus! Thou art a God worthy of infinite love.

## I.

Blessed Denis the Carthusian says that the Passion of Jesus Christ was called an excess, --*And they spake of his excess, which he would accomplish in Jerusalem* (Luke ix. 31), --because it was an excess of mercy and of love: "The Passion of Jesus Christ is said to be an excess, because in it was shown forth an excess of

love and of compassion." O my God, and where is the believer who could live without loving Jesus Christ, if he were frequently to meditate upon His Passion? The Wounds of Jesus, says St. Bonaventure, are all of them Wounds of love. They are darts and flames which wound the hardest hearts, and kindle into a flame the most frozen souls: "O Wounds that wound stony hearts; and set frozen minds on fire!" In order the more strongly to impress upon his heart a love towards Jesus in His Passion, the Blessed Henry Suso one day took a knife, and cut out in letters upon his breast the Name of his beloved Lord. And, when thus bathed in blood, he went into the church and, prostrating himself before the Crucifix, he said: "Behold, O Lord, Thou only love of my soul, behold my desire. I would gladly have written Thee deeper within my heart; but this I cannot do. Do Thou, Who canst do all things, supply what is wanting in my powers, and imprint Thy adorable Name in the lowest depths of my heart, that so it may no more be possible to cancel in it either Thy Name or Thy love."

*My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands.* (Cant. v. 10). O my Jesus, Thou art all white through Thy spotless innocence; but upon this Cross Thou art also all ruddy with Wounds suffered for me. I choose Thee for the one and only Object of my love. And whom shall I love if I love not Thee? What is there that I can find amongst all other objects more lovely than Thee, my Redeemer, my God, my All? I love Thee, O most lovely Lord. I love Thee above every thing. Do Thou make me love Thee with all my affection, and without reserve.

## II.

"Oh, if thou didst know the mystery of the Cross!" said St. Andrew to the tyrant. O tyrant (it was his wish to say), wert thou to understand the love that Jesus Christ has borne thee, in willing to die upon a Cross to save thee, thou wouldst abandon all thy possessions and earthly hopes in order to give thyself wholly to the love of this thy Saviour. The same ought to be said to those Catholics who, believing as they do in the Passion of Jesus, yet do not think of it. Ah, were all men to think upon the love which Jesus Christ has shown forth for us in His Death, who would ever be able not to love Him? It was for this end, says the

Apostle, that He, our Redeemer, died for us, that, by the love He displayed towards us in His Death, He might become the Possessor of our hearts: *To this end Christ died and rose again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living; therefore, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.* (Rom. xiv. 9). Whether, then, we die or live, it is but just that we belong wholly to Jesus Who has saved us at so great a cost. Oh, who is there that can say, as did the loving Martyr St. Ignatius, whose lot it was to give his life for Jesus Christ: "Let fire, cross, beasts, and torments of every kind come upon me: let me only have fruition of Thee, O Christ." Let flames, crosses, wild beasts, and every kind of torture come upon me, provided only that I obtain and enjoy my Jesus Christ.

O my dear Lord, Thou didst die in order to gain my soul; but what have I done in order to gain Thee, O Infinite Good? Ah, my Jesus, how often have I lost Thee for a nothing! Miserable that I was, I knew at the time that I was losing Thy grace by sin; I knew also I was giving Thee great displeasure; and yet I committed sin. My consolation is that I have to deal with an Infinite Goodness Who remembers his offences no more when a sinner repents and loves Him. Yes, my God, I do repent and love Thee. Oh, pardon me, and do Thou from this day forth bear rule in this rebellious heart of mine. To Thee do I consign it; to Thee do I wholly give myself. Tell me what Thou dost desire, wishing, as I do, to perform it all. Yes, my Lord, I wish to love Thee; I wish to please Thee in every thing. Do Thou give me strength, and I hope to do so.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *OUR OBLIGATION TO LOVE JESUS CHRIST*

The first and principal command that the Lord imposes on us all is to love Him with our whole heart; *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.* (Deut. vi. 5). Because He loves us intensely, He wishes to be loved ardently by us. Hence, He so pressingly demands our love and calls for our heart: *My son, give me thy heart.* (Prov. xxiii. 26). And what, says Moses, does the Lord demand of you, but that you love him with your whole heart. *What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but that thou love him, and serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart.* (Deut. x. 12). To our love He promises Himself as a reward. *I am thy reward exceed-*

*ing great.* (Gen. xv. i). To their faithful subjects the monarchs of the earth give riches and honours; but to those who love Him our God gives nothing less than Himself. But though our love should receive no other reward, for us it should be enough to know that God loves those that love Him. He frequently declares in the Scriptures that He loves all who love Him. *I love them that love me.* (Prov. viii. 17). In another place He says: *He that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him.* (1 Jo. iv. 16). And Jesus Christ has said: *He that loveth me, shall be loved by my Father; and I will love him.* (Jo. xiv. 21).

All our perfection, then, consists in the love of God; for, as St. Augustine says, love is the only virtue that unites us to God. All other virtues, without charity, profit us nothing; but charity brings with it all virtues; for, as the Apostle teaches (1 Cor. xiii. 4)--it is patient, it is kind, it is not puffed up, it is not ambitious of honours, it seeks not its own interest, but suffers all things, believes all things, and hopes for all things. Love, says the same Apostle, is the fulfilment of the law. (Rom. xiii. 10). Hence, St. Augustine said: "Love, and do what you wish" "*Ama, et fac quod, vis.*" He that loves another is careful not to give him the least displeasure, and studies to do everything in his power to please him. Hence, also, the soul that loves God abhors as death the smallest offence against His Divine Majesty, and endeavours to the best of her ability to please Him.

Let it be remembered that perfect charity consists in loving God for His own sake. To love God as the Author of our felicity is the love of *concupiscence*, which, strictly speaking, belongs not to charity, but to hope; to love God because He deserves to be loved, because He is Infinite Goodness, is the love of *friendship*, or true charity. But it is necessary to observe that hope is in no way opposed, nor any obstacle to perfect charity. In admitting a state of charity that excluded all hope the Bishop of Cambrai fell into an error which was condemned. We love God, because on account of His perfections He deserves to be loved, and we would love Him though there were no reward for loving Him; but since He wishes to give us a reward, and even commands us to hope for it, we are bound to hope for it and to desire it. Besides, to desire Paradise in order to possess God, and to love Him

better, is true and perfect charity; for eternal glory is the consummation of love. There the soul, entirely forgetful of herself, and divested of all self-love, loves God with all her strength, and with a most pure love; it is thus that the Saints in bliss happily lose themselves in God.

If we knew that in an earthly kingdom there was a prince, beautiful, holy, and learned, kind and merciful, surely he would win our affection, though he had conferred no favour upon us. But what are the amiable qualities of such a prince compared with the perfections of God? God possesses all perfections, and possesses them in an infinite degree. He has all the qualities that can render Him amiable: He is infinite goodness, infinite beauty, infinite wisdom, and infinite mercy. Hence His goodness of itself merits all our love. In the *Lives* of the Fathers of the Desert it is related that in the desert there were two monks who were brothers; to one of them the devil said that the other was doomed to perdition. The simple monk believed the fiend and was greatly afflicted. Being asked one day the cause of his affliction, he answered that it was revealed to him that his brother was doomed to hell. He then humbly answered: "If such be the will of the Lord, may it be forever blessed; but still I will love Him to the utmost of my power in this life, for I love Him neither through fear of hell, nor through the hope of Heaven, but only because He deserves to be loved." On the following night an Angel appeared to the deluded monk and told him that his brother's name was written among the number of the Elect.

We should, therefore, love God because He deserves to be loved on account of His infinite perfections. We should love Him at least through gratitude for the love that He has borne us.

If the affections of all men, of all the Angels, and of all the Saints, were united together, they would not equal the smallest part of the love that God bears to a single soul. St. John Chrysostom says that God loves us more than we love ourselves. I, says God Himself to each of us, have loved you from eternity, and through pure love have drawn you out of nothing, and have placed you in this world. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love.* (Jer. xxxi. 3). Our parents were the first to love us in this world; but they loved us only after they had known us; but God loved

us before we had existence. Our fathers or mothers were not yet born, and God loved us; the world was not yet created, and God loved us; and how long before the creation of the world did He love us? Perhaps a thousand years or a thousand ages? It is useless to multiply years and ages; for God has loved us as long as He has been God; He has loved us as long as He has loved Himself. Hence the holy virgin St. Agnes had reason to say: "I am prevented by another Lover." When the world and creatures sought her love, she answered: No, I cannot love you; since my God has been the first to love me, it is but just that I consecrate my whole heart to Him alone.

Our God, then, has loved us as long as He has been God; and through pure love has drawn us out of nothing; and among so many possible beings that He could, but never will create, He has chosen us and has placed us in this world. For the love of us, He has also created so many other beautiful creatures--the heavens, the hills, the seas, the fountains, and all other creatures that are on this earth.

### **Evening Meditation**

#### *JESUS PRAYS IN THE GARDEN.*

##### I.

Jesus, knowing that the hour of His Passion had now come, after having washed the feet of His disciples and instituted the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, --wherein He left us His whole Self-- goes to the Garden of Gethsemani, whither He knew already His enemies would come to take Him. He there betakes Himself to prayer, and lo! He finds Himself assailed by a great dread, by a great repugnance, and by a great sadness: *He began to fear and to be heavy, and to grow sorrowful.* (Mark xiv. and Matt. xxvi.). There came upon Him, first, a great dread of the bitter death which He would have to suffer on Calvary, and of all the desolations by which it would be accompanied. During the actual course of His Passion, the scourges, the thorns, the nails, and the rest of His tortures came upon Him but one at a time; whereas, in the Garden, they all came upon Him at the same time, crowding into His memory in order to torment Him. For His love of us He embraced them all; but in embracing them, He trembles and is in agony: *Being in an agony, he prayed the longer.*



(Luke xxii. 43).

There comes upon Him, moreover, a great repugnance to all He has now to suffer; so that He prays His Father to deliver Him from it: *My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass away from me.* (Matt. xxvi. 39). He prayed thus to teach us that in our tribulations we may indeed beg of God to deliver us from them; but we ought at the same time to refer ourselves to His will, and to say, as Jesus then said: *Not, however, as I will, but as thou wilt.* Yes, my Jesus, Thy will, and not mine, be done. I embrace all the crosses that Thou wilt send me. Thou, innocent as Thou art, hast suffered so much for love of me; it is but just that I who am a sinner, and deserving of hell, should suffer for love of Thee that which Thou dost ordain.

## II.

There came upon Him, likewise, a sadness so great, that it would have been enough to cause Him to die, had He not, of Himself, kept death away, in order to die for us after having suffered more: *My soul is sorrowful even unto death.* (Mark xiv. 34). This great sadness was occasioned by the sight of the future ungratefulness of men, who, instead of corresponding to so great a love on His part, would offend Him by so many sins, the sight of which caused Him to sweat streams of Blood: *And his sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground.* (Luke xxii. 44). So, then, O my Jesus, it is not the executioners, the scourges, the thorns, or the Cross, that have been so cruel: the cruelty lies in my sins, which afflicted Thee so much in the Garden. Do Thou give me, then, a share of that sorrow and abhorrence which Thou didst experience in the Garden, that so, even to my death, I may weep bitterly for the offence that I have given Thee. I love Thee, O my Jesus: do Thou receive with kindness a sinner who wishes to love Thee. Recommend me, O Mary, to this Thy Son, Who is in affliction and sadness for love of me.

## Monday in Passion Week

(The Feast of St. Joseph)

March 19th

## Morning Meditation

*THE GLORIOUS DEATH OF ST. JOSEPH*

*Pretiosa in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum ejus!* Joseph had the happiness to die in the arms of Jesus and Mary. How could death be painful to him who died in the arms of Life? The devout clients of St. Joseph should hope with confidence that, at their death, the Saint will visit them accompanied by Jesus and Mary, to help them to die happily.

I.

*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.* (Ps. cxv. 15). Consider that St. Joseph, after having faithfully served Jesus and Mary, arrived at the end of life in the house of Nazareth. There, surrounded by Angels, assisted by Jesus Christ, the King of Angels, and by Mary, his spouse, who placed themselves one at each side of his poor bed, in this sweet and noble company, filled with the peace of Paradise, he departed this miserable life.

The presence of such a spouse, and of such a Son, a name by which the Redeemer condescended to call himself, rendered the death of Joseph exceedingly sweet and precious. How could death be painful to him who died in the arms of Life? Who shall ever be able to explain or understand the pure sweetness, the consolations, the blessed hopes, the acts of resignation, the flames of charity, which the words of Eternal Life, coming alternately from the lips of Jesus and Mary, breathed into the soul of Joseph at the end of his life? There is, then, great probability in the opinion of St. Francis de Sales, that St. Joseph died of the pure love for God.

My holy Patriarch, now that thou dost rejoice in Heaven on a glorious throne, near thy beloved Jesus Who was subject to thee on earth, have pity on me who am still living in the midst of so many enemies, devils and bad passions, that continually strive to rob me of the peace of God. Ah, through the grace given thee on earth of enjoying the continual society of Jesus and Mary, obtain for me the grace to live always united with God, by resisting the assaults of hell, and to die loving Jesus and Mary, that I may be able one day to enjoy their company with thee in the kingdom of bliss.

II.

Such, then, was the death of St. Joseph, all placid and sweet, free from anguish and fear; because his life was always holy.

They who have offended God, and merited hell, cannot expect to die such a death. But great, indeed, will be the comfort of those who, at the hour of death, shall be protected by St. Joseph, who, since a God was once obedient to him, has power to command the devils, will drive them away, and hinder them from tempting his clients in their last moments. Happy the soul that shall then be assisted by this great advocate, who, on account of having died with the assistance of Jesus and Mary, and of having preserved the infant Jesus from the dangers of death by his flight into Egypt, has received the privilege of being the protector of a good death, and of delivering his dying clients from the danger of eternal death.

My holy protector, thou hadst a just claim to so holy a death, because thy entire life was holy. I justly merit an unhappy death, because I have deserved it by my wicked life. But if thou dost defend me I shall not be lost. Thou hast been not only a great friend of my Judge, but thou hast also been His guardian and protector. If thou wilt recommend me to Jesus, He will not know how to condemn me. I choose thee, after Mary, for my principal advocate and protector. I promise to honour thee every day by some special devotion, and by placing myself under thy protection. I am unworthy of being thy servant; but through the love which thou dost bear to Jesus and Mary, accept me for thy perpetual servant. Through the sweet company of Jesus and Mary, which thou didst enjoy during life, protect me during my whole life, that I may never be separated from God by losing His grace. And through the assistance which Jesus and Mary gave thee at death, protect me at the hour of my death, that, dying in the company of thee, of Jesus, and of Mary, I may one day go to thank thee in Paradise, and in thy company to praise and love thy God for ever.

### **Spiritual Reading**

*EXHORTATION TO EXCITE SOULS TO DEVOTION TOWARDS THE GREAT ST. JOSEPH*

The example of Jesus Christ Who wished to honour St. Joseph so much, and to be subject to him on earth, ought to inflame all with a fervent devotion towards this great Saint. As soon as the Eternal Father gave on earth His own place to

St. Joseph, Jesus always regarded him as a father, and always respected and obeyed him for the space of thirty years. *And*, says St. Luke, *he was subject to them*. (Luke ii. 51). These words of the Evangelist mean that during all this time the sole occupation of the Redeemer was to obey Mary and Joseph. To Joseph, as the head of that little Family, belonged the office of commanding, and to Jesus, as a subject, the duty of obedience. Jesus did not take a step, perform an action, take food or rest; but in obedience to the directions of Joseph. To St. Bridget God made the following revelation: "Thus My Son was so obedient, that when Joseph would say do this or do that, He instantly did it." And John Gerson says: "He often prepares the meat and drink, washes the vessels, carries water from the fountain, and sweeps the house." The humility of Jesus in obeying Joseph shows that he is superior in dignity to all the Saints except the Divine Mother. Hence, a learned author has justly said "Men should pay great honour to him whom the King of kings wished to raise to such a height." Hence, Jesus Himself recommended St. Margaret of Cortona to cherish a particular devotion to St. Joseph, because he had taken care of the Saviour during His life.

I abstain from relating here the innumerable examples of persons devoted to St. Joseph for whom he obtained great graces. They who wish for information on this subject may read the work of Father Patrignani, entitled *The Devout Servant of St. Joseph*. It is enough to state what St. Teresa says in the sixth chapter of her *Life*: "I do not remember to have asked any favour from him he did not grant. The narration of the many graces God bestowed on me, and of the dangers, corporal as well as spiritual, from which He has delivered me, through this Saint, would excite wonder. The Lord appears to have given power to the other Saints to assist us in a single necessity; but experience shows that this Saint gives aid in all. The Lord gives us to understand that, as He wished to be subject to St. Joseph on earth, so in Heaven He does whatever the Saint asks. This, others also whom I advised to recommend themselves to him, have learned by experience. I should wish to persuade all to be devoted to this Saint, because I have long experience of the great favours which he obtains from God. I have not known any soul particularly

devoted to this Saint that did not always advance in virtue. For many years I have on his Festival asked a particular favour, and I have always obtained it. I ask, for God's sake, that they who do not believe me will at least make a trial of this devotion. I cannot imagine that favours are not granted to St. Joseph in return for the helps which he gave on earth to the Mother and the Son."

In fine, St. Bernardine of Sienna says that we ought to be persuaded that our Lord, Who respected St. Joseph on earth as His father, will refuse him nothing in Heaven; but will, on the contrary, most abundantly grant his petitions.

As we all must die, all should be devout to St. Joseph in order to obtain the grace of a good death. All the world acknowledges him as the advocate of the dying and as the Patron of a good death; and for three reasons: first, because Jesus Christ has loved him not only as a friend, but as a father, and therefore his intercession is far more powerful than that of the other Saints. John Gerson says that, with Jesus Christ, the prayers of St. Joseph have in a certain manner the force of a command. Secondly, because St. Joseph has great power against the devils who will assail us at the end of our life. In return for having saved Him from the snares of Herod, Jesus Christ has given St. Joseph the particular privilege of protecting the dying against the snares of Lucifer. Thirdly, because St. Joseph, even on account of the assistance which he received at death from Jesus and Mary, has a privilege of obtaining for his servants a sweet and holy death. Hence, if they invoke him at death, he will come to strengthen them, and will bring with him the assistance of Jesus and Mary.

Of this there are many examples, but I shall relate only the following:

Boverius relates, that, in the year 1541, Brother Alexius Vigeveno, a Capuchin lay-brother, at the hour of death entreated the brethren to light certain candles. They asked why he made such a request. Because, replied Alexius, Joseph and most holy Mary will soon come to visit me. Scarcely had he said this, when he exclaimed: "Behold St. Joseph and the Queen of Heaven! My Fathers, kneel down and welcome them!" After these words he placidly expired, on the 19th of March, the day consecrated to the honour of St. Joseph.

Patrignani relates, in the work mentioned above, that in honour of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, a merchant in the city of Valencia was accustomed every year to invite to dinner on Christmas Day, an old man and a woman that gave suck to her infant. The merchant appeared after death to a person who was praying for him, and said that at the hour of his passage into eternity, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph visited him and said: "During life you received us into your house in the three poor persons whom you invited: we are now come to welcome you into our house." They then conducted him to Heaven.

Besides, in the Franciscan Legends for the 14th of February, we read that the Venerable Sister Pudentiana Zagnoni, who was greatly devoted to St. Joseph, had at death the happiness of seeing the Saint approach her bed with Jesus in his arms. She began to converse with Jesus and Joseph, thanking them for so great a favour, and breathed forth her soul in this most sweet company.

We also find in the History of the Discalced Carmelites, that, when the Venerable Sister Anne of St. Augustine of the order of St. Teresa, was on the point of death, some of the Religious saw her assisted by St. Joseph and St. Teresa, and exulting with joy; and a Religious of another monastery saw her ascending to Heaven between St. Joseph and St. Teresa.

A Religious of the Order of St. Augustine, as Father John Allosa relates, appeared after death to a companion and told him that God preserved him from hell on account of the special devotion which he had for St. Joseph: he then said that the Saint, as the reputed father of Jesus Christ, had great power with Him.

### **Evening Meditation**

*JESUS IS APPREHENDED AND LED BEFORE CAIPHAS.*

I.

The Lord, knowing that the Jews who were coming to take Him were now at hand, rose up from prayer and went to meet them; and so, without reluctance, He lets them take Him, and bind Him: *They took Jesus, and bound him.* (John xviii. 12). O amazement! A God bound as a criminal by His own creatures! Behold, my soul, how some of them seize hold of His hands; others put the handcuffs on Him; and others smite Him; and the innocent Lamb lets Himself be bound and struck at their will,

and says not a word: *He was offered because it was his own will, and opened not his mouth. He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter.* (Is. liii. 7). He neither speaks nor utters a complaint, since He had Himself already offered Himself up to die for us; and, therefore, did that Lamb let Himself be bound and led to death without opening His mouth.

Jesus enters Jerusalem bound. Those who were asleep in their beds, at the noise of the crowd passing by, awake, and inquire who that may be they are taking along in custody; and they are told in reply, "It is Jesus of Nazareth Who has been found out to be an impostor and seducer." They bring Him up before Caiphas, who is pleased at seeing Him, and asks Him about His disciples, and about His doctrine. Jesus replies that He has spoken openly; so that He calls upon the Jews themselves, who were standing around Him, to bear their testimony as to what He has said: *Behold, these know what I have said.* But upon this reply, one of the officials of the court gives Him a blow in the Face, saying: *Answerest thou the high-priest so?* But, O God, how does a reply, so humble and gentle, deserve so great an insult? Ah, my Jesus, Thou dost suffer it all in order to pay the penalty of the insults that I have offered to Thy Heavenly Father.

## II.

The High-priest, in the next place, conjures Him in the Name of God, to say whether He is truly the Son of God? Jesus answers in the affirmative, that such He was; and Caiphas, on hearing this, instead of prostrating himself on the earth to adore his God, rends his garments, and, turning to the other priests, says: *What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, ye have now heard the blasphemy: what think ye?* And they unanimously replied: *He is guilty of death.* And then, as the Evangelists relate, they all began to spit in His Face, and to abuse Him, slapping Him with their hands, and striking Him with their fists; and then, tying a piece of cloth over His face, they turned Him into ridicule, saying, *Prophecy to us, O Christ: who is it that struck thee?* Thus writes St. Matthew (chap. xxvi. 68). And St. Mark writes: *And some began to spit upon him, and to cover his face, and to deal upon him blows, and to say to him: Prophecy. And the servants did smite him with the palms of their hands.* (Mark xiv. 65). Behold Thyself, O my Jesus,

become, upon this night, the butt of the rabble. And how can men see Thee in such humiliation for love of them, and not love Thee? And how have I been able to go so far as to outrage Thee by so many sins, when Thou, O Lord, hast suffered so much for me? Forgive me, O my Love, for I will not displease Thee more. I love Thee, my chiefest Good, and I repent above every other evil of having despised Thee. O Mary, my Mother, pray thy ill-treated Son to pardon me.

## **Tuesday in Passion Week**

### **Morning Meditation**

*GOD DESERVES TO BE LOVED ABOVE EVERYTHING.*

St. Teresa says that it is a great favour God bestows upon a soul when He commands it to love Him. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.* The Venerable Louis de Ponte felt ashamed at saying to God: "O Lord, I love Thee above everything--more than creatures, than all riches, than all honours, than all earthly pleasures." For it seemed to him it was like saying: "My God, I love Thee more than straw and smoke and mire!"

I.

Let us love God since we are called to this love, and let us love Him as He deserves to be loved. God is satisfied when we love Him above all things. Therefore, at least let us say to Him: Yes, O Lord, I love Thee more than all the honours of the world, more than all its riches, more than all my relations and friends; I love Thee more than health, more than my good name, more than knowledge, more than all my comforts; in a word, I love Thee more than everything I possess--more than myself.

And let us further say: "O Lord, I value Thy graces and Thy gifts, but more than all Thy gifts, I love Thyself Who alone art Infinite Goodness, and a Good infinitely amiable, and surpassing every other good. And, therefore, O my God, whatever Thou mayest give me besides Thyself, which is not Thyself, is not sufficient for me. If Thou givest me Thyself, Thou alone art sufficient for me. Let others seek what they will, I will seek nothing but Thee alone, my Love, my All: In Thee alone I find all that I can seek or desire."



The sacred Spouse said that among all things she had chosen to love her Beloved: *My beloved is fair and ruddy and chosen out of thousands.* (Cant. v. 10). And whom shall we choose to love? Among all our friends of this world, where can we find a friend more worthy of love and more faithful than God? And who has loved us more than God? Let us pray, then, and let us pray constantly, "O Lord, draw me after Thee; for if Thou dost not draw me after Thee, I cannot come to Thee."

O Jesus, my Saviour, when will it be that, stripped of every other affection, I may ask and seek for none but Thee. I fain would detach myself from everything; but again and again some importunate affections enter my heart, and draw me away from Thee. Separate me, then, with Thy powerful hand, and make Thyself the one object of all my affections and all my thoughts.

## II.

St. Augustine said that he who has God has everything, and he who has not God has nothing. What does it profit a rich man that he possesses many treasures of gold and jewels, if he lives apart from God? What does it profit a monarch to extend his dominions, if he has not the grace of God? What does it profit a man of letters to understand many sciences and languages, if he knows not how to love his God? What does it profit a general to command an army, if he lives the slave of the devil, and far from God? While David was yet king, but in a state of sin, he walked in his garden, he went to his sports and his other pleasures; but these creatures seemed to say: *Where is thy God?* Wouldst thou seek in us thy happiness? Go, seek God Whom thou has left, for He alone can give thee rest. And thus David confessed that, in the midst of all his delights, he found not peace, and mourned night and day, lamenting that he was without God. *Tears were my bread night and day, while they daily said to me, Where is thy God?* (Ps. xli. 4).

In the midst of the miseries and toils of this world, who can console us better than Jesus Christ? He alone says: *Come to me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.* (Matt. xi. 28). O, the folly of worldlings! One single tear shed for our sins, one aspiration, "My God!" uttered in love, by a soul in a state of grace, gives more joy to a man than a thousand festivities, a

thousand plays, a thousand banquets can bring to a heart that loves the world. I say again, O folly! and a folly, too, which none can remedy when there comes that death, when it is night, as the Gospel says, *The night cometh in which no man can work.* (Jo. ix. 4). Wherefore our Lord warns us to walk while the light favours us; for the night will come, when no man can walk. Let God alone, then, be all our treasure, all our love; and let all our desire be to please God Who will not suffer us to conquer Him in love. He rewards a hundredfold everything that we do to give Him pleasure.

O my God, my only Good! Be Thou the ruling power in my soul; and, as I would choose to love Thee above all things, so do Thou grant that in all things I may prefer Thy will to my own pleasure. O my Jesus, I trust in Thy Blood, that, through the rest of my life I may love none but Thee upon this earth, in order that I may come one day to possess Thee forever in the Kingdom of the Blessed. O holy Virgin, succour me with thy powerful prayers, and take me to kiss thy feet in Paradise.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *OUR OBLIGATION TO LOVE JESUS CHRIST*

God was not content with bestowing rich favours: His love was not satisfied till He gave us Himself. *He hath loved us and delivered himself for us.* (Eph. v. 2). From the ruin caused by sin He took occasion to show His love; accursed sin had robbed us of Divine grace, had closed Paradise against us, and made us the slaves of hell. The Lord could have redeemed us from these evils in many ways; but He chose to come in person on this earth, in order to become Man, to redeem us from eternal death, and to obtain for us the Divine friendship and Heaven, which we had lost, exciting by such a prodigy of love, the astonishment of Heaven and creation. How great the wonder which an earthly monarch would excite were he, through love for a slave, to become a slave, or for the sake of a worm to become a worm! But our wonder should be infinitely greater at the sight of the Son of God humbled so as to become Man, for the love of man: *He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, . . . and in habit found as man* (Phil. ii. 7): at the sight of a God clothed with flesh: *And the word was made flesh.* (Jo. i. 14).

But the wonder increases when we see all that this Son of God has done and suffered for the love of us miserable worms. To save us it would have been enough to give a single drop of His Blood, to have shed a tear, or to have offered a prayer; for a tear or prayer offered to the Eternal Father, by a God-Man, for our salvation, would have been of infinite value, and therefore sufficient to save the world, and an infinite number of worlds. But no; Jesus Christ wished not only to save us, but through the immense love that He bore us, He wished to gain all our love. Hence, to make us understand the extent of His love, He chose a life of pain and ignominy, and a death the most cruel and shameful of all deaths. *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.* (Phil. ii. 8).

O God, had our Saviour not been God, but an equal and a friend, what more could He do than give His life for us? *Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* (Jo. xv. 13). What do you say? Do you believe it? Can you, then, think of loving any other object than Jesus Christ? A certain author says that before the Incarnation of the Word, man might be able to doubt whether God loved him with a tender love; but after the Incarnation and death of Jesus Christ, how is it possible to doubt it? How could He show us greater tenderness of affection than by suffering so many torments, so many insults, and by dying on a Cross? Alas! we have heard of the Incarnation of the Redeemer, of a God born in a stable, of a God scourged, of a God crowned with thorns, and dying on a Cross! O holy Faith enlighten us, and make us understand the excess of love which made our God become Man, and die for the love of us!

But the desire that Jesus Christ had to suffer and die for us should be a subject of still greater astonishment. During His life our Blessed Saviour said: *I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized: and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!* (Luke xii. 50). I am to be baptised with the baptism of My own Blood, not to wash Myself, but to cleanse men from their sins; and how am I straitened until My desire be accomplished! O God! Jesus Christ is not loved by men, because they will not even think of the love that the amiable Redeemer has borne them. How is it possible for a soul that thinks on His love to live without loving

Him? *The charity of Christ presseth us.* (2 Cor. v. 14). St. Paul says that a soul that reflects on the love of Jesus Christ feels itself, as it were, constrained to love Him. In meditating on the Passion of the Saviour, the Saints were inflamed with love, and sometimes broke out into exclamations of wonder and tenderness. "We have seen," exclaims St. Laurence Justinian, "the Author of Wisdom become foolish through excess of love." We have seen a God, as it were, foolish through love for us. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, being one day rapt in an ecstasy, took an image of Jesus crucified into her hands, and cried aloud that He was foolish through love. "Yes, my Jesus," she continued to exclaim, "Thou art foolish through love. I say, and I will always say: O my Jesus, Thou art foolish through love."

Had not Faith assured us of this great Mystery of Redemption, who could have believed that the Creator of the universe should voluntarily suffer and die for His own creatures? O God, if Jesus Christ had not died for us, who among men would dare to ask a God to become man, and save us by His death? Would it not have appeared folly even to think of it? And in reality when the Gentiles heard the Apostles preaching the Death of Jesus Christ, they regarded it as a fable, and, as St. Paul attests, called it incredible folly. *We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness.* (1 Cor. i. 23). Yes, says St. Gregory, it appeared to them folly that the Author of life should die for man. How, said the Gentiles, can we believe that a God Who has need of no one, and is most happy in Himself, should descend from Heaven to earth, assume human flesh, and die for men, His miserable creatures? This would be to believe that a God had become foolish for the love of men. But it is a Truth of Faith that Jesus, the true Son of God, for the love of us, His miserable and ungrateful creatures, has abandoned Himself to torments, to ignominies and to death. *He hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us.* (Eph. v. 2).

And why has He done so? He has done so, says St. Augustine, that man may understand the immense love that God bears him. And, long before, Jesus Himself said: *I am to come to cast fire on the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?* (Luke xii. 49). I have, He says, come on earth to kindle the holy fire of Divine

love, and I only desire to see the hearts of men burning with its blessed flames. In contemplating Jesus in the Garden, captured as a criminal by the soldiers, St. Bernard, turning to his Lord, exclaimed, "My Jesus, what hast Thou to do with cords and chains?" These belong to us slaves and sinners; but Thou art the King of Heaven, Thou art holy. And what has reduced Thee to the condition of a malefactor, the vilest and most wicked among men? And what has effected all this? Love, which is regardless of dignity when there is question of gaining the affection of the beloved. In a word, concludes the Saint, God, Whom no one can conquer, has been conquered by love; His love for man has made Him take human flesh, and consume His Divine life in a sea of sorrows and reproaches. "Love triumphs over God."

In another place the same St. Bernard contemplates our Redeemer condemned to death by Pilate, and asks of Jesus Christ: "Tell me, O my beloved Lord, Who art innocence itself, what evil hast Thou done to merit the barbarous sentence of condemnation to the death of the Cross?" But, adds the Saint, I understand the cause of Thy death; the crime of which Thou art guilty is Thy love. Thy offence is the love Thou hast borne to men; it is this, and not Pilate, that condemns Thee to death, and makes Thee die.

### **Evening Meditation**

*JESUS BEFORE PILATE AND HEROD. BARABBAS IS  
PREFERRED BEFORE HIM.*

I.

The morning being come, they lead Jesus to Pilate, that he may pronounce upon Him the sentence of death, But Pilate is aware that Jesus is innocent, and, therefore he tells the Jews that he can find no reason why he should condemn Him. However, on seeing them obstinate in their desire for His death, he referred Him to the Court of Herod. Herod, on seeing Jesus before him, desired to see some one of the Lord's great miracles, of which he had heard accounts, wrought in his presence. The Lord would not vouchsafe so much as an answer to the questions of that audacious man. Alas, for the poor soul to which God speaks no more! O my Redeemer, such, too, were my deserts, for not having obeyed so many calls of Thine; I deserved that Thou

shouldst not speak to me more, and that Thou shouldst leave me to myself: but no, my Jesus, Thou hast not abandoned me yet. Speak to me, then: *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.* Tell me what Thou desirest of me, for I will do all to please Thee.

Herod, seeing that Jesus gave him no answer, drove Him away from his house in scorn, turning Him into ridicule with all the persons of his court; and, in order to load Him with the greater contempt, he had Him clothed in a white garment, so treating Him like a fool; and thus he sent Him back again to Pilate: *He despised and mocked him, putting on him a white garment, and sent him again to Pilate.* (Luke xxiii. 11). Behold how Jesus, clad in that robe which makes Him a laughing-stock, is borne on along the streets of Jerusalem. O my despised Saviour, this additional wrong, of being treated as a fool, was still wanting to Thee! If, then, the Divine Wisdom is so treated by the world, happy is he who cares nothing for the world's approbation, and desires nothing but to know Jesus crucified, and to love sufferings and contempt, saying, with the Apostle: *For I judged not myself to know any thing among you, but Jesus Christ and him crucified.* (1 Cor. ii. 2).

## II.

The Jews had the right of demanding from the Roman governor the liberation of a criminal on the Feast of the Passover. Pilate, therefore, asked the people which of the two they would wish to have liberated, Jesus or Barabbas: *Whom will you that I release to you, Barabbas or Jesus?* (Matt. xxvii. 17). Barabbas was a wicked wretch, a murderer, a thief, and held in abhorrence by all: Jesus was innocent; but the Jews cried aloud for Barabbas to live, and for Jesus to die. Ah, my Jesus, so too have I said, whenever I deliberately offended Thee for some satisfaction of my own, preferring before Thee that miserable pleasure of mine, and, in order not to lose it, contenting myself to lose Thee, O Infinite Good. But now I love Thee above every other good, and more than my life itself. Have compassion upon me, O God of mercy. And do thou, O Mary, be my advocate.

## Wednesday of Passion Week

### Morning Meditation

*HAPPY IS HE WHO IS FAITHFUL TO GOD IN ADVERSITY.*

Some people think they are beloved of God when all their affairs go prosperously with them and they have no troubles. But St. James says: *Blessed is the man that suffereth temptation; for when he is tried, he will receive the crown of life which God hath promised to them that love him.* The faithfulness of soldiers is tried, not in repose, but in battle.

I.

The faithfulness of soldiers is tried, not in repose, but in battle. This earth is our battlefield, where every one is placed to fight, and to conquer, in order to be saved: if he conquers not, he is lost forever. Therefore, said holy Job, *Every day I now fight; I wait until my change cometh.* (Job. xiv. 14). Job suffered in struggling with many a foe, but he comforted himself with the hope that, in conquering and rising from the dead, he would change his whole state. Of this change St. Paul spoke, and rejoiced in speaking of it: *The dead shall rise again incorruptible, and we shall be changed.* (1 Cor. xv. 52). Our state is changed in Heaven, which is a place not of toil, but of rest, not of fear, but of security; not of sorrow or weariness, but of gladness and joy eternal. With the hope, then, of so great a joy, let us inspire ourselves, and fight till death, and never give ourselves up conquered to our enemies *until our change comes*; until the end of our struggle is attained, and we possess a blessed eternity.

*The patient man will endure for the time, and then shall gladness be restored to him.* Blessed is he who suffers for God in this life; he suffers *for the time*, but his joy will be eternal in the country of the Blessed. This will end the persecutions, the temptations, the infirmities, the annoyances, and all the miseries of this life; and God will give us a life full of satisfaction which will never end. Now is the time for pruning the vine, and for cutting off everything that hinders its growth towards the promised land of Heaven. But the cutting off produces pain, so that we have need of patience; and then comes the restoration of gladness,

when the more we have suffered, the more we shall be filled with consolations. God is faithful; and to him who suffers on earth for His love's sake, with resignation, He promises that He Himself will be his reward; a reward infinitely greater than our sufferings: *Behold, I am thy exceeding great reward.* (Gen. xv. i.).

Nevertheless, before we receive the crown of eternal life, the Lord wills that we should be tried with sufferings. *Blessed is the man that suffereth temptation; for, when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love him.* (James i. 12). Blessed, then, is he who is faithful to God in adversity. Some people think they are beloved of God when all their affairs go prosperously, and they have no troubles; but they complain because God does not try the patience and faithfulness of His servants by prosperity, but by adversity, in order to give them that crown which fadeth not away, as all the crowns of this life do fade away. This will be a crown of eternal glory, as St. Peter writes: *Ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.* (1 Peter v. 4). To whom, then, is this crown promised? St. James says: *He shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love him.* (i. 12). God has promised it again and again to those that love Him, because Divine love makes us fight with courage and win the victory.

## II.

To the love of God we must also join humility. The Preacher says, *Gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation.* (Ecclus. ii. 5). It is in humiliation that Saints are revealed, in which it is made known whether they are gold or lead. Such a one has been counted a Saint; but when he receives an injury from another, he is all in agitation; he complains of it to everyone; he says he will make him repent of it. This is a sign of what he is; it is a sign that he is lead. The Lord said, *In thy humility have patience.* (Ecclus. ii. 4). The proud man, whatever humiliation he receives, considers it a great injustice, and therefore cannot endure it; but the humble man, accounting himself deserving of every evil treatment, suffers all with patience. Let him who has committed a mortal sin cast a glance upon the hell that he has deserved, and thus he will suffer with patience every contempt and every pain.



Let us, then, love God, and be humble; and whatever we do, let us do it, not to please ourselves, but only to please God. O cursed self-love, which intrudes itself in all our works. Even in our spiritual exercises, in meditation, in works of penance, and in all our pious works, it goes about seeking its own interests. Few are the devout souls who do not fall into this defect: *Who shall find a valiant woman? Far and from the uttermost coasts, is the price of her.* (Prov. xxxi. 10). Where shall we find a soul so brave that, despoiled of every passion, and of all concern for its own interests, continues to love Jesus Christ in the midst of sighs, pains, desolation of spirit, and weariness of life? Solomon said that these are gems of great price; they come from the very ends of the world, and therefore are most rare.

O my crucified Jesus, I am one who, even in my devotions, have been seeking my own pleasure and satisfaction, all so unlike Thee, Who, through love of me, passed a life of sorrow and deprived of every alleviation. Give me Thy help that henceforward I may seek only Thy pleasure and Thy glory. I would love Thee without any other reward; but I am weak, and Thou must give me strength to accomplish this. Behold, I am Thine! Dispose of me as Thou pleasest. Make me love Thee and I ask for nothing more. O Mary, my Mother, by thy intercession, obtain for me fidelity to God. Amen.

## **Spiritual Reading**

### *OUR OBLIGATION TO LOVE JESUS CHRIST*

O Lord, exclaimed holy Job, *what is man, that thou shouldst magnify him? or why dost thou set thy heart upon him?* (Job vii. 17). My God, what is man whom Thou hast so highly honoured? What benefit has he ever conferred upon Thee that Thy whole Heart should, as it were, be occupied in seeking his welfare, and in endeavouring to make known to him the affection Thou dost bear him? St. Thomas says that God loved man "as if man were His God; as if without him He could not be happy"; as if God could not be happy unless man were also happy ... And had you been the God of Jesus Christ, what more could He have done for you than spend so many years in pains and toils, and afterwards submit to a cruel death? Had Jesus been compelled to save His own Father's life, what more could He have done than He has

done for you? But, O God, where is your gratitude? Had one of your servants suffered what your Jesus has endured for your salvation, could you ever forget his sufferings, or live without loving him? Ah! at the thoughts of the death of Jesus Christ each of us should be, as it were, foolish through love for Him, and should exclaim with St. Paschal: "My Love has been crucified for me! My Love has died for me!"

But what we have not as yet done, we may now do. God gives us time to do it. Jesus has died for us, that by His love for us He might gain the entire dominion of our hearts. *To this end*, says St. Paul, *Christ died that he might be the Lord both of the dead and of the living*. (Rom. xiv. 9). Jesus died that we might live no longer to ourselves, but only to that God Who has given His life for us. *Christ died for all*, says the same Apostle, *that they also who live may not now live to themselves, but unto him who died for them*. (2 Cor. v. 15). Contemplating the death of Jesus Christ, and the love with which He died for men, the Saints esteemed it little to forfeit, for His sake, property, honours, and life. How many grandees, how many kings and queens and empresses, have renounced their kingdoms to shut themselves up in a cloister, and live only for the love of Jesus Christ! How many millions of Martyrs have esteemed themselves happy to be able to sacrifice their lives for Him amid the most horrible torments! How many young and noble virgins, renouncing the nuptials of the first monarchs of the earth, have gone with joy to death to make some return of love for the love of a God Who died for the love of them.

And do you think that you have as yet done anything for the love of Jesus Christ? What proof or token have you as yet given of the love that you bear Him? It is certain that as He has died for the Saints, for St. Lucy, for St. Agatha, for St. Agnes, so He has also died for you. Consider, moreover, the special graces He has bestowed on you, and that He has withheld from so many of your companions who had as good a claim to them as you had. How many noble ladies, how many princesses, have been born among infidels and heretics, and live miserably in a state of perdition, bereft of the Sacraments, of sermons, and of the other helps necessary for salvation? And to you He has given the grace to be born in the bosom of the true Church. He has also given

wealth to your parents, that you might have more opportunities and means of acquiring eternal salvation. He has also chosen you from among so many of your companions, whom He has left in the midst of the dangers of the world; from these dangers He has rescued you and perhaps against your inclination, and assists you continually by His lights and interior calls, by the Sacraments, by sermons, by the example of the good, and by so many other helps to salvation. Consider also the many mercies He has shown you, in pardoning so many offences. It was enough for Him that you repented and asked forgiveness: He instantly pardoned you; you ungratefully offended Him again, and He with the same love pardoned you, and instead of inflicting chastisements on your multiplied offences, He has multiplied graces, lights, calls, and consolations. And behold, at this moment, while you read this book, He continues to call you to His love. What are your thoughts? What resolutions do you make? What do you wait for? Perhaps you intend to wait till the Lord calls you no more, and abandons you.

### **Evening Meditation**

#### *JESUS IS SCOURGED AT THE PILLAR.*

I.

*Then Pilate, therefore, took Jesus, and scourged him.* (John xix. 1). O thou unjust judge, thou hast declared Him innocent, and then thou dost condemn Him to so cruel and so ignominious a punishment! Behold, now, my soul, how, after this unjust decree, the executioners seize hold of the Divine Lamb; they take Him to the pretorium, and bind Him with ropes to the pillar. O ye blessed cords that bound the hands of my sweet Redeemer to that pillar, bind likewise this wretched heart of mine to His Divine Heart, that so I may, from this day forth, neither seek for, nor desire, anything but what He doth wish.

Behold how they now lay hold of the scourges, and, at a given sign, begin to strike, in every part, that Sacred Flesh, which at first assumes a livid appearance, and then is covered all over with Blood, that flows from every pore. Alas, the scourges and the executioners' hands are all now dyed in Blood; and with Blood is the ground all drenched. But, O God, through the violence of the blows, not only does the Blood, but pieces of the

very Flesh of Jesus Christ go flying through the air. That Divine Body is already but one mass of Wounds; and yet do those barbarians continue to add blow to blow and pain to pain. And all this while, what is Jesus doing? He speaks not; He complains not; but patiently endures that great torture in order to appease the Divine justice, that was wroth against us. *He shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and he shall not open his mouth.* (Is. liii. 7--Acts viii.). Go quickly, O my soul, go and wash thyself in that Divine Blood. My beloved Saviour, I behold Thee all torn in pieces for me; no longer, therefore, can I doubt that Thou dost love me, and love me greatly, too. Every Wound of Thine is a sure token on Thy part of Thy love, which with too much reason demands my love. Thou, O my Jesus, dost, without reserve, give me Thy Blood; it is but just that I without reserve should give Thee all my heart. Do Thou, then, accept of it, and make it to be ever faithful.

## II.

O my God, had Jesus Christ not suffered more than a single blow for love of me, I ought yet to have been burning with love for Him, saying, A God hath been willing to be struck for me! But no: He contented not Himself with a single blow; but, to pay the penalty due to my sins, He was willing to have His whole Body torn to shreds, as Isaias had already foretold: *He was bruised for our sins* (Is. liii. 5); and that even until He looked like a leper covered with wounds from head to foot: *And we thought him, as it were, a leper.* (Is. liii. 4). While, then, O my soul, Jesus was being scourged, He was thinking of thee, and offering to God those bitter sufferings of His, in order to deliver thee from the eternal scourges of hell. O God of love, how have I been able to live so many years, in time past, without loving Thee? O ye Wounds of Jesus, wound me with love towards a God Who has loved me so much! O Mary, O Mother of graces, do thou gain for me this love!

## Thursday of Passion Week

(March 25, Feast of the Annunciation)

### Morning Meditation

*"HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN AND WAS MADE*

*MAN SUFFERED AND WAS BURIED."*

God has created us to love Him in this life, and afterwards to enjoy Him in the next; but we ungratefully rebelled against God by sinning, and refused to obey Him, and therefore we have been deprived of Divine grace, and excluded from Paradise, and besides, condemned to the eternal pains of hell. Behold us, therefore, all lost; but this God, moved by compassion for us, resolved to send on earth a Redeemer Who should repair our great ruin.

But who shall this Redeemer be? Shall it be an Angel, or a Seraph? No; to show us the immense love that He bears us, God sends us His own Son: *God sent his son in the likeness of sinful flesh.*

I.

O prodigy! O excess of the love of God--a God became Man! Did a prince of this world, seeing a dead worm, wish to restore it to life; and were he told that to do so it would be necessary that he should himself become a worm, enter its dwelling, and there at the price of his life make it a bath in his own blood, and that thus only could its life be restored, what would the reply of such a prince be? "No," he would say: "what does it signify to me whether the worm comes to life again or not, that I should shed my blood and die to restore its life?" Of what import was it to God that men should be lost, since they had merited it by their sins? Would His happiness have been diminished thereby?

No, indeed; it was because God's love for men was so truly great that He came upon earth and humbled Himself to take flesh from a Virgin; and taking the form of a servant became Man, --that is, He made Himself a worm like us: *He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man.* (Phil. ii. 7). He is God like the Father --immense, omnipotent, sovereign, and in all things equal to the Father; but when He was made Man in the womb of Mary He became a creature--a servant, weak, and less than the Father. Behold Him thus humbled in the womb of Mary; there He accepted the command of His Father, Who willed that after three-and-thirty years of suffering He should die cruelly executed on a Cross: *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.* (Phil. ii. 8).

Behold Him as a Child in the womb of His Mother. He

there conformed Himself in all things to the will of His Father, and, inflamed with love for us, He offered Himself willingly: *He was offered because it was his own will.* (Is. liii. 7). He offered Himself to suffer all for our salvation. He then foresaw the scourging, and offered His body; He foresaw the thorns, and offered His head; He foresaw the nails, and offered His hands and feet; He foresaw the Cross, and offered His life. And why was He pleased to suffer so much for us ungrateful sinners? It was because He loved us: *Who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.* (Apoc. i. 5). He saw us soiled with sin, and prepared us a bath in His own Blood, that we might thereby be cleansed, and become dear to God: *Christ also hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us.* (Eph. v. 2). He saw us condemned to death, and prepared to die Himself, that we might live; and seeing us cursed by God on account of our sins, He was pleased to charge Himself with the curses which we had deserved, that we might be saved: *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.* (Gal. iii. 13).

I thank Thee, O my God, on behalf of all mankind; for if Thou hadst not thought of saving us, I and all the world would have been lost forever! I love Thee, O my dear Jesus: Thou art my Hope and my Love!

## II.

St. Francis de Paula, then, indeed had reason in considering the mystery of a God made Man and dying through love for us, to exclaim: "O charity! O charity! O charity!" Did not Faith assure us of all that the Son of God did and suffered for us, who could ever believe it? Ah, the love which Jesus Christ had and has for us indeed drives and forces us to love Him, *for the charity of Christ presseth us.* (2 Cor. v. 14). Tender, indeed, are the sentiments expressed by St. Francis de Sales on these words of St. Paul. He says: "Knowing, then, that Jesus, Who was truly God, has loved us, and loved us so much as to die, and to die on a Cross, for us, is not this to have our hearts under a wine-press, and to feel them forced and so strongly pressed, that love issues from them by the very violence with which they are pressed; and the greater this violence is with which they are pressed, the more sweet and amiable is it."

But here St. John laments: *He came into his own, and his own received him not.* (Jo. i. 11). Why did the only-begotten Son of God become Man on earth, suffer and die for us, if it was not that we might love Him? "God became Man," says Hugo of St. Victor, "that man might love Him more affectionately." "Jesus Christ," says St. Augustine, "came on earth principally that man might know how much He loved him." And if a God loves us so much, He requires, with justice, that we should love Him. "He made known His love," says St. Bernard, "that He might experience thine." He has shown us the greatness of the love He bears us, that He may obtain our love at least out of gratitude.

O Eternal Word, Thou camest from Heaven on earth to become Man and to die for man, that Thou mightest be loved by man; how is it, then, that among men there are so few who love Thee? Ah, infinite beauty, amiable infinity, worthy of infinite love, behold me; I am one of those ungrateful creatures whom Thou hast loved so much, but have not yet known how to love Thee; nay even, instead of loving Thee, I have greatly offended Thee. But Thou didst become man and die to pardon sinners who detest their sins, and wish to love Thee. Lord, behold me; see, I am a sinner, it is true; but I repent of the crimes I have committed against Thee, and I desire to love Thee; pity me.

And thou, O holy Virgin, who by thy humility didst become worthy to be the Mother of God, and as such art also our Mother; the refuge, the advocate of sinners, do thou pray for me, recommend me to this Son Who loves thee so much, and refuses nothing that thou askest Him. Tell Him to pardon me; tell Him to give me His holy love; tell Him to save me; that with thee I may one day love Him face to face in Paradise. Amen.

### **Spiritual Reading**

*MARY, BY HER HUMILITY, BECAME THE MOTHER OF HER CREATOR.*

God, having determined to manifest to the world His immense goodness, by humbling Himself so far as to become Man, to redeem lost man, and having to choose a virgin Mother, sought amongst virgins the one who was most humble. He found that the Blessed Virgin Mary surpassed all others in humility, as greatly as she surpassed them in sanctity, and therefore chose

her for His Mother. *He hath regarded the humility of his handmaid.* "She did not say," remarks St. Laurence Justinian, "He hath regarded the virginity, or the innocence, but only the humility of His handmaid." And before him St. Jerome had said, that "God chose her to be His Mother more on account of her humility than of all her other sublime virtues."

Now we understand that Mary was the one who was spoken of in the sacred Canticles under the name of spikenard, a small and lowly plant, which, by its sweet odour, drew the King of Heaven, the Eternal Word, from the bosom of His Father, into her womb, there to clothe Himself with human flesh: *While the king was at his repose, my spikenard sent forth the odour thereof* (Cant. i. 11), which St. Antoninus thus explains: "Spikenard, from its being a small and lowly herb, was a type of Mary, who in the highest degree gave forth the sweet odour of her humility." Before him St. Bernard had said: "She was indeed worthy to be looked upon by the Lord, whose beauty the King so greatly desired, and by whose most sweet odour He was drawn from the eternal repose of His Father's bosom." So that God, attracted by the humility of the Blessed Virgin, when He became Man for the redemption of man, chose her for His Mother. He would not, however, for the greater glory and merit of His Mother, become her Son without her consent. "He would not take flesh from her," says the Abbot William, "unless she gave it." Behold, whilst this humble little virgin was in her poor cottage sighing and entreating the Lord, as it was revealed to St. Elizabeth of Hungary, that He would send the world its Redeemer, the Archangel Gabriel came, as the bearer on the part of God, of the great embassy, and saluted her: *Hail, full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women.* (Luke i., 28). Hail, O Mary full of grace; for thou art rich in that grace which surpasses the grace given to all men and Angels. The Lord is with thee, and always was with thee, assisting thee with His grace. Thou art blessed amongst all women for all others fell under the curse of sin; but thou, as the Mother of the Blessed One, wast preserved from every stain; and always wast, and always wilt be blessed.

What answer does the humble Mary give to a salutation so full of praises? She does not reply; but, astonished at it, she



is confounded and troubled: *who having heard was troubled at his saying, and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be.* (Luke, i 29). Why was she troubled? Was it that she feared an illusion? No, for she was sure that it was a celestial spirit who spoke to her. Her modesty was perhaps troubled at the sight of an Angel under human form, as some have thought? No, the text is clear, *she was troubled at his saying*: to which Eusebius Emisenu adds, "not at his appearance, but at what he said." This trouble, then, proceeded entirely from her humility and was caused by the great praises, which were far from her own humble estimate of herself. Hence the more she heard herself praised, the more deeply did she enter into the depth of her own nothingness. St. Bernardine of Sienna writes, that "had the Angel said, 'O Mary, thou art the greatest sinner in the world,' her astonishment would not have been so great; the sound of such high praises filled her with fear."

### **Evening Meditation**

*JESUS IS CROWNED WITH THORNS, AND TREATED AS A MOCK KING.*

#### **I.**

When the soldiers had finished the scourging of Jesus Christ, they all assembled together in the pretorium, and, stripping His own clothes off Him again, in order to turn Him into ridicule, and to make Him a mock king, they put upon Him an old ragged mantle of a reddish colour, to represent the royal purple; in His hand a reed to represent a sceptre; and upon His Head a bundle of thorns, to represent a crown, but fashioned like a helmet, so as to fit close upon the whole of His Sacred Head. *Stripping him, they put a scarlet cloak about him, and, plating a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand.* (Matt. xxvii. 28, 29). And when the thorns, by the pressure of their hands alone, could not be made to penetrate deeper into that Divine Head which they were piercing, with the self-same reed, and with all their might, they battered down that barbarous crown: *And spitting upon him, they took the reed, and struck his head.* (Matt. xxvii. 30). O ungrateful thorns, do you thus torture your Creator? But what thorns, what thorns? You, ye wicked thoughts of mine; it is you that have pierced the Head of my Redeemer.

I detest, O my Jesus, and I abhor, more than I do death itself, those evil consentings by which I have so often grieved Thee, my God, Who art so good. But since Thou dost make me know how much Thou hast loved me, Thee alone will I love, Thee alone.

## II.

O my God, how the Blood is now streaming down from that pierced Head over the Face and the Breast of Jesus! And Thou, my Saviour, dost not even utter a complaint at such wicked cruelties. Thou art the King of Heaven and of earth; but now, my Jesus, Thou art brought down so low as to appear before us as a King of derision and of sorrows, being made the laughing-stock of all Jerusalem. But the prophecy of Jeremias had to be fulfilled, that Thou wouldst one day have Thy fill of sorrows and shame: *He will give his cheek to the smiter, he will be satiated with reproaches.* (Lam. iii. 30). O Jesus, my Love, in time past I have despised Thee; but now I prize Thee, and I love Thee with all my heart, and I desire to die for love of Thee.

But no; these men for whom Thou art suffering have not yet their fill of torturing and mocking Thee, O Jesus! After having thus tortured Thee and dressed Thee up as a mock king, they bend their knee before Thee and scornfully address Thee: *Hail to thee, O King of the Jews!* And then, with shouts of laughter, they deal out more blows upon Thee, thus redoubling the dreadful anguish of the Head already pierced by the thorns: *And bowing the knee before him, they derided him saying: Hail, King of the Jews; and they gave him blows.* (Matt. xxvii. 29, and John xix. 3). Do thou at least go, O my soul, and recognise Jesus for what He is, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; and return thanks to Him, and love Him, now that Thou beholdest Him become, for love of thee, the King of Sorrows. O my Lord, keep not in Thy remembrance the griefs I have caused Thee. I now love Thee more than myself. Thou only dost deserve all my love, and, therefore, Thee only do I wish to love. I fear, on account of my weaknesses; but it is for Thee to give me the strength to execute my desire. And thou, too, O Mary, must help me by thy prayers.

## Friday in Passion Week

(Feast of Our Lady of Dolours)

## Morning Meditation

### THE MOTHER OF DOLOURS

In order to show us what the Martyrs suffered, they are represented with the instruments of their Martyrdom: St. Andrew with a cross; St. Paul with a sword. Mary is represented with her dead Son in her arms, for He alone was the cause of her Martyrdom; compassion for Him made her Queen of Martyrs.

#### I.

St. Laurence Justinian considers Jesus on the road to Calvary with His Cross on His shoulders, turning to His Mother and saying: "Alas, My own dear Mother, whither goest thou? What a scene thou art going to witness! Thou wilt be agonised by My sufferings, and I by thine." But the loving Mother would follow Him all the same, though she knew that by being present at His death she should have to endure tortures greater than any death. She saw that her Son carried the Cross to be crucified on it, and she also took up the cross of her Dolours and followed her Son to be crucified with Him.

Blessed Amadeus writes that "Mary suffered much more in the Passion of her Son than she would have done had she herself endured it; for she loved her Jesus much more than she loved herself." Hence St. Ildephonsus did not hesitate to assert that "the sufferings of Mary exceeded those of all Martyrs united." St. Anselm, addressing the Blessed Virgin, says: "The most cruel torments inflicted on the holy Martyrs were trifling or as nothing in comparison with thy Martyrdom, O Mary." The same Saint adds: "Indeed, O Lady, in each moment of thy life thy sufferings were such, that thou couldst not have endured them, and wouldst have expired under them, had not thy Son, the source of life, preserved thee." St. Bernardine of Sienna even says, that the sufferings of Mary were such, that had they been divided among all creatures capable of suffering, they would have caused their immediate death. Who, then, can ever doubt that the Martyrdom of Mary was without its equal, and that it exceeded the sufferings of all the Martyrs; since, as St. Antoninus says, "they suffered in the sacrifice of their own lives; but the Blessed Virgin suffered by offering the life of her Son to God, a life which she loved far more than her own."

By this Martyrdom of thy beautiful soul, do thou obtain for me, O Mother of fair love, the forgiveness of the offences I have committed against my beloved Lord and God, and of which I repent with my whole heart. Do thou defend me in temptations, and assist me at the hour of my death, that, saving my soul through the merits of Jesus and thy merits, I may, after this miserable exile, go to Paradise to sing the praises of Jesus and thee for all eternity. Amen.

## II.

The Martyrs suffered under the torments inflicted on them by tyrants, but Our Lord, Who never abandons His servants, always comforted them in the midst of their sufferings. The love of God burning in their hearts rendered all their pains sweet and pleasing to them. So that the greater their love for Jesus Christ, the less did they feel their pains; and, in the midst of them all, the remembrance alone of the Passion of Christ sufficed to console them.

With Mary it was precisely the reverse; for the torments of Jesus were her Martyrdom, and love for Jesus was her only executioner. Here we must repeat the words of Jeremias: *Great as the sea is thy destruction: who shall heal thee?* As the sea is all bitterness, and has not within its bosom a single drop of water which is sweet, so also was the heart of Mary all bitterness, and without the least consolation: *Who shall heal thee?* Her Son alone could console her and heal her wounds; but how could Mary receive comfort in her grief from her crucified Son, since the love she bore Him was the whole cause of her Martyrdom?

"To understand, then, how great was the grief of Mary, we must understand," says Cornelius a Lapide, "how great was the love she bore her Son." But who can ever measure this love? Blessed Amadeus says that "natural love towards Him as her Son, and supernatural love towards Him as her God, were united in the heart of Mary." These two loves were blended into one, and this so great a love, that William of Paris does not hesitate to assert that Mary loved Jesus "as much as it was possible for a pure creature to love Him." So that, as Richard of St. Victor says, "as no other creature ever loved God as much as Mary loved Him, so there never was any sorrow like Mary's sorrow."

My sorrowful Mother, by the merit of that grief which thou didst feel in seeing thy beloved Jesus led to death, obtain me the grace, that I also may bear with patience the crosses God sends me. Happy indeed shall I be, if I only know how to accompany thee with my cross until death. Thou with thy Jesus--and You were both innocent--hast carried a far heavier cross; and shall I, a sinner, who have deserved hell, refuse to carry mine? Ah, Immaculate Virgin, from thee do I hope for help to bear all crosses with patience. Amen.

### **Spiritual Reading**

*MARY, BY HER HUMILITY BECOMES THE MOTHER OF GOD.*

The Blessed Virgin already understood the Sacred Scriptures; she well knew that the time foretold by the Prophets for the coming of the Messiah had arrived; she knew that the Seventy Weeks of Daniel were completed, and that the sceptre of Juda had passed into the hands of Herod, a stranger, according to the prophecy of Jacob; she also knew that the Mother of the Messiah was to be a Virgin. She then heard the Angel give her praises, which it was evident could apply to no other than the Mother of God. May not a thought or doubt have entered her mind, that she was perhaps this chosen Mother? No; her profound humility did not even allow her to have a doubt. Those praises only caused her so great fear, that the Angel himself was obliged to encourage her not to fear, as St. Peter Chrysologus writes: "As Christ was pleased to be comforted by an Angel, so had the Blessed Virgin to be encouraged by one." St. Gabriel said, *Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found grace with God.* (Luke i. 30). As if he had said, Why fearest thou, O Mary? Knowest thou not that God exalts the humble? Thou in thine own eyes art lowly and of no account, and therefore He in His goodness exalts thee to the dignity of being His Mother. *Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus.* (Luke i. 31).

In the meantime the Angel waits to know whether she is willing to be the Mother of God. St. Bernard addresses her, saying: "The Angel awaits thy reply; and we also, O Lady, on whom the sentence of condemnation weighs so heavily, await

the word of mercy." "Behold, O holy Virgin, the price of our salvation, which will be the Blood of that Son now to be formed in thy womb. This price is offered to thee to pay for our sins, and deliver us from death; we shall be instantly delivered, if thou consentest." "Thy Lord Himself desires thy consent; for by it He has determined to save the world. He desires it with an ardour equal to the love with which He has loved thy beauty." "Answer, O sacred Virgin," says St. Augustine, "why delayest thou the salvation of the world, which depends on thy consent?"

But see, Mary already replies to the Angel. *Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done unto me according to thy word.* (Luke i. 38). O admirable answer, which rejoiced Heaven, and brought an immense treasure of good things to the world. An answer which drew the only-begotten Son from the bosom of His eternal Father into this world to become Man; for these words had hardly fallen from the lips of Mary before the *Word was made flesh*: the Son of God became also the Son of Mary. "O powerful *fiat*!" exclaims St. Thomas of Villanova; "O efficacious *fiat*! O *fiat* to be venerated above every other *fiat*!" for with that *fiat* Heaven came down to earth, and earth was raised to Heaven.

Let us now examine Mary's answer more closely: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord.* By this answer the humble Virgin meant: Behold the servant of the Lord, obliged to that which her Lord commands; since He well sees my nothingness, and since all that I have is His, who can say that He has chosen me for any merit of my own? *Behold the handmaid of the Lord.* What merits can a servant have, for which she should be chosen to be the Mother of her Lord? Let not the servant, then, be praised, but the goodness alone of that Lord, Who is graciously pleased to regard so lowly a creature, and make her so great.

"O humility," exclaims the Abbot Guericc, "as nothing in its own eyes, yet sufficiently great for the Divinity! Insufficient for itself, sufficient in the eyes of God to contain Him in her womb, Whom the Heavens cannot contain!" Let us also hear the exclamations of St. Bernard on this subject. He says: "And how, O Lady, couldst thou unite in thy heart so humble an opinion of thyself with so great purity, with such innocence, and the so great a plenitude of grace as thou didst possess?" "Whence this

humility," continues the Saint, "and so great humility, O blessed one?" Lucifer, seeing himself enriched by God with extraordinary beauty, aspired to exalt his throne above the stars, and to make himself like God: *I will exalt my throne above the stars of God I will be like the Most High.* (Is. xiv. 13) O, what would that proud spirit have said had he ever been adorned with the gifts of Mary! He, being exalted by God, became proud, and was sent to hell; but the more the humble Mary saw herself enriched, so much the more did she concentrate herself in her own nothingness; and therefore God raised her to the dignity of being His Mother, having made her so incomparably greater than all other creatures, that, as St. Andrew of Crete says "there is no one who is not God who can be compared with Mary." Hence St. Anselm also says, "there is no one who is thy equal, O Lady; for all are either above or beneath thee: God alone is above thee, and all that is not God is inferior to thee."

To what greater dignity could a creature be raised than that of the Mother of her Creator? "To be the Mother of God," St. Bonaventure writes, "is the greatest grace which can be conferred on a creature. It is such that God could make a greater world, a greater Heaven, but He could not exalt a creature more than to make her His Mother." This the Blessed Virgin was pleased herself to express when she said, *He that is mighty hath done great things to me.* (Luke i. 49). But here the Abbot of Celles reminds her: "God did not create thee for Himself only; He gave thee to the Angels as their restorer, and to men as their repairer." So that God did not create Mary for Himself only, but He created her for man also; that is to say, to repair the ruin entailed upon him by sin.

### **Evening Meditation**

*PILATE EXHIBITS JESUS: "BEHOLD THE MAN!"*

I.

Jesus having again been brought and set before Pilate, he beheld Him so wounded and disfigured by the scourges and the thorns, that he thought, by showing Him to them, to move the people to compassion. He therefore went out into the portico, bringing with him the afflicted Lord, and said: *Behold the man!* As though he would have said: Go now, and rest content with

what this poor innocent One has already suffered. Behold Him brought to so low a state that He cannot long survive. Go your way, and leave Him, for He can but have a short time to live. Do thou, too, my soul, behold thy Lord in that portico, bound and half naked, covered only with Wounds and Blood; and consider to what thy Shepherd has reduced Himself, in order to save thee, a sheep that was lost.

At the same time that Pilate is exhibiting the wounded Jesus to the Jews, the Eternal Father is from Heaven inviting us to turn our eyes to behold Jesus Christ in such a condition, and in like manner says to us: *Behold the man!* O men, this Man whom you behold thus wounded and set at naught--He is My beloved Son, Who is suffering all this in order to pay the penalty of your sins; behold Him, and love Him. O my God and my Father, I do behold Thy Son, and I thank Him, and love Him, and hope to love Him always; but do Thou, I pray Thee, behold Him also, and for love of this Thy Son have mercy upon me; pardon me, and give me the grace never to love anything apart from Thee.

## II.

But what is it that the Jews reply, on their beholding that King of sorrows? They raise a shout and say: *Crucify him! Crucify him!* And seeing that Pilate, notwithstanding their clamour, was seeking a means to release Him, they worked upon his fears by telling him: *If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar's friend.* (Jo. xix. 12). Pilate still makes resistance, and replies: *Shall I crucify your King?* And their answer is; *We have no king but Caesar.* (Jo. xix. 15). Ah, my adorable Jesus, these men will not recognise Thee for their King, and tell Thee that they wish for no other king but Caesar. I acknowledge Thee to be my King and God; and I protest that I wish for no other King of my heart but Thee, my Love, and my one and only Good. Wretch that I am, I at one time refused Thee for my King, and declared that I did not wish to serve Thee; but now I wish Thee alone to have dominion over my will. Do Thou make it obey Thee in all that Thou dost ordain. O Will of God, Thou art my love. Do thou, O Mary, pray for me. Thy prayers are not rejected.



## Saturday in Passion Week

### Morning Meditation

*"THERE STOOD BY THE CROSS OF JESUS, HIS MOTHER."* (John xix. 25)

We have now to witness a new kind of Martyrdom --a Mother condemned to see an innocent Son, and One she loves with all the affection of her soul--cruelly tormented and put to death before her own eyes. *There stood by the cross of Jesus his mother.* St. John considered that in these words he had said enough of Mary's Martyrdom. *O all ye who pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow!* (Lam. i. 12).

I.

Consider Mary at the foot of the Cross of her dying Son, and then see if there be sorrow like to her sorrow. As soon as our agonizing Redeemer had reached the Mount of Calvary, the executioners stripped Him of His clothes, and piercing His hands and feet, not with sharp but with blunt nails, as St. Bernard says, to torment Him more, they fastened Him on the Cross. Having crucified Him, they planted the Cross, and thus left Him to die. The executioners left Him, but not so Mary. She then drew nearer to the Cross, to be present at His death: "I did not leave Him," the Blessed Virgin said to St. Bridget, "but stood nearer to the Cross."

But what did it avail thee, O Lady, says St. Bonaventure, to go to Calvary, and see this Son expire? Shame should have prevented thee; for His disgrace was thine, since thou wert His Mother. At least, horror of witnessing such a crime as the crucifixion of a God by His own creatures should have prevented thee from going there. But the same Saint answers: Ah, thy heart did not then think of its own sorrows, but of the sufferings and death of thy dear Son, and therefore thou wouldst thyself be present, at least to compassionate Him. A true Mother, says the Abbot William, a most loving Mother, whom not even the fear of death could separate from her beloved Son!

But, O God, what a cruel sight was it there to behold this Son in agony on the Cross, and at its foot this Mother in agony, suffering all the torments endured by her Son! Listen to the

words in which Mary revealed to St. Bridget the sorrowful state in which she beheld her dying Son on the Cross: "My dear Jesus was breathless, exhausted, and in His last agony on the Cross; His eyes were sunk, half-closed, and lifeless; His lips hanging, and His mouth open; His cheeks hollow and drawn in; His face elongated, His nose sharp, His countenance sad; His head had fallen on His breast, His hair was black with blood, His stomach collapsed, His arms and legs stiff, and His whole body covered with wounds and blood."

All these sufferings of Jesus were also those of Mary; "Every torture inflicted on the body of Jesus," says St. Jerome, "was a wound in the heart of the Mother."

Ah, Mother, the most sorrowful of all mothers, who can ever console thee? The thought that Jesus by His death conquered hell, opened Heaven--until then closed to men--and gained so many souls, can alone console thee. From that throne of the Cross He will reign in many hearts, which, conquered by His love, will serve Him with devotion. Disdain not, in the meantime, O my Mother, to keep me near thee, to weep with thee, since I have so much reason to weep for the crimes by which I have offended Jesus. Ah, Mother of Mercy, I hope, first, through the death of my Redeemer, and then through thy sorrows to obtain pardon and eternal salvation. Amen.

## II.

"Whoever was present on the Mount of Calvary," says St. John Chrysostom, "might see two altars, on which two great Sacrifices were consummated; the one in the body of Jesus, the other in the heart of Mary." Nay, better still may we say with St. Bonaventure, "there was but one altar--that of the Cross of the Son, on which, together with this Divine Lamb, the Victim, the Mother was also sacrificed." Therefore the Saint asks this Mother: "O Lady, where standest thou? Near the Cross? Nay, rather, thou art on the Cross, crucified, sacrificing thyself with thy Son." St. Augustine assures us of the same thing: "The Cross and Nails of the Son were also those of His Mother; with Christ crucified the Mother was also crucified." Yes; for, as St. Bernard says, "Love inflicted on the heart of Mary the tortures caused by nails in the Body of Jesus." So much so, that, as St. Bernardine writes,

"At the same time that the Son sacrificed His Body, the Mother sacrificed her soul."

Mothers ordinarily fly from the presence of their dying children; but when a mother is obliged to witness such a scene, she procures all possible relief for her child; she arranges his bed, that he may be more at ease; she administers consolation to him; and thus the poor mother soothes her own grief. Ah, most afflicted of all Mothers! O Mary, thou hadst to witness the agony of thy dying Jesus; but thou couldst administer Him no relief. Mary heard her Son exclaim, *I thirst*, but she could not give Him even a drop of water to refresh Him in that great thirst. She could only say, as St. Vincent Ferrer remarks: "My Son, I have only the water of tears." She saw that on that bed of torture her Son, suspended by three nails, could find no repose; she would have clasped Him in her arms to give Him relief, or that at least He might there have expired; but she could not. "In vain," says St. Bernard, "did she extend her arms; they sank back empty on her breast." She beheld that poor Son Who in His sea of grief sought consolation, as it was foretold by the Prophet, but in vain: *I have trodden the winepress alone... I looked about and there was none to help; I sought, and there was none to give aid.* (Is. lxiii. 3, 5).

I pity thee, my afflicted Mother, for the sword of sorrow which pierced thee, when on Mount Calvary thou didst behold thy beloved Son Jesus slowly dying before thy eyes, amid so many torments and insults, on that hard bed of the Cross, where thou couldst not administer to him even the least of those comforts that are granted to the greatest criminals at the hour of death. I beseech thee, by the agony which thou, my most loving Mother, didst endure together with thy dying Son, and by the sadness which thou didst feel, when, for the last time, He spoke to thee from the Cross and bade thee farewell, and left us all, in the person of St. John, to thee as thy children; by the constancy in which thou didst then see Him bow down His Head and expire, I beseech thee to obtain me the grace, from thy crucified Love, to live and die crucified to all earthly things, that I may spend my life for God alone, and thus one day enter Paradise to enjoy Him face to face.

## Spiritual Reading

### *MEANS OF ACQUIRING DIVINE LOVE*

The first means is, to desire ardently to attain that perfect love that will make your heart entirely belong to God. Ardent desires are the wings with which the Saints flew to unite themselves with God by perfect love. If you have not this desire, at least ask it of God; for without it you will never be able to arrive at any degree of holiness, but with the aid of such desires you will soon attain to sanctity. St. Teresa has left her spiritual children many excellent lessons on this subject. In one place she says: "Let our thoughts be great: from great thoughts our good shall come." In another place she writes: "We must not debase our desires, but must trust in God: for by continual efforts we shall, with the Divine aid, gradually arrive at the perfection that the Saints have attained." She attests that she had never seen a cowardly soul make as much progress in many years as generous souls make in a few days. Hence she says: "The Lord is as much pleased with our desires as if they were already executed." St. Gregory says that he who pants after God with his whole heart finds Him; but to wish for God with the whole heart, the soul must be stripped and emptied of worldly affections.

The second means necessary to love God with the whole heart is, detachment from all love that is not for God. He wishes to have the exclusive possession of our whole hearts; He will admit no companion. St. Augustine relates that the Roman Senate, after adoring thirty thousand gods, refused to adore the God of the Christians, saying that He was a proud God Who wished to be worshipped alone, without companions. But this Our Lord justly claims; for He is the only and the true God; and our only true Lover, Who, because He loves us tenderly, wishes that we should love Him with our whole hearts. To love God with the whole heart implies two things: it implies, first, the expulsion from the heart of every affection that is not for God.

The enamoured St. Francis de Sales said: "If I knew that there was a single fibre in my heart that was not for God, I would instantly pluck it out." If the heart is not emptied of earthly affections, the love of God cannot enter. But in a heart detached from creatures, the fire of Divine love burns and

always increases. St. Teresa used to say: "Detach the heart from creatures; seek God and you shall find Him." *The Lord is good to the soul that seeketh him.* (Lam. iii. 25). He gives Himself entirely to those that leave all things for His sake, as He once said to St. Teresa: "Now that you are all Mine, I am all yours." He will say the same to you, if you divest yourself of all things in order to belong entirely to Him. Father Segneri the Younger wrote to a spiritual soul: "Divine love is a thief that robs the soul of all her affections, so that she can say: "What else do I wish for than Thee alone, O my Lord?" And St. Francis de Sales has said: "The pure love of God consumes all that is not God, in order to convert everything into itself; for all that is done for the love of God is love." In the Life of the Venerable Joseph Caracciolo, of the Order of Theatines, we read that after the death of a brother, being in company with his relatives, he said: "Ah, let us reserve our tears for a better occasion; to weep over the death of Jesus Christ, Who has been to us a Father, a Brother, and a Spouse, and has died for the love of us." We should reserve all our tenderness and compassion for Jesus.

## Evening Meditation

### *JESUS IS CONDEMNED BY PILATE.*

#### I.

Behold, at last, how Pilate, after having so often declared the innocence of Jesus, declares it now anew, and protesting that he is innocent of the Blood of that Just Man: *I am innocent of the blood of this just man* (Matt. xxvii. 24), and after all this pronounces the sentence and condemns Him to death. Oh, what injustice --such as the world has never seen! At the very time that the judge declares the accused One to be innocent, he condemns Him. Ah, my Jesus, Thou dost not deserve death; but it is I that deserve it. Since, then, it is Thy will to make satisfaction for me, it is not Pilate, but Thy Father Himself Who justly condemns Thee to pay the penalty that was my due. I love Thee, O Eternal Father, Who dost condemn Thine innocent Son in order to liberate me who am the guilty one. I love Thee, O Eternal Son, Who dost accept of the death which I, a sinner, have deserved.

Pilate, after having pronounced sentence upon Jesus, delivers Him over to the hands of the Jews, to the end that they may

do with Him whatsoever they please: *He delivered Jesus up to their will.* (Luke xxiii. 25). Such truly is the course of things when an innocent one is condemned. There are no limits set for the punishment, but he is left in the hands of his enemies, that they may make him suffer and die according to their own pleasure. Poor Jews! You then imprecated chastisement upon yourselves in saying: *His blood be upon us, and upon our children.* (Matt. xxvii. 25); and the chastisement has come: you now endure, you miserable men, and will endure, even to the end of the world, the penalty of that innocent Blood. Do Thou, O my Jesus, have mercy upon me, who by my sins have also been the cause of Thy death. But I do not wish to be obstinate, and like the Jews; I wish to bewail the evil treatment that I have given Thee, and I wish always to love Thee--always, always, always!

## II.

Behold, the unjust sentence of death upon a Cross is proclaimed in the presence of the condemned Lord. He listens to it; and, all submissive to the will of the Father, He obediently and humbly accepts it: *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, and that the death of the cross.* (Phil. ii. 8). Pilate says on earth, "Let Jesus die"; and the Eternal Father, in like manner, says from Heaven, "Let My Son die"; and the Son Himself makes answer: "Behold! I obey; I accept of death, and death upon a Cross." O my beloved Redeemer, Thou dost accept of the death that was my due. Blessed for evermore be Thy mercy: I return Thee my most grateful thanks for it. But since Thou Who art innocent dost accept of the death of the Cross for me, I, who am a sinner, accept of that death which Thou dost destine to be mine, together with all the pains that shall accompany it; and, from this time forth, I unite it to Thy death, and offer it up to Thy Eternal Father. Thou hast died for love of me, and I wish to die for love of Thee. Ah, by the merits of Thy holy death, make me die in Thy grace, and burning with holy love for Thee. Mary, my hope, be mindful of me.

## Palm Sunday

### Morning Meditation

#### THE SACRED WOUNDS OF JESUS

St. Bonaventure says the Wounds of Jesus wound the stoniest hearts and inflame the coldest souls. *The charity of Christ presseth us*. And yet men do not love Thee, O my Redeemer, because they live unmindful of the death Thou hast suffered for them.

I.

St. Bonaventure says that the Wounds of Jesus wound the stoniest hearts and inflame the coldest souls. And in truth, how can we believe that God permitted Himself to be buffeted, scourged, crowned with thorns, and finally put to death for the love of us, and yet not love Him? St. Francis of Assisi frequently bewailed the ingratitude of men as he passed along the country, saying: "Love is not loved! Love is not loved!"

Behold, O my Jesus, I am one of those who are thus ungrateful, who have been so many years in the world and have not loved Thee. And shall I, my Redeemer, remain forever such? No, I will love Thee until death, and will give myself wholly to Thee; mercifully accept of me and help me.

The Church, when she shows us Jesus Christ crucified, exclaims: "His whole figure breathes forth love; His head bowed down, His arms extended, His side opened." She cries out: Behold, O man! Behold thy God Who has died for thy love; see how His arms are extended to embrace thee, His head bowed down to give thee the kiss of peace, His side opened to give thee access to His Heart, if thou wilt but love Him!

Assuredly I will love Thee, my Treasure, my Love, and my All. And whom shall I love, if I love not God Who has died for me?

II.

*The charity of Christ*, says the Apostle, *presseth us*. (2 Cor. v. 14). Ah! my Redeemer, Thou hast died for the love of men; yet men do not love Thee, because they live unmindful of the death Thou hast suffered for them. Did they bear it in mind, how could they live without loving Thee? "Knowing," says St. Francis de Sales, "that Jesus being really God has so loved us as to suffer the death

of the Cross for us, do we not on this account feel our hearts, as it were, in a press, in which they are forcibly held, and love pressed from them by a kind of violence, which is the more powerful as it is the more amiable?" And this is what St. Paul says in these words: *The charity of Christ presseth us*; the love of Jesus Christ forces us to love Him.

Ah! my beloved Saviour, hitherto I have despised Thee, but now I esteem and love Thee more than my own life: nothing afflicts me so much as the remembrance of the many offences I have committed against Thee. Pardon me, O my Jesus, and draw my whole heart to Thyself that so I may not desire, or seek, or sigh after any other save Thee alone.

O Mary, my Mother, help me to love Jesus Christ.

## **Spiritual Reading**

### *MEANS OF ACQUIRING DIVINE LOVE*

Above all, to love Jesus Christ with our whole heart it is necessary to deny ourselves by embracing what is painful to self-love, and by abstaining from what self-love seeks. St. Teresa once refused to taste a dish that was brought to her in sickness. The infirmarian entreated her to eat it, saying that it was well dressed. The Saint replied: "It is because it is well-dressed that I do not wish to taste it." Hence we ought to abstain from things that are agreeable because they please us. We should, therefore, turn away the eyes, and not look at certain objects of curiosity because they gratify the sight. We should also abstain from such an amusement because we feel a predilection for it; we should serve an ungrateful person because he is ungrateful; we should take such a medicine because it is bitter. Beware, says St. Francis de Sales, lest self-love should seek to have part in things the most holy, and even make it appear to us that nothing is good in which we do not feel satisfaction. Hence the Saint used to say that even virtues should be loved with detachment. For example, we ought to love Mental Prayer and solitude; but when obedience or charity takes us away from meditation or solitude, we must not be disturbed, but must embrace with peace whatever happens by the will of God, however repugnant it may be to our own inclinations. The Venerable Father Balthasar Alvarez used to say that Our Lord often commands creatures to turn their



backs upon us, and abandon us, that we may run to Him; but let us be careful to leave them and unite ourselves to God before they forsake us.

*The path of the just, as a shining light, goeth forwards, and increaseth even to perfect day.* (Prov. iv. 18). The Wise Man says that the life of the just always increases to perfect day. But who arrives at this perfect day? He that, without inclining to anything until he knows the Divine will, wishes, or wishes not, what God wills or wills not. Hence we should pray in the words of the same Father Alvarez: "Lord, grant me the grace to find peace in whatever thy Divine will shall appoint for me; for my part, I ask for neither more delights nor fewer afflictions." Oh, how happy is his life who lives detached from all things! Let us be persuaded that there is no one more content in this world than the man who despises all its goods, and wishes only for God. Hence each of us should live on this earth as in a wilderness, saying: Here there is no one but God and myself. And with this spirit of detachment all who have consecrated their lives to God should endeavour to renew every day the Religious Vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience; intending to divest themselves of all attachment to property, to pleasure, and to self-will. This renewal of vows should be made in a few words, that they may be made more easily and more frequently. It is enough for you to say: My Jesus, for the love of Thee I renew my Vows, and purpose to observe them with exactness; I entreat Thee to grant me the grace to be faithful to Thee.

The third means of obtaining the perfect love of Jesus Christ is to meditate frequently on His Passion. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi used to say that after being made the spouse of a crucified God, a Religious, during her whole life, and in all her actions, should have nothing before her view but Jesus on the Cross; and should have no other occupation than the contemplation of the love that this Divine Spouse has borne her. Were a person to suffer for a friend insults, stripes, and imprisonment, how great the pleasure he would derive from hearing that his friend frequently remembered his sufferings! But if, when his sufferings are mentioned, the friend should endeavour to change the subject of conversation, and should refuse even to think of them, how great

the pain that he would feel at such ingratitude! Such is the pain given to the Heart of Jesus by the souls that think but little on the sorrows and ignominies that He suffered for the love of them. But, on the other hand, He is greatly pleased with all those who continually remember and meditate on His Passion. I say that the only subject of all the meditations of a lover of Jesus Christ ought to be His Passion. We should make at least one meditation on it every day.

To me it appears, as I have observed in another place, that it was to supply different mysteries for the meditation of His lovers that our Redeemer wished to suffer different species of pains and reproaches, chains, buffets, scourges, thorns, spittle, and nails; it was for this end that He wished to represent Himself to us suffering in so many different ways: at one time sweating blood in the Garden; at another bound and captured by soldiers; now clothed with a white garment, the badge of a fool; again, torn with scourges; now crowned with thorns as a king of sorrows and mockery, and again going to death with the Cross on His shoulders; at one time suspended by three nails on a Cross, and at another hanging dead on that bed of sorrow with His side opened. But remember that we should not meditate on the Passion of Jesus Christ in order to enjoy spiritual consolations, but for the sole purpose of inflaming our souls with the love of our Redeemer, and of learning from Him what He wishes us to do; offering ourselves to suffer every pain for His sake, because He voluntarily suffered so much for the love of us. Our Lord once revealed to a holy solitary that there is no exercise more apt to kindle in us the Divine love than meditation on His Passion.

### **Evening Meditation**

#### *JESUS CARRIES HIS CROSS.*

The sentence upon our Saviour having been published, they straightway seize hold of Him in their fury: they strip Him anew of that purple rag, and put His own raiment upon Him, to lead Him away to be crucified on Calvary, --the place appropriated for the execution of criminals: *They took off the cloak from him, and put on him his own garments, and led him away to crucify him.* (Matt. xxvii. 31). They then lay hold of two rough beams, and quickly make them into a Cross, and order Him to carry it on His shoul-

ders to the place of His punishment. What cruelty, to lay upon the criminal the gibbet upon which he has to die! But this is Thy lot, O my Jesus, because Thou hast taken my sins upon Thyself.

Jesus refuses not the Cross; with love He embraces it, as being the Altar whereon is destined to be completed the sacrifice of His life for the salvation of men: *And bearing his own cross he went forth to that place which is called Calvary.* (John xix. 17). The condemned criminals now come forth from Pilate's residence, and in the midst of them there also goes our condemned Lord. O that sight, which filled both Heaven and earth with amazement! To see the Son of God going to die for the sake of those very men from whose hands He is receiving His death!

## II.

Behold the Prophecy fulfilled: *And I was as a meek Lamb, that is carried to be a victim.* (Jer. xi. 19). The appearance that Jesus made on this journey was so pitiable that the Jewish women, on beholding Him, followed Him in tears: *They bewailed and lamented him.* (Luke xxiii. 27). O my dear Redeemer, by the merits of this sorrowful journey of Thine, give me strength to bear my cross with patience. I accept of all the sufferings and contempt which Thou hast destined for me to undergo. Thou hast rendered them lovely and sweet by embracing them for love of us: give me strength to endure them with calmness.

Behold, my soul, now that thy condemned Saviour is passing, behold how He moves along, dripping with Blood that keeps flowing from His still fresh Wounds, crowned with thorns, and laden with the Cross. Alas, how at every motion is the pain of all His Wounds renewed! The Cross, from the first moment begins its torture, pressing heavily upon His wounded shoulders, and cruelly acting like a hammer upon the thorns of the crown. O God, at every step, how great art Thy sufferings! Let us meditate upon the sentiments of love with which Jesus, in this journey is drawing nigh to Calvary, where death stands awaiting Him. Ah, my Jesus, Thou art going to die for us. In time past I have turned my back upon Thee, and would that I could die of grief on this account! But for the future I have not the heart any more to leave Thee, O my Redeemer, my God, my Love, my All. O Mary, my Mother, do thou obtain for me strength to bear my

cross in peace.

## Monday in Holy Week

### Morning Meditation

#### *DETACHMENT FROM ALL THAT IS NOT GOD*

If we do not purify and strip the heart of everything earthly, the love of God cannot enter in and possess it all. Detach thy heart from all created things, says St. Teresa, and seek God, and thou shalt find Him.

#### I.

In order to attain to loving God with all our heart, we must separate it from everything that is not God, that does not tend towards God. He chooses to be alone in the possession of our hearts; He admits no companions there; and with reason, because He is our only Lord, Who has given us everything. Still further, He is our only Lover, Who has loved us not for His own interest, but solely from His goodness; and because He thus exceedingly loves us, He desires that we should love Him with all our hearts: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.*

To love God with our whole heart implies two things: the first is, to drive from it every affection that is not for God, or not according to the will of God. "If I knew," said St. Francis de Sales, "that I had one fibre in my heart that did not belong to God, I would instantly tear it out." The second is prayer, by which holy love introduces itself into the heart. But if the heart does not fly from the earth, love cannot enter, for it finds no place for itself. On the other hand, a heart detached from all creatures instantly becomes inflamed, and increases in Divine love at every breathing of grace.

"Pure love," said the holy Bishop of Geneva, "consumes everything that is not God, in order to change it into itself; because everything that is done for God is the love of God." Oh, how full of goodness and liberality is God to those souls that seek nothing but Him and His will! *The Lord is good to them that seek him.* (Lam. iii. 25). Happy he who, living still in the world, can say from his heart with St. Francis: "My God and my All!" and thus hold in contempt all the vanities of the world. "I have despised the kingdoms of the world, and all the glory of this life, for the love

of Jesus Christ my Lord."

When, then, creatures would enter our heart and take a share of this love, all of which we owe to God, we must immediately banish them, shutting the door against them, and saying: "Begone! Begone to those who desire you; my heart I have given wholly to Jesus Christ; for you there is no place." And, in addition to this resolution to desire nothing but God, we must hate that which the world loves, and love that which the world hates.

O Jesus, I do not desire that creatures should have any part in my heart. Thou must be my only Lord by possessing it altogether. Let others seek the delights and grandeurs of the world. Thou alone in this life and in the next must be my only portion, my only Good, my only Love. O Mary, thy prayers can make me belong wholly to Jesus.

## II.

Above all, to attain to perfect love, we must deny ourselves, embracing that which is distasteful to self-love, and rejecting that which self-love demands. A certain thing is pleasant to us; for that very reason we must reject it. A certain medicine is disagreeable, because it is bitter. We must take it for the very reason that it is bitter. It is unpleasant to us to do good to a certain person who has been ungrateful to us; we must, by all means, do him good, for the very reason that he has been ungrateful.

Further, St. Francis de Sales said that we must love even virtues with a detachment of heart; for example, we ought to love meditation and retirement; but when they are forbidden to us, through the calls of obedience or of charity, we must leave both the one and the other without being disquieted. And thus it is necessary to embrace with equanimity everything that happens to us through the will of God. Happy is he who wishes to have, or refuses to have, whatever happens because God wishes it or refuses it, without inclining to either side. And therefore we must pray the Lord to enable us to find peace in everything that He appoints for us.

It is certain that no one lives more happy in the world, than he who despises the things of the world, and lives in continual conformity to the will of God. Therefore, it is a useful thing frequently during the day, or at least at the times of prayer and

Communion, to renew at the foot of the Crucifix the total renunciation of ourselves and of all our possessions, saying: O my Jesus, I desire to think no more of myself; I give myself wholly to Thee, do with me what Thou wilt. I see that everything that the world offers me is vanity and deceit. From this day, I would seek nothing but Thee, and Thy good will; help me to be faithful to Thee. O Virgin Mary, pray to Jesus for me.

## Spiritual Reading

### MEANS OF ACQUIRING DIVINE LOVE

The fourth means to attain perfect love is to make frequent acts of love. As fire is kept alive by fuel, so love is nourished by acts.

He that loves, in the first place, rejoices at the welfare and happiness of his beloved: this is called love of *complacency*. Rejoice, then, in the infinite felicity of your God, and delight in it more than if it were your own; for you should love Him more than yourself, and your greatest joy should consist in the thought that your Beloved wants nothing, and will not for all eternity want anything necessary for infinite beatitude. Hence you ought to feel consolation in knowing that so many millions of Angels and Saints love Him perfectly in Heaven. You should also rejoice whenever you hear that any soul on this earth loves Jesus Christ with a tender love.

He that loves desires to see his beloved loved by all: such love is called the love of *benevolence*, which you should practise by desiring to see Jesus Christ ardently loved by all men. Hence you would do well to speak frequently to others of His love in order to kindle it in the hearts of all those with whom you converse. You should, moreover, desire to see Jesus known and loved by all who yet neither know or love Him. And to you the contempt with which He is treated by so many Christians should be the only source of pain. Would she be considered an affectionate spouse who should behold with indifference an insult offered to her husband, or a wound inflicted on him? You should grieve for the offences that you remember to have hitherto given your Jesus; for these you should constantly make acts of contrition--this is called *sorrowful love*.

He that loves prefers his beloved to all other objects, and

this is the love of *preference* with which God principally wishes us to love Him. The first degree of this love consists in being prepared to lose all things rather than forfeit the grace of God. Does the Lord demand too much of us when He requires that we prefer Him to everything in this world? And what are creatures compared with God? The Emperor Domitian tempted St. Clement to worship idols by presenting to him as the reward of his impiety, gold, silver, and precious stones. The Saint heaved a deep sigh, and began to weep when he saw his God compared with earthly goods. We should be ashamed to say to God: Lord, I love Thee above all things. For to speak in this manner to God would be the same as if we said to a king: My sovereign, I esteem you more than chaff and mire! But our God is content with being loved above all creatures, which, compared with His sovereign Majesty, are infinitely less than chaff or mire is in comparison with the first monarch of the universe. Father Vincent Carafa, of the Society of Jesus, used to say that were the whole world in his possession he would surrender it in an instant at the bare Name of God. It is necessary, then, to live always in such a disposition of mind that we be always ready to forfeit property, character, life, and all things sooner than lose God. We must say with St. Paul: *Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God.* (Rom. viii. 39). He that feels he cannot live without God possesses a great treasure; but He that aspires to His perfect love should not only be ready to die a thousand times rather than offend Him by mortal sin, or even by a deliberate venial sin, but should also prefer the pleasure of God before all self-indulgence, and should be prepared to suffer every pain in order to please his Lord. Jesus Christ has preferred your salvation before His own life; in you, then, it is not much, nay, it is nothing, to prefer His pleasure to every personal good.

They that love, refuse not sufferings; on the contrary, they rejoice to suffer for their Beloved in order to give Him proof of their love. It was thus that Jesus Christ showed His love for us. He that desires to suffer for Jesus, desires, or at least embraces in peace, the occasions of suffering. For loving souls tribulations are, as it were, the way to union with God; for in sufferings they unite themselves with Him by stronger love. Father Balthasar

Alvarez used to say, "that he who in afflictions peacefully resigns himself to the Divine will, runs to God." In a word, every event, whether it causes joy or sorrow, tends to unite the soul that loves more closely to her God. *To them that love God, all things work together unto good.* (Rom. viii. 28). It is certain that all His arrangements are intended for our good. Our Lord said one day to St. Gertrude: "With the same love with which I created man, I ordain for his good all the prosperity or adversity I send him."

## **Evening Meditation**

### *JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS.*

#### I.

No sooner is the Redeemer arrived, all suffering and wearied out, at Calvary, than they strip Him of His clothes, --that now stick to His wounded Flesh, --and then cast Him down upon the Cross. Jesus stretches forth His holy hands, and at the same time offers up the sacrifice of His life to the Eternal Father, and prays Him to accept it for the salvation of mankind. In the next place, the executioners savagely lay hold of the nails and hammers, and nailing His Hands and His Feet, they fasten Him to the Cross. O ye Sacred Hands, that by a mere touch have so often healed the sick, wherefore are they now nailing you upon this Cross? O Holy Feet, that have encountered so much fatigue in your search after us lost sheep, wherefore do they now transfix you with so much pain? When a nerve is wounded in the human body, so great is the suffering, that it occasions convulsions and fits of fainting: what, then, must not the suffering of Jesus have been, in having nails driven through His Hands and Feet, parts which are most full of nerves and muscles! O my sweet Saviour, so much did the desire of seeing me saved and of gaining my love cost Thee! And I have so often ungratefully despised Thy love for a nothing; but now I prize it above every good.

The Cross is now raised up, together with the Crucified, and they let it fall with a shock into a hole that has been made for it in the rock. It is then made firm by means of stones and pieces of wood; and Jesus remains hanging upon it, to leave His life thereon. The afflicted Saviour, now about to die upon that bed of pain, and finding Himself in such desolation and misery, seeks for some one to console Him, but finds none. Surely, my Lord,



those men will at least compassionate Thee, now that Thou art dying! But no; I hear some outraging Thee, some ridiculing Thee, and others blaspheming Thee, saying to Thee: *He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross.* (Matt. xxvii. 42). Alas, you barbarians, He is now about to die, according as you desire; at least torment Him not with your revilings.

## II.

See how much thy dying Redeemer is suffering upon that gibbet. Each member suffers its own pain, and the one cannot come to the help of the other. Alas, how does He experience in every moment the pains of death. Well may it be said that, in those three hours during which Jesus was suffering His agony upon the Cross, He suffered as many deaths as were the moments He remained there. He finds not there even the slightest relief or repose, whether He lean His weight upon His Hands or upon His Feet; wheresoever He leans the pain is increased, His most Holy Body hanging suspended, as it does, from His very Wounds themselves. Go, my soul, and tenderly draw nigh to that Cross, and kiss that Altar, whereon thy Lord is dying a Victim for love of thee. Place thyself beneath His Feet, and let that Divine Blood trickle down upon thee. Yes, my dear Jesus, let that Blood wash me from all my sins, and set me all on fire with love towards Thee, my God, Who hast been willing to die for love of me. Do thou, O suffering Mother, who dost stand at the foot of the Cross, pray to Jesus for me.

## Tuesday in Holy Week

### Morning Meditation

*"PRECIOUS IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD IS THE DEATH OF HIS SAINTS."*

*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.* (Ps. cxv. 15). And why is the death of the Saints called precious? "Because," answers St. Bernard, "it is so rich in blessings which deserve to be purchased at any price." O death worthy of being loved, who can fear thee since thou art the end of all toils, and the beginning of eternal life!

## I.

*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.* (Ps. cxv. 15). Why is the death of the Saints called precious? "Because," answers St. Bernard, "it is so rich in blessings which deserve to be purchased at any price."

Some persons, attached to this world, would wish that there was no such thing as death; but St. Augustine says: "What is it to live long upon this earth, except to endure long sufferings?" "The miseries and difficulties that constantly weary us in this present life are so great," says St. Ambrose, "that death seems rather a relief than a punishment."

Death terrifies sinners, because they know that from the first death, if they die in sin, they will pass to the second death, which is eternal; but it does not terrify good souls, who, trusting in the merits of Jesus Christ, have sufficient signs to give them a moral assurance that they are in the grace of God. Wherefore, those words, "Depart, Christian soul, from this world," which are so terrible to those who die against their will, do not afflict the Saints who preserve their hearts free from worldly love, and with a true affection can continue repeating, "My God and my All."

To these, death is not a torment, but a rest from the pains they have suffered in struggling with temptations, and in quieting their scruples, and no fear now of offending God; so that what St. John writes of them is fulfilled: *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord! Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours.* (Apoc. xiv. 13). He that dies loving God is not disturbed by the pains that death brings; but rather it is a joy to such persons to offer them to God, as the last gifts of their life. Oh, what peace is experienced by him who dies, when he has abandoned himself into the arms of Jesus Christ Who chose for Himself a death of bitterness and desolation, that He might obtain for us a death of sweetness and resignation!

O my Jesus, Thou art my Judge, but Thou art also my Redeemer Who hast died to save me. From my first sin I have deserved to be condemned to hell, but in Thy mercy Thou hast given me a deep sorrow for my sins, wherefore I confidently hope that now Thou hast pardoned me. I have not deserved to love Thee; but with Thy gifts Thou hast drawn me to Thy love. If it is Thy will that this sickness shall bring death to me, I

willingly receive it. I see truly that I do not now deserve to enter Paradise; I go contentedly to Purgatory, to suffer as much as it pleases Thee. There my greatest pain will be to continue far from Thee, and I shall sigh to come and see Thee and love Thee face to face. Therefore, O my beloved Saviour, have mercy upon me.

## II.

And what else is this present life, but a state of perpetual peril of losing God? "We walk amidst snares," says St. Ambrose; amidst the deceits of enemies who seek to cause us to lose the Divine grace. Therefore St. Teresa, every time that the clock struck, gave thanks to God that another hour of struggle and peril had passed without sin; and therefore she rejoiced at the tidings of her coming death, considering that her struggles were over, and the time was near for her to depart and behold her God.

In this present life we cannot live without defects. This is the motive that makes souls that love God even desire death. It was this thought that, at the time of death, gladdened Father Vincent Carafa, when he said: "Now that I finish my life, I cease to displease God." A certain man gave directions to his attendants, that at the time of his death they should often repeat to him these words: "Comfort thyself, because the time is near when thou wilt no more offend God."

And what else is this body to us but a prison in which the soul is incarcerated, so that it cannot depart to unite itself to God? On this account, St. Francis, inflamed with love, at the hour of his death cried out with the Prophet: *Take my soul out of prison*. O Lord, deliver me from this prison which prevents me from seeing Thee. O death worthy of being loved, who can fear thee and not desire thee, since thou art the end of all toils, and the beginning of eternal life! St. Pionius, the Martyr, standing by the instruments of death, showed himself so full of joy, that the people who stood by wondered at his delight, and asked him how he could be so happy when he was just going to die. "You are mistaken," said he, "you are mistaken; I am hastening not to death, but to life."

O most sweet Jesus, I thank Thee for not having called me

to death when I was under Thy wrath, and for having won over my soul with such gentle means as Thou hast employed. When I think of the displeasure I have caused Thee, I am ready to die with grief. This my soul, which was lost, I now commit wholly into Thy hands. *Into thy hands I commend my spirit!* Remember, O Lord, that Thou hast redeemed it with Thy death. I love Thee, O Infinite Goodness! And I desire to depart quickly from this life, that I may come and love Thee with a more perfect love in Heaven. And so long as I shall continue to live on this earth, make me continually comprehend better my obligation to love Thee. O my God, receive me; I give myself wholly to Thee, and I trust in Thee through the merits of Jesus Christ. I also trust in thy intercession, O Mary, my hope!

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *MEANS OF ACQUIRING DIVINE LOVE*

Be particularly careful to unite yourself to God in the time of sickness. Infirmities prove the true lover. In sickness you must be obedient. Ask for nothing, and take the remedies prescribed, however nauseous and painful. Do not complain of anything; be meek and thankful to all. Resign yourself entirely to the will of God, and offer yourself to suffer whatsoever He sends, uniting yourself to Jesus on the Cross, desiring not to descend from it so long as it is not His will, content even to leave your life upon it, if such be His will. Fix your eyes on the Crucifix, and when you see that your sufferings are far less than those that Jesus suffered for your sake, you will bear the pains of sickness with greater peace. Love Jesus, says St. Francis de Sales, "in consolations and tribulations: He is as lovely when He afflicts as when He consoles you, because He does all for your welfare." If you love Jesus Christ, love contempt, love correction; and entreat your confessor to correct you in the way that he deems most profitable to you, and not exempt you from any remedy necessary for your recovery.

He that loves always remembers his beloved. Thus the soul that loves God always thinks of Him, and always endeavours to show Him its affection by ardent sighs and ejaculations of love. This is called the *love of aspiration*. Endeavour frequently, by day and night, in solitude and in company, to say frequently to the crucified Spouse of your soul: My God I wish for nothing but

Thee. My God, I give myself entirely to Thee. I wish whatsoever Thou wishest. Dispose of me as Thou pleasest. It will be enough to say to Him: My God, I love Thee! or, My God, my All! A loving sigh, an elevation of the heart, a look towards Heaven, an affectionate glance at the Crucifix, or at the Most Holy Sacrament, will be sufficient, even without words. Such acts are, perhaps, the most useful, because they can be made more easily and more frequently, and sometimes they are the most fervent.

In the Old Law, the Lord commanded that fire should burn unceasingly on His altar. *And the fire on the altar shall always burn.* (Lev. vi. 12). St. Gregory says that these altars are our hearts, on which God commands that the fire of His Divine love should always burn. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart. These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart ... and thou shalt meditate upon them sitting in thy house, and walking on thy journey, sleeping and rising ... And thou shalt bind them as a sign on thy hand, and they shall be, and shall move before thy eyes. And thou shalt write them in the entry, and on the doors of thy house.* (Deut. vi. 5). Mark the earnestness with which the Lord inculcates the precept of loving Him. I wish, He says, that this command be always within your heart, that you meditate upon it continually, sitting in your house, on your journey, sleeping and waking. I wish that you keep it printed on your hands, and present to your eyes: I wish that you write it on the entrance, and on all the doors of your house, in order to remember it always, and fulfill it by acts of love. Hence Theologians justly teach, that though it is probable that we are not bound to make Acts of Faith and Hope more than once a year, still we are obliged to make an Act of Charity at least once a month; some say we are bound to make it more frequently.

Father Balthasar Alvarez used to call the monasteries of Religious, hospitals of persons wounded with Divine love; furnaces of love, in which the hardest rocks are reduced to ashes. Such they ought to be: all men should burn continually with the love of Jesus Christ. But, alas! few, very few, have this ardent love. I say, that if Jesus Christ could weep at present, and were capable of sadness, His greatest sorrow would arise from seeing Himself so little loved by those who are His very own. Do you, then,

love Him; love Him at least through compassion at the sight of your God Who is so little loved. Tell me, were a mighty prince of noble birth, of immense wealth, of extraordinary beauty and holiness, to take for his spouse a poor, ignorant, deformed, ill-dressed peasant, and were he, by making her his spouse, to render her rich, noble, wise, and happy, what would she not do for such a spouse? How great the affection and respect that she would feel for him, at the thought of his greatness and her own vileness! She would do nothing else than thank him continually for his goodness towards her. With what care would she labour to gratify his wishes, and to please him in all things! How careful would she be to execute, without reply, all his behests! And should it be necessary to suffer any pain for his sake, with what promptness and joy would she submit to it; how happy would she esteem herself in giving him such a proof of her affection and gratitude! And should she see him despised by his subjects, would she not weep continually? Were she, even through her own negligence, to offend him, how great would be her sorrow, and with what humility would she cast herself in tears at his feet, and ask pardon! Should she be at a distance from her spouse, oh! would she not count the hours and moments of her absence from him? How great the happiness that she would feel in thinking of her former and present state. Apply all this to yourself. Jesus Christ has made you, a miserable sinner, His own spouse.

## **Evening Meditation**

### *JESUS UPON THE CROSS*

#### I.

Jesus on the Cross! Behold the proof of the love of a God! Behold the final manifestation of Himself, which the Word Incarnate makes upon this earth, --a manifestation of suffering indeed, but still more, a manifestation of love. St. Francis of Paola, as he was one day meditating upon the Divine Love in the person of Jesus Crucified, rapt in ecstasy, exclaimed aloud three times, in these words: "O God--Love! O God--Love! O God --Love!" wishing hereby to signify that we shall never be able to comprehend how great has been the Divine love towards us, in willing to die for love of us.

O my beloved Jesus, if I behold Thy Body upon this Cross, I

see nothing but Wounds and Blood; and then, if I turn my attention to Thy Heart, I find it to be all afflicted and in sorrow. Upon this Cross I see it written up that Thou art a King; but what tokens of Majesty dost Thou retain? I see not any royal throne save that of this tree of infamy; no other purple do I behold save Thy wounded and bleeding Flesh; no other crown save this band of thorns that tortures Thee. Ah, how it all declares Thee to be King of Love! Yes, for this Cross, these Nails, this Crown, and these Wounds are, all of them, tokens of love.

## II.

Jesus, from the Cross, asks us not so much for our compassion as for our love; and, even if He does ask our compassion, He asks it solely in order that the compassion may move us to love Him. As being Infinite Goodness, He already merits all our love; but when placed upon the Cross, it seems as if He seeks for us to love Him, at least out of compassion. Ah, my Jesus, and who is there that will not love Thee, while confessing Thee to be the God that Thou art, and contemplating Thee upon the Cross? Oh, what arrows of fire dost Thou dart at souls from that throne of Love! Oh, how many hearts hast Thou not drawn to Thyself from that Cross of Thine? O Wounds of my Jesus! O beautiful furnaces of love! admit me, too, amongst yourselves to burn, not indeed with that fire of hell which I have deserved, but with holy flames of love for that God Who has been willing to die for me, consumed by torments. O my dear Redeemer, receive back a sinner, who, sorrowing for having offended Thee, is now earnestly longing to love Thee. I love Thee, I love Thee, O Infinite Goodness, O Infinite Love! O Mary, O Mother of beautiful Love, obtain for me a greater measure of love, to consume me for that God Who has died consumed by love for me.

## **Wednesday in Holy Week**

### **Morning Meditation**

#### *THE SUFFERINGS OF JESUS ON THE CROSS*

Jesus on the Cross! O stupendous sight for Heaven and earth of God's mercy and love! To behold the Son of God dying of pain upon a gibbet of infamy, condemned as a malefactor to so bitter and shameful a death, in order to save sinful men from

the penalty that was their due! This sight has ever been, and will ever be, the subject of the contemplation of the Saints. O, happy is the soul that frequently sets before its eyes Jesus dying on the Cross!

I.

Jesus on the Cross! O stupendous sight for Heaven and earth of God's mercy and love! To behold the Son of God dying of pain upon a gibbet of infamy, condemned as a malefactor to so bitter and shameful a death in order to save sinful men from the penalty that was their due! This sight has ever been, and ever will be, the subject of the contemplation of the Saints, and has led them willingly to renounce all the goods of earth, and to embrace with great courage, sufferings and death, that thus they might make themselves more pleasing to a God Who died for love of them. The sight of Jesus hanging despised between two thieves made the Saints love contempt far more than worldlings love the honours of the world. Beholding Jesus covered with Wounds upon the Cross, they have held in abhorrence the pleasures of sense, and have endeavoured to punish their flesh in order to unite their sufferings to the sufferings of the Crucified. And in beholding the patience of our Saviour in His death, the Saints have joyfully accepted the most painful sicknesses, and even the most cruel torments that tyrants could inflict. Lastly, at beholding the love of Jesus Christ in being willing to sacrifice His life for us in a sea of sorrows, they have sought to sacrifice to Him all that they had, --possessions, children, and even life itself.

St. Paul, speaking of the love which the Eternal Father has borne towards us, in that, when He saw us dead by reason of sin, He willed to restore life to us by sending His Son to die for us, calls it *too great* a love. *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his exceeding charity wherewith he loved us, hath quickened us together in Christ.* (Eph. ii. 4). And in the same way ought we to call the love wherewith Jesus Christ has willed to die for us *too great* a love. Hence the same Apostle says: *We preach Jesus Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles, foolishness.* (1 Cor. i. 23). St. Paul says that the Death of Jesus Christ appeared to the Jews a stumbling-block, because they thought that He should have appeared on earth full of worldly majesty, and not



indeed as one condemned to die like a criminal upon a Cross. On the other hand, to the Gentiles it seemed a folly that a God should be willing to die, and by such a death too, for His creatures. On this subject St. Laurence Justinian remarks: "We have seen Him Who is wise infatuated through an excess of love." We have beheld Him Who is Eternal Wisdom Itself, the Son of God, become a fool for us, by reason of the *too great* love which He bore towards us.

And does it not seem a folly for God, almighty and supremely happy in Himself, to be willing of His own accord to subject Himself to be scourged, treated as a mock-king, buffeted, spit upon in the face, condemned to die as a malefactor, abandoned by all upon a Cross of shame, and this to save the miserable worms He Himself had created? The loving St. Francis, when he thought of this, went about the country exclaiming with tears, "Love is not loved! Love is not loved!" And hence St. Bonaventure says that he who wishes to keep his love for Jesus Christ ought always to represent Him to himself hanging on the Cross, and dying there for us. "Let him ever have before the eyes of his heart Christ dying upon the Cross."

## II.

Oh, happy is that soul which frequently sets before its eyes Jesus dying on the Cross, and stops to contemplate with tenderness the pains which Jesus has suffered, and the love wherewith He offered Himself to the Father, while He lay agonizing on that bed of sorrow. Souls that love God, when they find themselves more than usually harassed by temptations of the devil and by fears about their eternal salvation, derive great comfort from considering, in silence and alone, Jesus hanging on the Cross, and shedding Blood from all His Wounds. At the sight of the Crucifix, all desires for the goods of this world flee utterly away. From that Cross exhales a heavenly breath which causes us to forget all earthly objects, and enkindles within us a holy desire of quitting all things in order to employ all our affections in loving that Lord Who was pleased to die for love of us.

Isaias foretold that our Redeemer would be a *Man of Sorrows*. *And we have seen him ... despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows.* (Is. liii. 2). Now let him who wishes to behold this *Man*

*of Sorrows*, foretold by Isaias, look on Jesus Christ dying on the Cross. There, nailed by His hands and feet, He hangs, the whole weight of His body pressing on His Wounds in all His members, which are every one of them torn and bruised. He suffers continual and excruciating pains; whichever way He turns, so far from finding relief, His pain but increases more and more, until it deprives Him of life; and thus this *Man of Sorrows* is condemned by the Father to die of sheer suffering on account of our sins.

What Christian, then, O my Jesus, knowing by Faith that Thou hast died upon the Cross for love of him, can live without loving Thee? Pardon me, then, O Lord, first of all this great sin of having lived so many years in the world without loving Thee. My beloved Saviour, the thought of death fills me with dread, as being the moment when I shall give an account to Thee of all the sins I have ever committed against Thee; but that Blood that I see flowing from Thy Wounds causes me to hope for pardon from Thee, and at the same time, the grace of loving Thee for the future with my whole heart, by virtue of those merits Thou hast earned by so many pains. I give myself wholly to Thee: I will no longer be my own; I desire to do all, I desire to suffer all, in order to please Thee. I will die for Thee Who hast died for me, I will say to Thee, with St. Francis: "May I die for love of the love of Thee Who didst vouchsafe to die for love of the love of me."

## **Spiritual Reading**

### *MEANS OF ACQUIRING DIVINE LOVE*

Love Jesus Christ, then; but know that unless you love Him with your whole heart, He will not be satisfied. Love Him not only with the affections of the heart, love Him also by works. Some that are friends only in name, say to their friends: Friend, you are master of all that I possess. In effect, however, they give him little or nothing. But others that are real friends, give to their friend the better part of their possessions, and offer him the rest. A Religious soul that resolves to give herself to God without reserve, divests herself of all earthly things to which she sees her heart attached; she resolves to subject all her inclinations to holy obedience; she resolves to mortify herself in all that gratifies self-love, to disregard self-esteem, and to embrace with

joy derision and contempt. Oh! with what security does such a resolution make her walk! What confidence in God does it inspire! How prompt does it render the soul to bear crosses and contradictions! It makes her perform all her actions with a pure intention; it impels her to pray to Jesus and Mary for help to execute her purposes, and makes her firm and resolute in seeking in all things only what is pleasing of God. When difficulties arise, the same resolution animates her to say with courage: I must please God! Let pleasure be given to Him, though death should be the consequence. Should she sometimes fall into a defect, the resolution she has made prevents dejection, inspires hope, and gives her courage to attend with greater care, for the future, to what she had before neglected. But this resolution must be frequently renewed in Meditation, at Communion, in the Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and at rising in the morning it is particularly necessary to make the following protestation: My Jesus, I again give myself to Thee, and I promise to endeavour to do always what I shall know to be most pleasing to Thee. I unite this oblation of mine to the perfect unreserved oblation of Thyself, which Thou didst make to Thy Eternal Father. Give me strength to be faithful to Thee. Thy Passion is my hope; Thy merits, Thy promises, Thy love, are my hope. O Mary, my Mother, pray to Jesus for me; obtain for me holy perseverance and the love of thy Son.

If you wish to acquire the great treasure of the love of God, I recommend you to ask it continually, saying: My Jesus, give me Thy love; Mary, obtain for me the gift of Divine love; my holy Angel Guardian, my holy advocates, obtain for me the gift of love. It will be sufficient to say "*Love*." God will be always pleased with it, and will always infuse some new sentiment of devotion, will enkindle some new flame, and will excite some holy desire in your heart. Our Lord is liberal in dispensing all His gifts, but particularly in granting the gift of love to those who ask it; for this love is what He demands of us above all things. But let us ask not so much for a tender as for a strong love, that will make us conquer all human respect, and all repugnances of self-love, and render us prompt in doing, without delay or reserve, the things that are pleasing to God; and let us therefore accustom ourselves

to seek what is most pleasing to God in all, even in small things; for we shall thus be prepared to do great things. And when you are molested with the apprehension of not having strength to overcome yourself in some extraordinary difficulty, trust in God, and say: *I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me.* (Philipp. iv. 13). What I am of myself unable to do, I shall be able to do with the aid that I expect from God.

St. Augustine says all the time that is not spent for God is lost time. At death, we shall receive consolation only from having loved Jesus Christ. O God, how great the consolation that they who have loved Him shall enjoy in being able to say with their eyes fixed on the Crucifix: Jesus crucified has been my only love! Even in this life, what greater happiness can a soul enjoy than to say: I give pleasure to God! I am in the presence of God! But we must give ourselves to God, not for our own gratification, but to please Him, altogether forgetful of ourselves, saying with the spouse in the Canticles: *He brought me into the cellar of wine: he set in order charity within me: stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples: because I languish with love.* (Cant. ii. 4, 5). By *wine*, is signified holy Charity; for as wine deprives men of their senses, so that they no longer see or hear, but are, as it were, dead; so the soul inflamed with Divine love, lives as if it no longer had any sense of earthly things, and, forgetful of created objects, wishes for nothing but God; and therefore it asks the flowers of holy desires, and the fruits of holy works, which support the spiritual life, that is, Divine love, with which and for which, it lives. But this can be said only by the soul that truly gives itself entirely and without reserve to Jesus Christ. What do you say? Have you as yet given yourself to Him, as He desires you to do? Do you still resist? Has He not done enough to merit all your love? Jesus Christ gave Himself to you without reserve once on the Cross, and frequently in Holy Communion; what more do you expect from Him? What more can He do in order to make you belong entirely to Himself? Will you wait till He abandons you, and calls you no more in punishment of your ingratitude? Arise, then, and resist no longer.

## Evening Meditation

### THE WORDS OF JESUS ON THE CROSS

#### I.

While Jesus upon the Cross is being outraged by that barbarous populace, what is it that He is doing? He is praying for them and saying: *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.* (Luke xxiii. 34). O Eternal Father, hearken to this Thy beloved Son, Who, in dying, prays Thee to forgive me, too, who have outraged Thee so much. Then Jesus, turning to the good thief, who prays Him to have mercy upon him, replies: *This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.* (Luke xxiii. 43). Oh, how true is that which the Lord spake by the mouth of Ezechiel, that when a sinner repents of his sin, God, as it were, blots out from His memory all the offences of which he has been guilty: *But if the wicked do penance I will not remember all his iniquities.* (Ez. xviii. 21, 22). Oh, would that it were true, my Jesus, that I had never offended Thee! But, since the evil is done, remember no more, I pray Thee, the displeasure I have caused Thee; and, by that bitter death which Thou hast suffered for me, take me to Thy kingdom after my death; and, while I live, let Thy love ever reign within my soul.

Jesus, in His Agony upon the Cross, with every part of His Body full of torture, and deluged with affliction in His Soul, seeks for some one to console Him. He looks towards Mary; but that sorrowing Mother only adds by her grief to His affliction. He casts His eyes around Him, and there is no one that gives Him comfort. He asks His Father for consolation; but the Father, beholding Him covered with all the sins of men, even He too abandons Him: and then it was that Jesus cried out with a loud voice: *Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* (Matt. xxvii. 46). My God, my God, and why hast Thou also abandoned Me? This abandonment by the Eternal Father caused the death of Jesus Christ to be more bitter than any that has ever fallen to the lot of either penitent or Martyr; for it was a death of perfect desolation, and bereft of every kind of relief. O my Jesus, how is it that I have been able to live so long a time in forgetfulness of Thee? I return Thee thanks that Thou hast not been unmindful of me. Oh, I pray Thee ever

to keep me in mind of the bitter Death which Thou hast embraced for love of me, that so I may never be unmindful of the love Thou hast borne me!

## II.

Jesus, then, knowing that His Sacrifice was now completed said that He was thirsty: *He said, I thirst.* (John xix. 28). And the executioners then reached up to His mouth a sponge, filled with vinegar and gall. But, Lord, how is it that Thou dost make no complaint of those many pains which are taking away Thy life, but complainest only of Thy thirst? Ah, I understand Thee, my Jesus; Thy thirst is a thirst of love; because Thou lovest us, Thou dost desire to be beloved by us. Oh, help me to drive away from my heart all affections which are not for Thee; make me love none other but Thee, and to have no other desire save that of doing Thy will. O will of God, Thou art my love. O Mary, my Mother, obtain for me the grace to wish for nothing but that which God doth will.

## **Holy Thursday** **Morning Meditation**

*"IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME."*

*Do this in commemoration of me.* (Luke xxii. 19). St. Thomas says that the Redeemer left us the Most Blessed Sacrament that we may ever remember the blessings He has obtained for us, and the love He showed us in dying for us. And hence the Blessed Eucharist is called by the same holy Doctor *Passionis Memoriale*, a memorial of the Passion.

## I.

It is the opinion of sound Theologians that by these words - *Do this in commemoration of me* priests are bound when celebrating to call to mind the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ. And the Apostle would seem to require the same of all who communicate. *As often as ye shall eat this bread and drink this cup, ye shall show forth the Lord's death.* (1 Cor. xi. 26). St. Thomas writes that it was for this very end the Redeemer left us the Most Holy Sacrament, namely, that we might ever remember the blessings He has obtained for us and the love He has shown in dying for us. And hence the same holy Doctor calls the Blessed Eucharist a Memo-

rial of the Passion *Passionis Memoriale*..

Consider therefore that in the Sacrifice of the Mass it is the same Holy Victim Who gave His Blood and His Life for you. And the Holy Mass is not only the Memorial of the Sacrifice of the Cross; it is the same Sacrifice; for He Who offers it, and the Victim offered, are the same, namely, the Incarnate Word. The manner alone is different. The one was a Sacrifice of Blood; this is unbloody: in the one Jesus Christ really died, in the other He dies mystically. "One and the same Victim," says the holy Council of Trent, "only the manner of offering is different." Imagine, therefore, when you are at Mass that you are on Calvary and offering to God the Blood and Death of His Son. And when you communicate, imagine that you are drawing His Precious Blood from the Wounds of your Saviour.

O Lord, I am unworthy to appear before Thee, but encouraged by Thy goodness I come this morning to offer unto Thee Thy Son. *Ecce Agnus Dei!* Behold the Lamb here Which Thou didst behold one day sacrificed for Thy glory and for our salvation upon the Altar of the Cross! For the love of this Victim so dear to Thee, apply His merits to my soul and pardon all the offences great and small that I have committed against Thee. I grieve with my whole heart for having offended Thy Infinite Goodness.

And Thou, my Jesus, come and wash away in Thy Blood all my stains ere I receive Thee this morning. *Domine, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum, sed tantum dic verbo, et sanabitur anima mea!* I am not worthy to receive Thee, but Thou, O heavenly Physician, art able with one word to heal all my wounds. Come and heal me.

## II.

Consider, moreover, that in every Mass the work of Redemption is renewed: so much so that if Jesus Christ had not died once upon the Cross, the celebration of one Mass could procure for the world the very same blessings we have received through the Death of our Redeemer. *Tantum, valet celebratio missae quantum mors Christi in cruce.* The celebration of the Mass is of as much value as the Death of Christ on the Cross (St. John Chrysostom). Therefore all the merits of the Passion are applied

to men by means of the Sacrifice of the Altar.

According to the Council of Trent the time of the celebration of Holy Mass is precisely, then, that time in which the Lord is on His throne of grace to which we are exhorted to have recourse that we may obtain the Divine mercy and find grace in seasonable aid. (Heb. iv. 16). St. John Chrysostom says that the Angels wait for the time of Mass to intercede with greater efficacy in our favour, and he adds that what is not obtained at Mass is with difficulty obtained at any other time.

O miserable being that I am! How many graces have I lost, O my God, from having neglected to ask Thee for them during Mass! But since Thou now givest me new light I will no longer be negligent. I unite, then, O Eternal Father, my prayers with those of Jesus Christ. I hope for all through Thy merits, O my Jesus, and through thy intercession, O my Mother Mary.

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### *MEDITATION BEFORE THE MOST BLESSED SACRAMENT*

Meditation, wherever it is made, pleases God; but it is certain that Jesus Christ especially delights in the meditation that is made before the Most Holy Sacrament, since it appears that there He bestows light and grace most abundantly upon those who visit Him. He has left Himself in this Sacrament, not only to be the food of souls who receive Him in Holy Communion, but also to be found at all times by every one who seeks Him. Devout pilgrims go to the Holy House of Loretto, where Jesus Christ dwelt during His life, and to Jerusalem where He died on the Cross; but how much greater ought to be our devotion when we find Him before us in a Tabernacle, where this very Lord Himself now dwells in person, Who lived among us, and died for us on Calvary!

It is not permitted in the world for persons of all ranks to speak alone with kings; but with Jesus Christ, the King of Heaven, both nobles and plebeians, rich and poor, can converse at their will in this Sacrament, and employ themselves as long as they will in setting before Him their wants, and in seeking His graces; and there Jesus gives audience to all, hears all, and comforts them.



Men of the world, who know no treasures but those of the earth, cannot comprehend what pleasure can be found in spending a long time before an Altar where is placed a consecrated Host; but to souls who love God, hours and days passed before the Blessed Sacrament seem as moments, because of the celestial sweetness which the Lord there gives them to taste and to enjoy.

But how can worldly people expect to enjoy this sweetness if they keep their hearts full of the earth? St. Francis Borgia said that in order that Divine love may rule in our hearts, we must first drive the world away from them; otherwise, Divine love will never enter into them, because it finds no place to rest. *Be still, and see that I am God.* (Ps. xlv. 11). In order to have experience of God, and to prove how sweet He is to them that love Him, our hearts must be empty, that is, detached from earthly affections. Wouldst Thou find God? "Detach thyself from creatures and thou shalt find Him," said St. Teresa.

What should a soul do when in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament? It should love and pray. It should not come there in order to experience sweetness and consolation, but only to give pleasure to God, by making acts of love, by giving itself wholly to God without reserve, by stripping itself of its own will, and offering itself, saying: "O my God, I love Thee and desire nothing but Thee; grant that I may ever love Thee, and then do with me, and with all that I possess, according to Thy pleasure." Among all acts of love, that is most pleasing to God which the blessed continually exercise in Heaven, namely, the rejoicing in the infinite joy of God; for the blessed soul loves God infinitely more than it loves itself, and therefore desires the happiness of her Beloved far more than her own; and seeing that God enjoys infinite joy, the blessed soul would thence receive an infinite delight, but as a creature is not capable of an infinite delight, it rests full of satisfaction, and thus the joy of God constitutes its joy and its Paradise. These acts of love, even when made by us without any sensible sweetness, please God. He does not, however, give to souls whom He loves a perpetual enjoyment of His comforts in this life, but only at intervals; and when He gives them, He gives them not so much as a reward for good works (the full reward of which He reserves for them in Heaven), as to give them more

strength to suffer with patience the troubles and adversities of this present life, and especially the distractions and dryness of spirit which pious souls experience in meditation.

So far as distractions are concerned, of these we must not make much account, it is enough to drive them away when they come. Besides, even the Saints suffered involuntary distractions. But they did not on this account leave off meditation; and so also must we ourselves act. St. Francis de Sales said that if in meditation we did nothing but drive away, or seek to drive away, distractions, our meditation would be of great profit. As for dryness of spirit, the greatest pain of souls in meditation is to find themselves sometimes without a feeling of devotion, weary of it, and without any sensible desire of loving God; and with this is often joined the fear of being in the wrath of God through their sins, on account of which the Lord has abandoned them; and being in this gloomy darkness, they know not any way of escaping from it, for it seems to them that every way is closed against them. Let the devout soul, then, continue resolute in not leaving off meditation, as the devil will suggest to it. At such a time let it unite its desolation to that which Jesus Christ suffered upon the Cross; and if it can only say this, it is enough to say it, at least with the whole heart and will: "My God, I wish to love Thee; I wish to be wholly Thine! Have pity on me! Oh, leave me not!" Let it say, also, as a holy soul said to its God, in time of desolation: "I love Thee, though I seem to myself an enemy in Thy sight. Drive me away as Thou wilt; I will ever follow after Thee."

## Evening Meditation

### *JESUS DIES UPON THE CROSS.*

#### I.

Behold how the loving Saviour is now drawing nigh unto death. Behold, O my soul, those beautiful eyes growing dim, that face become all pallid, that Heart all but ceasing to beat, and that Sacred Body now disposing itself to the final surrender of its life. After Jesus had received the vinegar, He said: *It is consummated*. He then passed over in review the many and terrible sufferings that He had undergone during His life, in the shape of poverty, contempt, and pain; and then offering them all up to His Eternal Father, He turned to Him and said: *It is consummat-*

*ed.* My Father, behold by the sacrifice of My Life, the work of the world's Redemption which Thou hast laid upon Me, is now completed. And it seems as though, turning Himself again to us, He repeated: *It is consummated.* As if He would have said, O men, O men, love Me, for I have done all; there is nothing more that I can do in order to gain your love.

Behold how, at last, Jesus dies. Come ye Angels of Heaven, come and assist at the death of your King. And thou, O sorrowing Mother Mary, do thou draw nearer to the Cross, and fix thine eyes yet more attentively on thy Son, for He is now on the point of death. Behold Him, how, after having commended His Spirit to His Eternal Father, He calls upon Death, giving it permission to come and take away His life. Come, O Death, says Jesus, be quick and perform thine office; slay Me, and save My flock. The earth now trembles, the graves open, the veil of the Temple is rent in twain. The strength of the dying Saviour is failing through the violence of His sufferings; the warmth of His Body is gradually diminishing; He gives up His Body to death; He bows His Head down upon His breast, He opens His mouth, and dies: *And bowing his head, he gave up the ghost.* (John xix. 30).

## II.

The people behold Jesus expire, and, observing that He no longer moves, they say, He is dead, He is dead! And to them the voice of Mary makes echo, while she says, "Ah, my Son, Thou art, then, dead!"

He is dead! O God, who is it that is dead? The Author of life, the only-begotten Son of God, the Lord of the world, --He is dead! O Death, thou wert the amazement of Heaven and of all nature! O Infinite Love! A God to sacrifice His Blood and His Life! And for whom? For His ungrateful creatures; dying in an ocean of sufferings and shame, in order to pay the penalty due to their sins. Ah, Infinite Goodness! O Infinite Love! O my Jesus, Thou art, then, dead, on account of the love Thou hast borne me! Oh, let me never again live, even for a single moment, without loving Thee! I love Thee, my chief and only Good; I love Thee, my Jesus, --dead for me! O my sorrowing Mother Mary, do thou help a servant of thine, who desires to love Jesus.

## Good Friday

### Morning Meditation *OUR SALVATION IS IN THE CROSS.*

"Behold the wood of the Cross on which hung the salvation of the world!"--so sings the Church on this day. In the Cross is our salvation, our strength against temptations, detachment from earthly pleasures; in the Cross is found the true love of God. We must, therefore, resolve to carry with patience the cross Jesus Christ sends, and die upon it for the sake of Jesus Christ Who died upon His Cross for the love of us.

#### I.

In the Cross is our salvation, our strength against temptations, detachment from earthly pleasures; in the Cross is found the true love of God. We must, therefore, resolve to carry with patience that cross Jesus Christ sends us, and to die upon it for the sake of Jesus Christ Who died upon His Cross for the love of us. There is no other way to enter Heaven but to resign ourselves to tribulations until death. And thus may we find peace, even in suffering. When the cross comes, what means is there for enjoying peace, other than the uniting of ourselves to the Divine will? If we do not take this means, let us go where we will, let us do what we may, we shall never escape from the weight of the cross. On the other hand, if we carry it with good-will, it will bear us to Heaven, and give us peace upon earth.

What does he gain who refuses the cross? He increases its weight. But he who embraces it, and bears it with patience, lightens its weight, and the weight itself becomes a consolation; for God abounds with grace to all those who carry the cross with good-will in order to please Him. By the law of nature there is no pleasure in suffering; but Divine love, when it reigns in a heart, enables it to take delight in its sufferings.

Oh, that we would consider the happy condition we shall enjoy in Paradise, if we be faithful to God in enduring toils without lamenting; if we do not complain against God Who commands us to suffer, but say with Job: *Let this be my comfort, that he should not spare in afflicting me, nor I contradict the words of the Holy One.* (Job vi. 10). If we are sinners and have deserved hell, this should be our comfort in the tribulations which befall us, that we are

chastised in this life; because this is the sure sign that God will deliver us from eternal chastisement. Miserable is that sinner who prospers in this world! Whoever suffers a bitter trial, let him cast a glance at the hell he has deserved, and thus the pains he endures will seem light. If, then, we have committed sins, this ought to be our continual prayer to God: "O Lord, spare not pains, but give me, I pray Thee, strength to endure them with patience, that I may not oppose myself to Thy holy will. I will not oppose the words of the Holy One; in everything I unite myself to that which Thou wilt appoint for me, saying always, with Jesus Christ: *Yea, Father; for so hath it seemed good in thy sight.*" (Matt. xi. 26).

## II.

The soul which is governed by Divine love seeks only God. When a man has given all the substance of his house for love, he will despise it as nothing. (Cant. viii. 7). He that loves God despises and renounces everything that does not help him to love God; and in all the good works that he does, in his penitential acts and his labours for the glory of God, he seeks not consolations and sweetnesses of spirit; it is enough for him to know that he pleases God. In a word, he ever strives in all things to deny himself, renouncing every pleasure of his own; and then he boasts of nothing and is puffed up with nothing; but calls himself an unprofitable servant, and, setting himself in the lowest place, he abandons himself to the Divine will and mercy.

We must change our tastes in order to become Saints. If we do not arrive at a state in which bitter appears sweet and sweet bitter, we shall never attain to a perfect union with God. In this consists all our security and perfection: in suffering with resignation all things that are contrary to our inclinations, as they happen to us day by day, whether they are small or great. And we must suffer them for those purposes for which the Lord desires that we should endure them, namely, to purify ourselves from the sins we have committed, to merit eternal life, and to please God--which is the chief and most noble end at which we aim in all our actions.

Let us, then, ever offer ourselves to God, to suffer every cross that He may send us; and let us take care to be ever ready

to endure every toil for the love of Him, in order that, when it comes, we may be ready to embrace it, saying, as Jesus Christ said to Peter when He was taken in the Garden by the Jews to be led to death: *The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?* (Jo. xviii. 11). God hath given me this cross for my good, and shall I say to Him that I will not receive it?

And whenever the weight of any cross seems very heavy, let us immediately have recourse to prayer, and God will give us strength to endure it meritoriously.

And let us then recollect what St. Paul said, that no tribulation of this world, however grievous it may be, can be compared with the glory which God prepares for us in the world to come. (Rom. viii. 18). Let us, therefore, reanimate our Faith whenever tribulations afflict us; let us first cast our eyes upon the crucified One Who was in agony for us upon the Cross, and let us look also at Paradise, and on the blessings that God prepares for those who suffer for His love; and thus we shall not be faint-hearted, but shall thank Him for the pains He gives us to suffer, and shall desire that He may give us even more. Oh, how the Saints rejoice in Heaven, not that they have possessed honours and pleasures upon earth, but that they have suffered for Jesus Christ! Everything that passes is trifling; that only is great which is eternal, and never passes away.

O my Jesus, how comforting is that which Thou sayest to me: *Turn unto me, and I will turn to you.* (Zack. i. 3). For the sake of creatures, and of my own miserable tastes, I have left Thee; now I leave all and turn to Thee; and I am confident that Thou wilt not reject me if I desire to love Thee; for Thou hast told me that Thou art ready to embrace me. Receive me, then, into Thy Grace: make me know the great Good that Thou art, and the love Thou hast borne to me, that I may no more leave Thee. O my Jesus, pardon me! O my Beloved, pardon me the offences I have committed against Thee. Give me Thy love and then do with me what Thou wilt; chastise me as much as Thou wilt; deprive me of everything, but deprive me not of Thyself. Were the whole world to come and offer me all its goods, I declare that I desire Thee alone, and nothing more. O my Mother Mary, recommend me to thy Son. He giveth thee whatever thou askest;

in thee I trust.

## **Spiritual Reading** *MEDITATION ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

Meditation on the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ is a great means of acquiring Divine love. It is certain that the fact of Jesus Christ being so little loved in the world arises from the negligence and ingratitude of mankind, and from not considering, at least occasionally, how much He has suffered for us, and the love wherewith He has suffered for us. "To mankind it has appeared foolish," as St. Gregory observes, "that God should die for us." It seems folly says the Saint, that God should have been willing to die in order to save us miserable slaves; and, nevertheless, it is of Faith that He has done so. *He has loved us, and delivered himself for us.* (Eph. v. 2). And He has willed to shed all His Blood in order to wash away our sins therewith: *Who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.* (Apoc. i. 5).

St. Bonaventure says: "My God, so much hast Thou loved me, that through Thy love for me, Thou dost seem to have gone so far as even to have hated Thyself." Besides, He has yet further willed that He Himself should become our Food in Holy Communion. And here the angelic Doctor, St. Thomas, speaking of this Most Holy Sacrament, says that God has so humbled Himself for us, that it is as if He were our servant, and each of us His God: "as though He were the servant of men, and each of them were God's God."

Hence it is that the Apostle says: *For the charity of Christ presseth us.* (2 Cor. v. 14). St. Paul says that the love Jesus Christ has borne us constrains us, and, in a certain sense, forces us, to love Him. O my God, what is there that men will not do out of love for some creature on which they have set their affections! And how little is their love for One Who is, moreover, God! For One Whose goodness and loveliness are infinite, and Who has even gone so far as to die upon a Cross for each one of us! Ah, let us all follow the example of the Apostle who said: *But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Gal. vi. 14). So spoke the holy Apostle; and what greater glory can I hope for in the world than that of having a God to sacrifice His Blood and Life, out of love for me?

And this is what everyone who has Faith must say, and if he has Faith, how will it be possible for him to love any other than God? O my God! how can a soul--contemplating Jesus crucified, as, suspended on three nails, He hangs from those same Wounds of His in His Hands and Feet, and dies of sheer anguish, through His love for us--not perceive itself drawn, and, as it were, constrained, to love Him with all its powers?

Let a soul be as cold as it can be in Divine love; if it have Faith, I know not how it be possible for it not to find itself urged to love Jesus Christ. Even the most hasty consideration of the Holy Scripture reveals to us the love which He manifested towards us in His Passion, and in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. As regards His Passion, we read in Isaias: *Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows*; and in the verse that follows: *But he was wounded for our iniquities; he was bruised for our sins*. (Is. liii. 4). So that it is of Faith that Jesus Christ has willed to suffer in His own person pains and afflictions, to set free from them us sinners to whom they were justly due. And why is it that He has done so, if it be not for the love He bore towards us? *Christ hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us* (Eph. v. 2), as St. Paul says. And St. John says: *Who hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood*. (Apoc. i. 5). And in respect to the Sacrament of the Eucharist, it was Jesus Himself Who said to us all when He instituted it: *Take ye, and eat; this is my body*. (1 Cor. xi. 24). And in another passage: *He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me and I in him*. (John vi. 57). How can anyone who has Faith read this without feeling himself, as it were, forced to love his Redeemer, Who, after having sacrificed His Blood and Life out of love for him, left him His own Body in the Sacrament of the Altar, to be the Food of his soul, and the means of uniting him wholly to Himself in Holy Communion? We may add one more brief reflection on the Passion of Jesus Christ. He shows Himself to us on the Cross pierced by three nails, with His Blood issuing from every pore, and agonizing in the pangs of death. I ask, why is it that Jesus manifests Himself to us in such a pitiable condition? Is it, perchance, that we may compassionate Him? No: it is not so much to gain our compassion as to become the object of our love that He has reduced Himself to so miser-



able a state. It ought to have been a motive more than sufficient to gain our love had He given us to know that His love for us was for all eternity: *I have loved thee with an everlasting love.* (Jer. xxxi. 3). But seeing that this was not enough for our lukewarmness, the Lord, in order to move us to love Him according to His desires, willed thus to give us indeed a practical demonstration of the love He bore us, by showing Himself to us covered with Wounds, and dying with anguish through His love for us, that by means of His sufferings we may understand the immensity and tenderness of the love He cherishes towards us; as it is so well expressed in these words of St. Paul: *He has loved us and delivered himself for us.* (Eph. v. 2).

## **Evening Meditation**

### *JESUS HANGING DEAD UPON THE CROSS*

#### I.

Raise up thine eyes, my soul, and behold that crucified Man. Behold the Divine Lamb now sacrificed upon that altar of pain. Consider that He is the beloved Son of the Eternal Father; and consider that He is dead for the love that He has borne thee. See how He holds His arms stretched out to embrace thee; His Head bent down to give thee the kiss of peace; His side open to receive thee into His Heart. What dost thou say? Does not a God so loving deserve to be loved? Listen to the words He addresses to thee from that Cross: "Look, My son, and see whether there be any one in the world who has loved Thee more than I have." No, my God, there is none that has loved me more than Thou. But what return shall I ever be able to make to a God Who has been willing to die for me? What love from a creature will ever be able to recompense the love of his Creator Who died to gain his love?

O God, had the vilest one of mankind suffered for me what Jesus Christ has suffered, could I ever refrain from loving him? Were I to see any man torn to pieces with scourges and fastened to a cross in order to save my life, could I ever call it to mind without feeling a tender emotion of love? And were there to be brought to me the portrait of him, as he lay dead upon the cross, could I behold it with a look of indifference, when I considered: "This man is dead, tortured thus, for love of me. Had he not loved me he would not so have died. "Ah, my Redeemer, O Love

of my soul! How shall I ever again be able to forget Thee? How shall I ever be able to think that my sins have reduced Thee so low, and not always bewail the wrongs that I have done to Thy goodness? How shall I ever be able to see Thee dead of pain on this Cross for love of me, and not love Thee to the uttermost of my power?

## II.

O my dear Redeemer, well do I recognise in these Thy Wounds, and in Thy lacerated Body, as it were through so many lattices the tender affection which Thou dost retain for me. Since, then, in order to pardon me, Thou hast not pardoned Thyself, oh, look upon me now with the same love wherewith Thou didst one day look upon me from the Cross, whilst Thou wert dying for me. Look upon me and enlighten me, and draw my whole heart to Thyself, so that, from this day forth, I may love none else but Thee. Let me not ever be unmindful of Thy Death. Thou didst promise that, when raised up upon the Cross, Thou wouldst draw all our hearts to Thee. Behold this heart of mine, which, made tender by Thy Death and enamoured of Thee, desires to offer no further resistance to Thy calls. Oh, do Thou draw it to Thyself, and make it all Thine own.

Thou hast died for me, and I desire to die for Thee; and if I continue to live, I will live for Thee alone. O Pains of Jesus, O Ignominies of Jesus, O Death of Jesus, O Love of Jesus, fix yourselves within my heart, and let the remembrance of you abide there always, to be continually smiting me, and inflaming me with love. I love Thee, O Infinite Goodness; I love Thee, O Infinite Love. Thou art and shalt ever be, my one and only Love. O Mary, Mother of love, do thou obtain me love.

## **Holy Saturday**

### **Morning Meditation** *MARY HAS TO BID FAREWELL TO JESUS*

In raising the stone to close up the entrance to the Tomb, the holy disciples of the Saviour had to approach the Blessed Mother and say: Now, O Lady, we must close the Sepulchre. Forgive us. Look once more on thy Son, and bid Him a last farewell. Then, my beloved Son--must the afflicted Mother have said--then shall

I see Thee no more? Receive, therefore, on this last occasion that I behold Thee, my last farewell, the farewell of Thy dear Mother, and receive also my heart which I bury with Thee.

I.

When a mother is by the side of her suffering and dying child, she undoubtedly feels and suffers all his pains; but after he is actually dead, when, before the body is carried to the grave, the afflicted mother must bid her child a last farewell; then, indeed, the thought that she is to see him no more is a grief that exceeds all other griefs. Behold the last sword of Mary's sorrow. After witnessing the death of her Son on the Cross, and embracing for the last time His lifeless Body, this blessed Mother had to leave Him in the sepulchre, never more to enjoy His beloved presence on earth.

That we may better understand this last dolour, we will return to Calvary and consider the afflicted Mother, who still holds the lifeless Body of her Son clasped in her arms. O my Son, she seemed to say in the words of Job: My Son, *thou art changed to be cruel towards me.* (Job xxx. 21). Yes, for all Thy noble qualities, Thy beauty, grace, and virtues, Thy engaging manners, all the marks of special love Thou hast bestowed upon me, the peculiar favours Thou hast granted me,--all are now changed into grief, and as so many arrows pierce my heart, and the more they have excited me to love Thee, so much the more cruelly do they now make me feel Thy loss. Ah, my own beloved Son, in losing Thee I have lost all. "O truly-begotten of God, Thou wast to me a father, a son, a spouse: Thou wast my very soul! Now I am deprived of my father, widowed of my spouse, a desolate, childless Mother; having lost my only Son, I have lost all." (St. Bernard).

Thus was Mary, with her Son locked in her arms, absorbed in grief. The holy disciples, fearful that the poor Mother might die of grief, approached her to take the Body of her Son from her arms to bear it away for burial. This they did with gentle and respectful violence, and having embalmed it, they wrapped it in a linen cloth which was already prepared.

The disciples then bore Jesus to the tomb. As the mournful train sets forth, choirs of Angels from Heaven accompanied it, the holy women followed, and with them the afflicted Mother

also followed her Son to the place of burial. When they had reached the appointed place, O how willingly would Mary have there buried herself alive with her Son had such been His will. "I can truly say," Mary revealed to St. Bridget, "that at the burial of my Son one tomb contained, as it were, two hearts."

My afflicted Mother, I will not leave thee to weep alone; no, I will accompany thee with my tears. This grace I now ask of thee. Obtain that I may always bear in mind and always have a tender devotion towards the Passion of Jesus and thy sorrows, that the remainder of my days may thus be spent in weeping over thy sufferings, my own sweet Mother, and those of my Redeemer. These sorrows, I trust, will give me the confidence and strength that I shall require at the hour of death, that I may not despair at the sight of the many sins by which I have offended my Lord. They must obtain me pardon, perseverance, and Heaven, where I hope to rejoice with thee, and to sing the infinite mercies of my God for all eternity. Amen.

## II.

Before leaving the Sepulchre, according to St. Bonaventure, Mary blessed the sacred stone which closed it, saying: "O happy stone, that doth now enclose that sacred Body which for nine months was contained in my womb. I bless thee and envy thee; I leave thee the guardian of my Son, of that Son Who is my whole Treasure and all my Love." Then, raising her heart to the Eternal Father, she said: "O Father, to Thee do I recommend Him-Him Who is Thy Son at the same time that He is mine." Thus bidding her last farewell to her beloved Jesus and to the Sepulchre, she left it, and returned to her own house. This Mother, says St. Bernard, went away so afflicted and sad, that she moved many to tears in spite of themselves; and wherever she passed, all who met her wept, and could not restrain their tears. And he adds that the holy disciples and women who accompanied her "mourned even more for her than for their Lord."

St. Bonaventure says that, passing, on her return before the Cross still wet with the Blood of her Jesus, she was the first to adore it. "O holy Cross," she then said, "I kiss thee, I adore thee; for thou art no longer an infamous gibbet, but a throne of love and an altar of mercy, consecrated by the Blood of the Divine

Lamb, sacrificed on thee for the salvation of the world."

She then left the Cross, and returned home. When there, the afflicted Mother cast her eyes around, and no longer saw her Jesus; but, instead of the sweet presence of her dear Son, the remembrance of His beautiful life and cruel death presented itself before her eyes. She remembered how she had pressed that Son to her bosom in the stable of Bethlehem; the conversations she had held with Him during the many years they had dwelt in the house of Nazareth; she remembered their mutual affection, their loving looks, the words of Eternal Life which fell from those Divine lips; and then, the sad scene she had that day witnessed again presented itself before her. The nails, the thorns, the lacerated flesh of her Son, those deep Wounds, those uncovered bones, that open mouth, those dimmed eyes, all presented themselves before her. Ah, what a night of sorrow was that night for Mary! The afflicted Mother, turning to St. John, mournfully said: "Ah, John, tell me where is thy Master?" She then asked the Magdalene: "Daughter, tell me, where is thy Beloved? O God, who has taken Him from us?" Mary wept, and all who were present, wept with her.

And thou, my soul, weep not! Ah, turn to Mary, and address her with St. Bonaventure: "O my own sweet Lady, let me weep; thou art innocent, I am guilty." Entreat her at least to let thee weep with her: "Grant that I may weep with thee." She weeps for love; do thou weep through sorrow for thy sins. I pity thee, my afflicted Mother, for the bitter sword which pierced thee on seeing thy Son in thy arms already dead, no longer fair and beautiful as thou didst receive Him in the stable at Bethlehem, but covered with Blood, livid and all lacerated with Wounds, so that even His bones were seen. Thou didst then say: "My Son, my Son, to what has love reduced Thee!" And when He was borne to the Sepulchre, thou wouldst thyself accompany Him, and place Him with thy own hands in the Tomb; and bidding Him the last farewell, thou didst leave thy loving heart buried with Him. By this Martyrdom of thy beautiful soul, do thou obtain for me, O Mother of fair love, the forgiveness of the offences I have committed against my beloved God, and of which I repent with my whole heart. Do thou defend me in

temptations; do thou assist me at the moment of my death, that, saving my soul through the merits of Jesus and thee, I may one day, after this miserable exile, go to Paradise to sing the praises of Jesus and of thee for all eternity. Amen.

## Spiritual Reading

### FRUITS OF THE DEATH OF JESUS.

St. John writes that our Saviour, in order to make His disciples understand the death He was to suffer upon the Cross, said: *And I, if I be lifted up from, the earth, will draw all things to myself. Now this he said, signifying what death he should die.* (Jo. xii. 32).

And, in fact, by exhibiting Himself crucified and dead, how many souls has Jesus drawn to Himself, so that they have left all to give themselves up entirely to His Divine love. Ah, my Jesus, draw my soul to Thyself, which was one time lost; draw it by the chains of Thy love, so that it may forget the world, to think of nothing else but of loving and pleasing Thee. *Draw me after thee by the odour of thine ointments.*

O my Lord, Thou knowest my weakness and the offences that I have committed against Thee. Draw me out of the mire of my passions; draw all my affections to Thyself, so that I may attend to nothing but Thy pleasure only, O my God, most lovely! Hear me, O Lord, by the merits of Thy death, and make me wholly Thine.

St. Leo tells us that he who looks with confidence upon Jesus dead upon the Cross is healed of the wounds caused by his sins. "They who with Faith behold the death of Christ are healed from the wounds of sin." Every Christian, therefore, should keep Jesus crucified always before his eyes, and say with St. Paul, *I judged not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* (1 Cor. 2). In short, the Apostle says that he did not desire any other knowledge in this world than that of knowing how to love Jesus Christ crucified. My beloved Saviour, to obtain for me a good death, Thou hast chosen a death so full of pain and desolation! I cast myself into the arms of Thy mercy. I see that many years ago I ought to have been in hell, separated from Thee for ever, for having at one time despised Thy grace; but Thou hast called me to penance, and I hope hast pardoned me; but if through my fault Thou hast not yet pardoned me, pardon

me now. I repent, O my Jesus, with my heart, for having turned my back upon Thee, and driven Thee from my soul. Restore me to Thy grace. But that is not enough: give me strength to love Thee with all my soul during my whole life. And when I come to the hour of my death, let me expire burning with love for Thee, and saying: My Jesus, I love Thee! My Jesus, I love Thee! and thus continue to love Thee for all eternity. From this moment I unite my death to Thy holy death, through which I hope for my salvation. *In thee, O Lord, have I hoped; I shall not be confounded forever.* (Ps. xxx. 2).

O great Mother of God, thou after Jesus art my hope. In thee, O Lady have I hoped; I shall not be confounded forever.

O devout souls, when the devil wishes to make us distrustful about our salvation by the remembrance of our past sins, let us lift up our eyes to Jesus dead upon the Cross, in order to deliver us from eternal death. After a God has made us know, by means of the holy Faith, the desire He has had for our salvation, having even sacrificed His life for us, if we are resolved really to love Him for the rest of our lives, cost what it may, we should be on our guard against any weakness of confidence in His mercy. After He has given us so many signs of His love for us, and of His desire for our salvation, it is a kind of sin against Him not to put our whole confidence and hope in His goodness.

Full, then, of holy confidence, let us hope for every good from the hands of a God so liberal and so loving; and at the same time let us give ourselves to Him without reserve, and thus pray to Him: O Eternal God, we are sinners, but Thou Who art Almighty canst make us Saints; grant that henceforth we may neglect nothing that we know to be for Thy glory, and may do all to please Thee. Blessed shall we be if we lose all to gain Thee, the Infinite Good. Grant that we may spend the remainder of our lives in pleasing Thee alone. Punish us as Thou wilt for our past sins, but deliver us from the chastisement of not being able to love Thee; deprive us of all things save Thyself. Thou hast loved us without reserve; and we also will love Thee without reserve, O Infinite Love, O Infinite Good! O Virgin Mary, draw us wholly to God; thou canst do so; do so for the love thou hast for Jesus Christ.

## Evening Meditation

*O INCARNATION, O REDEMPTION, O PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST! O SWEET NAMES!*

I.

Oh, the unhappy state of a soul in sin which has lost God! It lives on in wretchedness, for it lives without God. God sees it, but no longer loves it; He hates and abhors it. There was, then, my soul, a time when thou didst live without God. The sight of thee no longer rejoiced the Heart of Jesus Christ, as it did when thou wast in His grace, but wast hateful to Him. The Blessed Virgin regarded thee with compassion, but detested thy deformity. When hearing Mass, thou didst see Jesus Christ in the consecrated Host, Who had become thine enemy. Ah, my God, despised and lost by me, pardon me and let me find Thee again! I wished to lose Thee, but Thou wouldst not abandon me. And if Thou hast not yet returned to me, I pray Thee to come to me now that I repent with all my heart of having offended Thee. Let me be sensible of Thy return to me, by feeling a great sorrow for my sins, and a great love towards Thee.

My beloved Lord, rather than see myself separated from Thee and deprived of Thy grace, I am content to suffer any punishment. Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ, I pray Thee to give me grace never more to offend Thee. May I die rather than turn my back upon Thee again!

Ah! my crucified Jesus, look on me with the same love with which Thou didst look on me when dying on the Cross for me; look on me and have pity on me; give me a general pardon for all the displeasure I have given Thee; give me holy perseverance; give me Thy holy love; give me a perfect conformity to Thy will; give me Paradise, that I may love Thee there for ever. I deserve nothing, but Thy Wounds encourage me to look for every good from Thee. Ah! Jesus of my soul, by that love which made Thee die for me, give me Thy love! Take away from me all affection for creatures, give me resignation in tribulation, and make Thyself the object of all my affections, that from this day forward I may love none other than Thee.

Thou hast created me, Thou hast redeemed me, Thou hast made me a Christian, Thou hast preserved me whilst, I was in



sin, Thou hast pardoned me many times; above all, instead of chastisements Thou hast increased Thy favours to me. Who should love Thee, if I do not? Arise, and let Thy mercy triumph over me; and may the fire of love with which I burn for Thee be as great as the fire which should have devoured me in hell. O my Jesus, my Love, my Treasure, my Paradise, my All!

## II.

O Incarnation, O Redemption, O Passion of Jesus Christ! O Calvary, O Scourges, O Thorns, O Nails, O Cross, that did torment my Lord! O sweet names, which remind me of the love a God has had for me, never depart from my mind and my heart. Remind me always of the pains Jesus my Redeemer willed to suffer for me! O most sacred Wounds, ye are the perpetual resting-place of my soul; ye are the blessed furnaces where it forever burns with Divine love!

My beloved Jesus, I have deserved hell, and to be for ever separated from Thee! I refuse not the fire, nor the other pains of hell, if Thou for my just punishment dost will to send me there; but what I cannot consent to is, not to be able to love Thee any more. Let me love Thee and then send me where Thou wilt. It is just that I should suffer for my sins, but it is not just that I should have to hate and curse Him Who created me, Who redeemed me, and Who has loved me so much! Justice requires that I should love and bless Thee for ever. I bless Thee, then, and love Thee, Jesus my Love, and I hope to love and bless Thee for all eternity.

My sweet Redeemer, I know Thou dost wish me to be wholly Thine. Ah I permit not that, from this day forward, creatures should have any part in that love which belongs altogether to Thee. Thou alone dost deserve all my affections, Thou alone art infinitely beautiful, Thou alone hast truly loved me; Thee alone, then, will I love, and I will do all I can to please Thee. I renounce all,— pleasures, riches, honours, and all the creatures of the earth. Thou alone, my Jesus, are sufficient for me. Away from me all earthly affections! Once upon a time you had a place in my heart; but then I was blind: now that God by His grace has enlightened me, and has made me to know the vanity

of this world and the love which He has borne me, and that He desires me to give Him all my love, I will consecrate it to Him alone. Yes, my Jesus, take possession of my whole heart; and if I know not how to give it to Thee entirely as Thou desirest, take it Thyself, and make it Thine own. I love Thee, my God, with all my heart; I love Thee more than myself. *Trahe me post te:* draw me, my Lord, all to Thee, and destroy in me the love of all created things.

O Paradise, O country of loving souls, O kingdom of love, O sure haven where God is loved for all eternity, and where there is no more fear of losing Him! When shall I pass thy threshold, and see myself free from this miserable body, and delivered from the many enemies that continually try to deceive me in order to deprive me of Divine grace? Ah, my crucified Jesus, make known to me the immense riches Thou hast prepared for the souls that love Thee. Give me a great desire of possessing Paradise, so that, forgetting this world, I may there make my continual abode; and whilst I live, may I have no other desire than to come to see Thee and love Thee face to face in Thy kingdom. I do not deserve it, and I know that at one time my name was written amongst those who were condemned to hell; but now that I am, as I hope, in Thy grace, I beseech Thee, by that Blood Thou didst shed for me on the Cross, to write me in the Book of Life. Thou hast died to win Paradise for me: I wish for it, I ardently desire it, and I hope to attain it through Thy merits, that I may there ascend to be consumed with Thy love by loving Thee with all my strength. There, forgetting myself and everything else, I shall think only of loving Thee; I shall desire nothing but to love Thee, and I shall do nothing but love Thee. O my Jesus, when shall this be? O Mary, Mother of God, by thy prayers bring me to Paradise. Turn, then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Amen.

## **Easter Sunday**

### **Morning Meditation**

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.

Let us rejoice at seeing in His risen glory our Saviour, our

Father, the best Friend we possess. Let us rejoice, too, for our own sakes, because the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is for us a sure pledge of our own resurrection and of the glory we hope one day to have in Heaven in our soul and body.

I.

Jesus came into the world not only to redeem us, but by His example to teach us all virtues, and especially humility, and holy poverty which is inseparably united with humility. For this it was, He chose to be born in a cave; to live as a poor man in a workshop for thirty years; and at last to die, poor and naked, on a Cross, seeing His garments divided amongst the soldiers before He breathed His last; while, after His death, He receives the winding-sheet for His burial as an alms from others.

Let the poor be consoled at seeing Jesus Christ, the King of Heaven and earth, thus living and dying in poverty in order to enrich us with His merits and gifts. *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that being rich he became poor for your sakes, that through his poverty you might be rich* (2 Cor. viii. 9). For this cause the Saints, in order to become like unto Jesus in His poverty, despised all earthly riches and honours, so that one day they might go to enjoy with Jesus Christ the riches and honours prepared by God in Heaven for them that love Him. And speaking of these blessings the Apostle St. Paul says *that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love him* (1 Cor. 9).

O my Jesus, I beseech Thee by Thy Resurrection, make me rise glorious with Thee on the last day, to be always united with Thee in Heaven, to praise Thee and to love Thee for ever.

II.

Jesus Christ, then, rose from the dead with the glory of possessing all power in Heaven and on earth, not only as God, but as Man. All the angels and all men are therefore subject to Him. Let us rejoice in thus seeing in glory our Saviour, our Father, and the best Friend we possess.

And let us rejoice for ourselves, because the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is for us a sure pledge of our own Resurrection, and of the glory that we may hope one day to have in Heaven in our soul and in our body. This hope gave courage to the Martyrs to

suffer with gladness All the evils of life, and the most cruel torments of tyrants. We must rest assured, however, that none will rejoice with Jesus Christ but they who are willing to suffer in this world with Him; nor will he obtain the crown who does not fight as he ought to fight. *He that striveth, for the mastery is not crowned except he strive lawfully.* (2 Tim. ii. 5). At the same time let us be assured by what the same Apostle says: *that all the sufferings of this life are short and light in comparison with the boundless and eternal joys we hope to enjoy in Paradise.* (2 Cor. iv. 17). Let us labour the more to continue in the grace of God, and continually to pray for perseverance in God's friendship. Without continual prayer we shall not obtain perseverance, and without perseverance we shall not be saved.

O sweet Jesus, worthy of all love, how hast Thou so loved men that, in order to show Thy love, Thou hast not refused to die wounded and dishonoured on an infamous tree! O my God, how is it there are so few among men who love Thee with their whole heart? O my dear Redeemer, I wish to be one of these few. Miserable that I am to have forgotten Thy love in the past, and given up Thy grace for miserable pleasures! I know the evil I have done. I grieve over it with my whole heart and would wish to die of grief. O my beloved Redeemer, I love Thee now more than myself and am ready to die a thousand deaths rather than lose Thy friendship. Jesus, I thank Thee for the light Thou hast given me. O Jesus, my Hope, leave me not in my own hands. Help me until death.

O Mary, Mother of God, pray to Jesus for me.

## Spiritual Reading

### THE HEAVEN GOD HAS WON FOR US.

The bliss of Heaven consists in seeing and loving God face to face. "Everything we expect," says St. Augustine, "is expressed in a word of one syllable, namely, God." The reward God promises to us does not consist altogether in the beauty, the harmony, and other advantages of the city of Paradise. God Himself, Whom the Saints are allowed to behold, is, according to the promises made to Abraham, the principal reward of the just in Heaven. *I am thy reward exceeding great.* (Gen. xv. 1). St. Augustine asserts that were God to show His face to the damned, "hell would

be instantly changed into a paradise of delights." And he adds that were a departed soul allowed the choice of seeing God and suffering the pains of hell, or of being freed from these pains and deprived of the sight of God, "it would prefer to see God, and to endure those torments."

The delights of the soul infinitely surpass all the pleasures of the senses. Even in this life, Divine love infuses such sweetness into the soul when God communicates Himself to it that the body is raised from the earth. St. Peter of Alcantara once fell into such an ecstasy of love that, taking hold of a tree, he drew it up from the roots, and raised it with him on high. So great is the sweetness of Divine love, that the holy Martyrs, in the midst of their torments, felt no pain, but were on the contrary filled with joy. Hence St. Augustine says that when St. Laurence was laid on a red-hot gridiron, the fervour of Divine love made him insensible to the burning heat of the fire. Even on sinners who weep for their sins, God bestows consolations which exceed all earthly pleasures. Hence St. Bernard says: "If it be so sweet to weep for Thee, what must it be to rejoice in Thee!"

How great is the sweetness which a soul experiences when, in the time of prayer, God, by a ray of His own light, reveals to it His goodness and His mercies towards it, and particularly the love Jesus Christ has borne to it in His Passion! It feels its heart melting and, as it were, dissolved through love. But in this life we do not see God as He really is: we see Him, as it were, in the dark. *We see now through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face.* (1 Cor. xiii. 12). Here below God is hidden from our view; we can see Him only with the eyes of Faith. How great shall be our happiness when the veil is raised, and we are permitted to behold God face to face! We shall then see His beauty, His greatness, His perfection, His amiableness, and His immense love for our souls.

*Man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred.* (Eccles. ix. 1). The fear of not loving God, and of not being loved by Him, is the greatest affliction which souls that love God endure on the earth; but in Heaven the soul is certain that it loves God and that He loves it; and sees that the Lord embraces it with infinite love, and that this love shall not be dissolved for all eternity.

The knowledge of the love Jesus Christ has shown it in offering Himself in sacrifice for it on the Cross, and in making Himself its Food in the Sacrament of the Altar, shall increase the ardour of its love. It shall also see clearly all the graces God has bestowed upon it, all the helps which He has given it, to preserve it from falling into sin, and to draw it to His love.

It shall see that all the tribulations, the poverty, the infirmities and persecutions which it regards as misfortunes, have all proceeded from love, and have been the means employed by Divine Providence to bring it to glory. It shall see all the lights, loving calls, and mercies which God had granted to it after it had insulted Him by its sins. From the blessed mountain of Paradise it shall see so many souls damned for fewer sins than it had committed, and shall see that it is saved and secured against the possibility of ever losing God. Justly, then, has St. Augustine said that to gain the eternal bliss and peace of Paradise, we should embrace eternal labour.

### Evening Meditation

"YOUR SORROW SHALL BE TURNED INTO JOY."

I.

Oh, happy are we, if we suffer with patience on earth the troubles of this present life! Distress of circumstances, fears, bodily infirmities, persecutions, and crosses of every kind, will one day all come to an end; and if we be saved, they will all become for us subjects of joy and glory in Paradise: *Your sorrow, says the Saviour to encourage us, shall be turned into joy.* (John xvi. 20). So great are the delights of Paradise that they can neither be explained nor understood by us mortals: *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him.* (1 Cor. ii 9). Beauties like to the beauties of Paradise, eye hath never seen; harmonies like unto the harmonies of Paradise, ear hath never heard; nor hath ever human heart gained the comprehension of the joys God hath prepared for those that love Him. Beautiful is the sight of a landscape adorned with hills, plains, woods, and views of the sea. Beautiful is the sight of a garden abounding with fruits, flowers, and fountains. Oh, how much more beautiful is Paradise!

To understand how great the joys of Paradise are, it is

enough to know that in that blessed realm resides a God omnipotent, Whose care it is to render happy His beloved souls. St. Bernard says that Paradise is a place where "there is nothing thou wouldst not, and everything thou wouldst." There thou shalt not find any thing displeasing to thyself, and every thing thou dost desire thou shalt find: "There is nothing thou wouldst not." In Paradise there is no night; no seasons of winter and summer; but one perpetual day of unvaried serenity, and one perpetual spring of unvaried delight. No more persecutions or jealousies are there; for there all sincerely love one another, and each rejoices in each other's good as if it were his own. No more bodily infirmities or pains are there, for the body is no longer subject to suffering; no poverty is there, for every one is rich to the full, not having anything more to desire; no more fears are there, for the soul being confirmed in grace can sin no more, nor lose that supreme good which it possesses.

"There is everything thou wouldst." In Paradise thou shalt have whatsoever thou desirest. There the sight is satisfied in beholding that city so beautiful, and its citizens all clothed in royal apparel, for they are all kings of that everlasting kingdom. There shall we see the beauty of Mary, whose appearance will be more beautiful than that of all the Angels and Saints together. We shall see the beauty of Jesus, which will immeasurably surpass the beauty of Mary. The smell will be satisfied with the perfumes of Paradise. The hearing will be satisfied with the harmonies of Heaven, and the canticles of the Blessed, who will all with ravishing sweetness sing the Divine praises for all eternity. Ah, my God, I deserve not Paradise, but hell; yet Thy death gives me a hope of obtaining it. I desire and ask Paradise of Thee, not so much in order to enjoy as in order to love Thee for ever, secure that it will never more be possible for me to lose Thee. O Mary, my Mother, O Star of the Sea, it is for thee, by thy prayers, to conduct me to Paradise.

## **Monday in Easter Week**

### **Morning Meditation**

THE LOVE OF JESUS IN DYING FOR US.

Jesus died for us that by His love for us He might gain the

entire dominion of our hearts. *For to this end, wrote St. Paul, Christ died and rose again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.* (Rom. xiv. 9). Contemplating the death of Jesus Christ, and the love with which He died for men, the Saints esteemed it little to forfeit for His sake, property, honours, and life itself.

## I.

Who could have conceived that the Son of God, the Lord of the Universe, to show His love for us, would suffer and die upon the Cross, if He had not really done so? With reason did Moses and Elias on Mount Tabor speak of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ as of an *excess*. (Luke ix. 31). And what could be greater excess of love than for the Creator to die for His creatures?

To make Thee an adequate return for Thy love, my dear Redeemer, it would be necessary for another God to die for Thee. It would therefore be but little, it would be nothing, were we poor miserable worms of the earth to give up our whole lives for Thee, Who hast given Thine for us.

What should still more excite us to love Him is the ardent desire with which, through the course of His life, He longed for the hour of His death. By this desire He indeed proved how great His love was for us. *I have a baptism, He said, wherewith I am to be baptized; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished* (Luke xii. 50). I must be baptized with the Baptism of My own Blood, to wash away the sins of men, and how am I dying with the desire of My bitter Passion and Death! My soul, lift up your eyes, and behold your Lord hanging upon a disgraceful Cross; behold the Blood which trickles down from His Wounds. Behold His mangled body, all inviting you to love Him. Your Redeemer in His sufferings would have you love Him at least through compassion.

O Jesus, Thou didst not refuse me Thy life and precious Blood, and shall I refuse Thee anything that Thou requirest of me? No, Thou hast given Thyself to me without reserve. I will give myself to Thee without reserve.

## II.

St. Francis de Sales, speaking of these words of the Apostle, *The charity of Christ presseth us* (2 Cor. v. 14), says: "Knowing that Jesus Christ, being true God, has loved us even to the



laying-down of His life for us, and this upon a Cross, do we not feel our hearts as it were in a press, forcibly straitened, and love pressed from them by a violence which is the more powerful as it is the more amiable?" And he adds: "Why, therefore, do we not cast ourselves upon Jesus Christ crucified, to die on the Cross for the love of Him Who has willingly died upon the Cross for the love of us? I will cling to Him, should we say, and will never abandon Him; I will die with Him, and be consumed in the fire of His love. My Jesus has given Himself entirely to me. and I will give myself entirely to Him. I will live and die upon His bosom; neither life nor death shall ever separate me from Him. O Eternal Love, my soul seeks Thee and espouses Thee forever!"

### **Spiritual Reading.**

#### **THE HAPPY LIFE OF THOSE WHO LOVE GOD.**

*Justice and peace, have kissed* (Ps. lxxxiv. 11). Peace resides in every soul in which justice dwells. Hence David said: *Delight in the Lord, and he will give thee the requests of thy heart.* (Ps. xxxvi. 4). To understand these words we must consider that worldlings seek to satisfy the desires of their hearts with the goods of this earth; but, because these cannot make them happy, their hearts continually make fresh demands; and how much soever they may acquire of these goods, they are not content. Hence the Prophet says: *Delight in the Lord, and he will give thee the requests of thy heart. Give up creatures, seek your delight in God, and He will satisfy all the cravings of your heart.*

This is what happened to St. Augustine, who, as long as he sought happiness in creatures, never enjoyed peace; but, as soon as he renounced them and gave to God all the affections of his heart, he exclaimed: "All things are hard, O Lord, and Thou alone art repose." As if he had said: Ah, Lord I now know my folly. I expected to find felicity in earthly pleasures; but now I know that they are only vanity and affliction of spirit, and that Thou alone art the peace and joy of our hearts.

The Apostle says that the peace which God gives to those who love Him surpasses all the sensual delights a man can enjoy on this earth. *The peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding.* (Phil. iv. 7). St. Francis of Assisi, in saying "My God and my All!" experienced on this earth an anticipation of Paradise. St.

Francis Xavier, in the midst of his labours in India for the glory of Jesus Christ, was so replenished with Divine consolations, that he would exclaim: "Enough, O Lord! Enough!" Where, I ask, has any lover of this world been found, so satisfied with the possession of worldly goods as to say: Enough, O world, enough; no more riches, no more honours, no more applause, no more pleasures? Ah, no! worldlings are constantly seeking after higher honours, greater riches, and new delights; but the more they have of them, the less are their desires satisfied, and the greater their disquietude.

It is necessary to persuade ourselves of this truth, that God alone can give content. Worldlings do not wish to be convinced of it, through an apprehension that, if they give themselves to God, they will lead a life of bitterness and discontent. But with the Royal Prophet, I say to them: *O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet.* (Ps. xxxiii. 9). Why, O sinners, will you despise and regard as miserable that life which you have not as yet tried? O taste and see. Begin to make a trial of it; hear Mass every day; practise Mental Prayer and the Visit to the Most Holy Sacrament; go to Communion at least once a week; fly from evil conversations; walk always with God; and you shall see that, by such a life, you will enjoy that sweetness and peace which the world, with all its delights, has not hitherto been able to give you.

### **Evening Meditation.**

THOU SHALT BE CROWNED.

I.

Let us imagine to ourselves a soul which, on departing out of this world, enters into eternity in the grace of God. All full of humility and of confidence, it presents itself before Jesus, its Judge and Saviour. Jesus embraces it, gives it His benediction, and causes it to hear these words of sweetness: Come, my spouse, come! Thou shalt be crowned! If the soul have need of being purified, He sends it to Purgatory, and, all resigned, it embraces the chastisement, because itself wishes not to enter into Heaven, that land of purity, if it is not wholly purified. The Guardian Angel comes to conduct it to Purgatory; it first returns him thanks for the assistance he has rendered it in its lifetime, and then obediently follows him. Ah, my God, when will that day arrive

on which I shall see myself out of this world of perils, secure of never being able to lose Thee any more? Yes, willingly will I go to the Purgatory which shall be mine; joyfully will I embrace all its pains; sufficient will it be for me in that fire to love Thee with all my heart, since there I shall love none else but Thee.

## II.

The purgation over, the Angel will return and say to the soul: Come, beautiful soul, the punishment is over; come, and enjoy the Presence of thy God Who is awaiting thee in Paradise. Behold, the soul now passes beyond the clouds, passes beyond the spheres and the stars, and enters into Heaven. O God, what will it say on entering into that beautiful country, and casting its first glance on that city of delights? The Angels and Saints, and especially its own holy advocates, will go to meet it, and with jubilation will they welcome it, saying, Welcome, O companion of our own! Welcome! Ah, my Jesus, do Thou make me worthy of it.

What consolation will the soul not feel in there meeting with relations and friends of its own who have previously entered into Heaven! But greater by far will be its joy in beholding Mary its Queen, and in kissing her feet, and thanking her for the many kindnesses she has done it. The Queen will embrace it, and will herself present it unto Jesus, Who will receive it as a spouse. And Jesus will then present it to His Divine Father, Who will embrace and bless it, saying: Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. And thus will He beatify it with the same beatitude He Himself enjoys. Ah, my God, make me love Thee exceedingly in this life, that I may love Thee exceedingly in eternity. Thou art the object most worthy of being loved; Thou dost deserve all my love; I will love none but Thee. Do Thou help me by Thy grace. And, Mary, my Mother, be thou my protectress.

## **Tuesday in Easter Week**

### **Morning Meditation.**

"YOU ARE BOUGHT WITH A GREAT PRICE."

We ought to set a higher value on the soul than on all the goods of the earth. To be convinced of this truth it is enough to know that God Himself condemned His Divine Son to death in

order to save our souls. And the Eternal Word has not refused to purchase them with His own Blood. *For God so loved the world as to give his only begotten son ... that the world may be saved by him.* (John iii. 16, 17).

I.

The business of eternal salvation is for us the most important of all affairs; but it is also the most neglected by Christians. They are diligent, and lose no time in seeking to gain a lawsuit, or a situation of emolument. How many measures are taken to attain these objects! How many means adopted! They neither eat nor sleep. And what efforts do they make to secure their eternal salvation? How do they live? To save their souls the greater number of Christians do nothing; on the contrary, they do everything to bring their souls to perdition; they live as if Death, Judgment, Hell, Heaven, and Eternity were not Truths of Faith, but fables invented by the poets. If a person lose a lawsuit, or a harvest crop, how great is his pain and distress of mind! With what zeal does he labour to repair the loss! If worldlings lose a horse, or a dog, with what diligence do they seek after it? But if they lose the grace of God, they sleep, and jest, and laugh. All blush at being told that they neglect their worldly affairs, but how few are ashamed to neglect the business of eternity, which is the most important of all. The worldling says that the Saints were truly wise, because they sought only the salvation of their souls; and still he himself attends to all worldly business, and utterly neglects the concerns of the soul. *But we entreat you, brethren,* says St. Paul, *that you do your own business.* (1 These. iv. 10, 11).

Ah, my God, how have I spent so many years, which Thou hast given me in order to secure my eternal salvation? Thou, my Redeemer, hast purchased my soul with Thy Blood, and hast consigned it to me that I may attend to its salvation; and I have laboured only for its perdition by offending Thee Who hast loved me so tenderly. I thank Thee for giving me time to be able to repair the great loss I have suffered. I have lost my soul and Thy grace. Lord, I am sorry with my whole heart for my past offences, and I resolve, henceforth, to lose everything, even my life, rather than forfeit Thy friendship.

II.

Salvation is the most important affair, because if the soul be lost, all is lost. We ought to set a higher value on the soul than on all the goods of the earth. "The soul," says St. Chrysostom, "is more precious than the whole world." To be convinced of this truth it is enough to know that God Himself condemned His Son to death in order to save our souls. The Eternal Word has not refused to purchase them with His own Blood. Hence a holy Father says that man appears to be of as much value as God. And Jesus Christ has asked: *What exchange shall a man give for his soul?* (Matt. xvi. 26). *For God so loved the world as to give his only begotten son.* (John 16). If, then, such is the value of the soul, for what earthly good shall a man exchange and lose it?

St. Philip Neri with reason could say that he who does not attend to the salvation of his soul is a fool. Were there on this earth two classes of men, one mortal and the other immortal, and were the former to see the latter seeking after the things of this world, its honours, goods, and amusements, they should certainly exclaim: O fools that you are! You have it in your power to acquire eternal riches, and do you fix your thoughts on those miserable and transitory things? Will you, for these, condemn yourselves to an eternity of torments in the next life? Leave us, for whom all shall end at death, leave us to seek after these earthly goods! But no; we are all immortal. How then does it happen that so many lose their souls for the miserable pleasures of this life? How does it come to pass, says Salvian, that Christians believe in Judgment, Hell, and Eternity, and still live as if they feared them not?

I love Thee above all things, and I resolve always to love Thee, my Sovereign Good, Who art worthy of infinite love. Assist me, my Jesus, that this purpose may not be like my past resolutions to which I have been always unfaithful. Take me out of life rather than suffer me ever again to offend Thee, or ever to cease to love Thee. O Mary, my hope after Jesus, save me by obtaining for me holy perseverance.

## Spiritual Reading.

### CONFESSION.

#### I.-IMPORTANCE OF FREQUENT CONFESSION.

I do not intend to treat in this place of the Confessions of those who commit mortal sins, although I shall say something on proximate occasions and on sacrilegious Confessions; but I will principally speak of the Confessions of timorous souls that love perfection and endeavour constantly to purify their souls more and more from the stain of venial sins.

Cesarius relates that a good priest commanded, in the Name of God, a devil who appeared to him, to tell what was most hurtful to him. The demon answered that nothing was more injurious or displeasing to him than frequent Confession. Jesus Christ once said to St. Bridget, that they who wish to preserve fervour should often purify their souls by accusing themselves in Confession of all their defects, and all their negligence in His service. Cassian says that he who aspires to perfection should aim at great purity of conscience; because from purity of conscience the soul passes to perfect love. Hence love corresponds to cleanness of heart. It is, however, necessary to know that in the present state this purity of soul does not consist in a total exemption from all faults; for except our Divine Saviour and His Divine Mother, there neither has been nor will be in this world, any soul free from all stain. *In many things we all offend.* (James iii. 2). But it consists in two things: first, in a careful guard over the heart, to prevent the commission of every deliberate sin, however venial; and secondly, in instantly purifying the soul from any fault that it may commit. Now these two are precisely the fruits of frequent Confession.

In the first place, Confession cleanses the soul from the stains it contracts. St. John Climacus relates that a young man, in order to discontinue the scandalous life that he led in the world, went to a Monastery in order to become a Religious. Before his admission the Abbot told him that if he wished to be received, he must make a public confession of all his sins. The young man, who was sincerely resolved to give himself to God, readily obeyed; and behold, while he confessed his faults in the presence of the monks, a holy Religious who was among them saw a man

of venerable aspect cancel from a written paper that he held in his hand, every sin the penitent confessed, so that at the end of the Confession all his sins were cancelled. Now, what then took place in a visible manner, happens invisibly to every one that confesses his sins with the requisite dispositions.

Confession not only washes away the stains of the soul, but it also gives it strength against relapse. The angelic Doctor teaches that the virtue of Penance not only destroys the fault that has been committed, but also prevents it from budding forth again. In his *Life of St. Malachy*, St. Bernard relates that there was a certain woman who was so much given to impatience and to anger that she became insupportable. Hearing from her that she had never confessed her impatience, St. Malachy induced her to make a Confession of all her sins of anger. St. Bernard states that after her Confession she became so meek and patient that she appeared incapable of resenting any injury or insult that she received.

Hence, to acquire purity of conscience, many Saints confessed their sins every day. Such was the practice of St. Catharine of Sienna, of St. Bridget, of Blessed Colletta, of St. Charles Borromeo, of St. Ignatius of Loyola, and of many others. St. Francis Borgia went to Confession even twice a day. If worldlings cannot bear to appear before those whom they love with a stain on the countenance, what wonder is it that souls that love God should endeavour always to purify themselves more and more, in order to render themselves more pleasing in the eyes of their beloved Lord! Now, I do not intend to require of those who practise frequent Communion to go to Confession every time they communicate; but it is right that they should go to Confession twice or at least once a week, and also when they have committed any deliberate fault.

### **Evening Meditation.**

SEEING AND ENJOYING GOD FOR EVER.

I.

The beauty of the Saints, the heavenly music, and the other delights of Paradise, form but the lesser portion of its treasures. That which gives to the soul its fulness of bliss is seeing a loving God face to face. St. Augustine says that were God to let His

beautiful Face be seen by the damned, hell, with all its torments, would become to them a paradise. Even in this world, when God gives a soul in prayer a taste of His sweet Presence, and by a ray of light discovers to it His goodness, and the love He bears it, so great is the contentment that the soul feels itself dissolve and melt away in love; and yet, in this life, it is not possible for us to see God as He is; we behold Him obscured, as if through a thick veil. What, then, will it be, when God will take away that veil from before us, and cause us to behold Him face to face, openly? O Lord, for having turned my back upon Thee no more should I be worthy to behold Thee; but, relying on Thy goodness, I hope to see Thee, and to love Thee in Paradise forever. I speak thus, because I am speaking with a God Who has died in order to give Paradise to me.

Although the souls that love God are the happiest in this world, yet they cannot, here below, enjoy a happiness full and complete; that fear, which arises from not knowing whether they be deserving of the love or the hatred of their beloved Saviour, keeps them, as it were, in perpetual suffering. But in Paradise the soul is certain that it loves God, and is loved by God; and it sees that that sweet tie of love which holds it united with God will never be loosened throughout all eternity. The flames of its love will be increased by the clearer knowledge the soul will then possess of what the love of God has been in being made Man, and having willed to die for it; and in having, moreover, given Himself to it in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Its love will be increased by then beholding, in all their distinctness, the graces He has given it, in order to lead it to Heaven; it will see that the crosses sent to it in lifetime have all been artifices of His love to render it happy. It will see, besides, the mercies He has granted it, the many lights and calls to penance. From the summit of that blessed Mount will it behold the many lost souls now in hell for sins less than its own, and it will behold itself now saved, possessed of God, and certain that it can never more lose Him throughout all eternity. My Jesus, my Jesus, when will that too happy day for me arrive?

The happiness of the blessed soul will be perfected by knowing with absolute certainty that that God Whom it then enjoys,



it will be able to enjoy for all eternity. Were there to be any fear in the Blessed that they might lose that God Whom they now enjoy, Paradise would be Paradise no longer. But no; the blessed soul is certain with the certainty which it has of the existence of God, that that supreme Good which it enjoys, it will enjoy forever. That joy, moreover, will not grow less with time; it will be ever new. The blessed one will be ever happy, and ever thirsting for that happiness; and, while ever thirsting, will be ever satiated.

When, therefore, we see ourselves afflicted with the troubles of life, let us lift up our eyes unto Heaven, and console ourselves by saying: Paradise! The sufferings will one day come to an end; nay, they will themselves become objects over which to rejoice. The Saints await us; the Angels await us; Mary awaits us: and Jesus stands with the crown in His hand wherewith to crown us, if we shall be faithful to Him. Ah, my God, when will that day come on which I shall arrive at possessing Thee, and be able to say unto Thee: My Love, I cannot lose Thee more! O Mary, my hope, never cease from praying for me, until thou seest me safe at thy feet in Paradise!

## Wednesday in Easter Week

### Morning Meditation

"THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH THY WHOLE HEART."

*For to this end Christ died and rose again, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and of the living.* (Rom. xiv. 9). The Saints, contemplating the death of Jesus Christ, thought it little to give their life and all things for the love of so loving a God. How many Martyrs have sacrificed their lives for Him! How many tender Virgins, renouncing the nuptials of the great, have gone with joy to death to make some return for the affection of a God Who died for their sake! And what have you done for Jesus' sake?

I.

*But one thing is necessary.* (Luke x. 42). What is this one thing necessary? It is not necessary to acquire riches, nor to obtain dignities, nor to gain a great name. The only thing necessary is to love God. Whatever is not done for the love of God is lost. This

is the greatest and the First Commandment of the Divine Law. To the Pharisee who asked which was the great Commandment of the Law, Jesus Christ answered: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart... This is the greatest and first commandment.* (Matt. xxii. 37, 38). But this, the greatest of the commandments, is the most despised by men: there are few who fulfil it. The greater part of men love relatives, friends, and even brute animals, but do not love God. Of these St. John says that they have not life -- that they are dead. *He that loveth not abideth in death* (1 Jo. iii. 14). St. Bernard says that the reward of a soul is estimated by the measure of her love for God.

Let us consider, then, how dear to us should be this command to love God with our whole heart. What object more noble, more magnificent, more powerful, more rich, more beautiful, more bountiful, more merciful, more grateful, more amiable, or more loving than Himself could God give us to love?

Who more *noble* than God? Some boast of a family nobility of five hundred or a thousand years; but the nobility of God our Father is eternal. He is the Lord of all. Before God all the Angels in Heaven, and all the nobles on earth are but as a drop of water or a grain of dust. *Behold the Gentiles are but as a drop of a bucket -- behold the islands are as a little dust* (Is. xl. 15).

Who more *powerful* than God? He can do whatsoever He wills. By an act of His will He created this world, and by another act He can destroy it when He pleases.

Who more *wealthy*? He possesses all the riches of Heaven and earth.

Who more *beautiful*? Before the beauty of God all the beauties of creatures fade away.

Who more *bountiful*? St. Augustine says that God has a greater desire to do good to us than we have to receive it.

Who more *merciful*? If the most impious sinner on earth humble himself before God, and repent of his sins, God instantly pardons and embraces him.

Who more *grateful*? He does not leave unrewarded the smallest act we perform for His sake.

Who more *amiable*? God is so amiable that, by barely seeing and loving Him in Heaven, the Saints feel a joy which makes

them perfectly happy and content for all eternity. The greatest of the torments of the damned arises from knowing that this God is so amiable, and that they cannot love Him.

O Infinite Goodness! O Infinite Love! My enamoured Jesus, fill my heart with Thy love so that I may forget myself, and think of nothing but of loving and pleasing Thee. I now consecrate to Thee my body, my soul, my will, my liberty. Till now I have sought to gratify myself to Thy great displeasure. I am exceedingly sorry, my crucified Love. I will henceforth seek nothing but Thee, my God and my All.

## II.

And who is more loving than God? In the Old Law men might doubt whether God loved them with a tender love; but, after seeing Him die on a Cross for us, how can we doubt the tenderness and the ardent affection with which He loves us? Let us raise our eyes and look at Jesus, the true Son of God, fastened with nails to a gibbet, and let us consider the intensity of the love which He bears us. That Cross, those Wounds, says St. Bernard, cry out, and proclaim to us that He truly loves us. And what more could He do to convince us of His great love than to lead a life of sorrow for thirty-three years, and afterwards die in torments on the infamous tree of the Cross, in order to wash away our sins with His own Blood? *Christ also hath loved us, and hath delivered himself up for us.* (Ephes. v. 2). *Who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.* (Apoc. i. 5). "How," says St. Philip Neri, "is it possible for him who believes in God to love anything but God?" Contemplating God's love towards men, St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi began one day to ring the bell, saying that she wished to invite all nations of the earth to love so loving a God. St. Francis de Sales used to say with tears: "To love our God it would be necessary to have an infinite love; and we throw away our love on vain, contemptible things."

Alas, my Jesus, how many times have I renounced Thy friendship and made myself a slave of Satan, dishonouring Thy Infinite Majesty! I grieve above all things for having so grievously insulted Thee. Ah, my God, bind my will to Thy feet with the sweet cords of Thy holy love, that it may wish for nothing but what pleases Thee. May I take Thy Will as the sole guide of my

life. I renounce everything. Thou alone art sufficient for me.

## **Spiritual Reading**

CONFESSION.

### II.-EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE.

Every one knows that for a good Confession three things are necessary: an Examination of Conscience, Sorrow, and the Purpose to Avoid Sin.

As to the examination of conscience, for those that frequent the Sacraments, it is not necessary to distress the head by efforts to find out all the minute circumstances of venial sins. I would rather see such persons careful to discover the causes and roots of their attachments and tepidity. Some there are who have the same story to tell, and recite the same faults without sorrow, and without any thought of amendment.

For spiritual souls that go frequently to Confession, and guard against deliberate venial sins, it is not necessary to spend a long time in the examination of conscience. With regard to grievous sins, they need not scrutinize the conscience, for had they committed any mortal sin, they would know it without examination. With regard to venial sins, if they have been fully deliberate, they, too, by the remorse that they cause, would make themselves known to the soul. Besides, there is no obligation of confessing all our venial transgressions; consequently we are not obliged to make a strict search after them, and much less after the number, the circumstance, the manner, or the causes of them; it is enough to confess those that are most grievous, and most opposed to perfection, and to tell the rest in general terms. And when you have not certain matter for the Sacrament, tell some sin of your past life for which you have great sorrow; and say, for example: I accuse myself in a special manner of all the faults I have committed in my past life against Charity, Purity, or Obedience. How consoling is the doctrine of St. Francis de Sales on this point. "Be not troubled," he says, if you do not remember all your little faults at Confession; for as you often fall imperceptibly, so you are often raised up imperceptibly," that is, by the acts of love, or by the other good acts that devout souls are accustomed to perform.

## Evening Meditation

THE PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST.

I.-HOW DESERVING JESUS CHRIST IS OF OUR LOVE ON ACCOUNT OF THE LOVE HE HAS SHOWN US IN HIS PASSION.

The whole sanctity and perfection of a soul consists in loving Jesus Christ our God, our sovereign Good, and our Redeemer. Whoever loves Me, says Jesus Christ Himself, shall be loved by My Eternal Father: *The Father himself loveth you, because you have loved me.* (John xvi. 27). Some, says St. Francis de Sales, make perfection consist in an austere life; others in prayer; in frequenting the Sacraments; others in alms-deeds. But they deceive themselves: perfection consists in loving God with our whole heart. The Apostle wrote: *Above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection.* (Col. iii. 14). It is charity which keeps united and preserves all the virtues that render a man perfect. Hence St. Augustine said: "Love God, and do whatever you please"; because a soul which loves God is taught by that same love never to do anything that will displease Him, and to leave nothing undone that may please Him.

But perhaps God does not deserve all our love? *I have loved thee with an everlasting love.* (Jer. xxxi. 3). O man, says the Lord, behold I was the first to love thee. Thou wast not yet in the world, nay, the world itself was not, and I already loved thee. As long as I am God, I love thee; as long as I have loved Myself, I have also loved thee. With good reason, therefore, did St. Agnes, that young holy virgin, reply to those who wished to unite her to an earthly spouse: "I am engaged to another Lover." "Go," said she, "O lovers of this world, cease to ask my love; my God was the first to love me. He has loved me from all eternity: it is but just, then, for me to give Him all my affections, and to love none other but Him."

### II.

As Almighty God knew that man is won by kindness, He determined to lavish His gifts upon him, and so take captive the affections of his heart. For this reason He said: *I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love* (Osee, xi. 4). I will catch men by those very snares by which they are naturally

caught, that is, by the snares of love. And such exactly are all the favours of God to man. After having given him a soul created to His own image, with memory, understanding, and will, and a body with its senses, He created Heaven and earth for him; yes, all that exists, all for the love of man, the firmament, the stars, the planets, the seas, the rivers, the fountains, the hills, the plains, metals, fruits, and a countless variety of animals: and all these God made that they might minister to the uses of man, and that man might love Him in gratitude for so many admirable gifts. "The heavens and the earth and all things tell me to love Thee," says St. Augustine. "My Lord," he said, "whatever I behold on the earth, or above the earth, all speak to me and exhort me to love Thee; because all assure me that Thou hast made them for the love of me." The Abbot de Rance, founder of La Trappe, when from his hermitage he stood and surveyed the hills, the fountains, the birds, the flowers, the planets, and the skies, felt himself animated by each one of these creatures to love that God Who had created all through love for him.

## Thursday in Easter Week

### Morning Meditation

"SHE IS AN INFINITE TREASURE TO MEN."

The earth, the heavens, and all nature with astonishment beheld Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God, the Lord of the Universe, die of intense pain and anguish, on a disgraceful Cross -- and why? *He hath loved us and hath delivered himself for us* (Eph. v. 2). And do men believe this and not love God?

I.

O inestimable value of Divine love which makes us rich before God! It is the treasure by which we gain His friendship. *She is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use become the friends of God* (Wis. vii. 14). The only thing we ought to fear, says St. Gregory of Nyssa, is the loss of God's friendship; and the only object of our desires should be its attainment. It is love that obtains the friendship of God. Hence, according to St. Laurence Justinian, by love the poor become rich, and without love the rich are poor. "No greater riches than to have charity. With charity the poor man is rich, and without charity the rich man is poor."

How great is the joy a person feels in thinking he is loved by a man of exalted rank! But how much greater must be the consolation a soul derives from the conviction that God loves her! *I love them that love me* (Prov. viii. 17). In a soul that loves God the Three Persons of the Adorable Trinity dwell. *If any one love me he will keep my word; and my Father will love him; and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him* (John xiv. 23). St. Bernard writes that, among all the virtues charity is the one that unites us to God. St. Catharine of Bologna used to say that love is the golden chain that binds the soul to God. St. Augustine says that "love is a link connecting the lover with the beloved." Hence were God not immense, where should He be found? Find a soul that loves God, and there God is certainly found. Of this St. John assures us. *He that abideth, in charity abideth in God, and God in him* (1 Jo. iv. 16). A poor man loves riches, but he does not therefore enjoy them; he may love a throne, but he does not therefore possess a kingdom. But the man that loves God possesses God. *He abideth in God and God in him.*

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It is true, O my Jesus, that I am so wretched as to have often offended Thee after so many special lights and graces. I am

no longer worthy to be consumed in those blessed flames with which the Saints are inflamed. I ought rather to burn in hell fire. But Thou dost command me to love Thee, and I will obey Thee. I will love Thee, Jesus, with my whole heart.

## II.

St. Thomas says that love draws in its train all other virtues, and directs them all to unite us more closely to God. Hence, because from charity all virtues are born, St. Laurence Justinian called it *the mother of all virtues*. Hence St. Augustine used to say: "Love, and do what you wish." He that loves God can only do what is good; if he does evil he shows that he has ceased to love God. And when he ceases to love God, all things can profit him nothing. If, said the Apostle, I gave all my possessions to the poor, and my body to the flames, and have not charity, I am nothing. *And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing* (1 Cor. xiii. 3).

Love also prevents us from feeling the pains of this life. St. Bonaventure says that the love of God is like honey; it sweetens the bitterest things. And what more sweet to a soul that loves God than to suffer for Him? She knows that by cheerfully embracing sufferings she pleases God, and that her pains shall be the brightest jewels in her crown in Paradise. And who is there that will not willingly suffer and die in imitation of Jesus Christ, Who has gone before us, carrying His Cross, to offer Himself in sacrifice for the love of us, and inviting us to follow His example. *If any man will come after me, let him take up His cross and follow me* (Matt. xvi. 24). For this purpose He has condescended to humble Himself to death, and to the opprobrious death of the Cross, for the love of us. *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross* (Phil. ii. 8).

O Jesus, I have believed all this, and yet not only have I not loved Thee, but I have frequently offended Thee. Pardon me, I beseech Thee, and keep me ever mindful of the death Thou hast suffered for me, that I may never more offend Thee, but may always love Thee. Holy Mary, Mother of God, enable me to love Jesus: this is the only favour I ask of thee.



## Spiritual Reading

### CONFESSION.

#### III. -- CONTRITION.

In the second place, sorrow is necessary; this is the principal condition necessary for obtaining the pardon of sins. The most sorrowful, not the longest Confessions, are the best. The proof of a good Confession is found, says St. Gregory, not in the multitude of the words of the penitent, but in true compunction of heart. But let those who go frequently to Confession, and abhor even venial faults, banish all doubts regarding the sincerity of their sorrow. Some are troubled because they do not feel sorrow; they wish to shed tears, and to feel a tender sorrow every time they receive the Sacrament of Penance; and, because with all their efforts they are unable to excite this tender sorrow, they feel always uneasy about their Confessions. But you must be persuaded that true sorrow consists not in feeling it, but in wishing for it. All the merit of virtue is in the will; hence, speaking of the Virtue of Faith, Gerson has said that sometimes a person who wishes to believe has more merit than another who believes. Speaking of sorrow, St. Thomas says that the essential sorrow necessary for Confession is a displeasure at having committed sin; and this sorrow is not in the sensitive part of the soul, but in the will; for sensible sorrow is an effect of the displeasure of the will, which effect we are not always able to produce, because the inferior part does not always follow and obey the superior part of the soul. Whenever the will is displeased, above all things, at having committed sin, the Confession is a good one.

Be careful to abstain from forced efforts to excite sensible sorrow. Remember that, with regard to interior acts, the best are those that we perform with the least violence, and with the greatest sweetness; for the Holy Ghost ordereth *all things sweetly and peaceably* (Wis. 1). Hence the holy penitent Ezechias said of the sorrow that he felt for his sins: *Behold in peace is my bitterness most bitter* (Is. xxxviii. 17). He felt great sorrow, but it was accompanied with peace.

When you wish to receive absolution, be careful in your preparation for Confession, first to ask of Jesus Christ, and of the sorrowful Mother Mary, a true sorrow for your sins. Make

afterwards, as has been already said, a short examination of conscience, and then as to the sorrow, it is enough for you to say with sincerity:

My God, I love Thee above all things; I hope, through the Blood of Jesus Christ, for the pardon of all my sins, for which I am sorry with my whole heart, because by them I have offended and displeased Thine infinite Goodness; I abhor them above every evil, and I unite my abhorrence of them to the abhorrence that Jesus had for them in the Garden of Gethsemani. I purpose, with Thy grace, never more to offend Thee.

And as often as you have sincerely wished to make these acts, go in peace to receive absolution, without fear or scruple. St. Teresa gave another excellent means of removing anxiety about sorrow for sins. "See," said the Saint, "whether you have a sincere purpose not to commit the sins that you confess; if you have, doubt not that you also have true sorrow."

### **Evening Meditation**

THE PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST.

II. -- HOW DESERVING JESUS CHRIST IS OF OUR LOVE ON ACCOUNT OF THE LOVE HE HAS SHOWN US IN HIS PASSION.

I.

St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, when she held any beautiful flower in her hand, was enkindled by the sight of it with love for God, and would say: "And God, then, has thought from all eternity of creating this flower for love of me!" Thus did that flower become, as it were, a dart of love, which sweetly wounded her, and united her more and more to her God. On the other hand, St. Teresa, at the sight of trees, fountains, rivers, lakes, or meadows, declared that all these fair things upbraided her for her ingratitude in loving so coldly a God Who created them that they might draw her to His love. To the like purpose it is related of a pious hermit, that when walking through the country, it seemed to him the plants and flowers in his pathway reproached him for the cold return of love he made to God; so that he went along gently striking them with his staff, and saying to them: Oh, be silent, be silent! You call me an ungrateful wretch; you tell me God has made you for love of me, and yet I do not love Him; but

now I understand you, be silent, be silent; do not reproach me more."

## II.

But God was not satisfied with giving us go many beautiful creatures. He has gone to such lengths to gain our love, as to give us Himself. The Eternal Father did not hesitate to give us even His only-begotten Son: *For God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son* (John iii. 16). When the Eternal Father saw that we were all dead, and deprived of His grace by sin, what did He do? For the immense love, nay, as the Apostle writes, for the *exceeding* love He bore us, He sent His beloved Son to make atonement for us; and so restore to us that life of which sin had robbed us: *Who through his exceeding charity with which he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together in Christ* (Eph. ii. 4, 5). And in granting us His Son (not sparing His Son, that He might spare us), He has granted us every good together with Him, His grace, His love and Paradise, since assuredly all these gifts are much less than that of His Son: *He that spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how hath he not also with him, given us an things?* (Rom. viii. 32).

## Friday in Easter Week

(First Friday of April)

### Morning Meditation

"THE CLEFTS OF THE ROCK."

Oh, what a safe place of refuge shall we not find in the sacred "clefts of the rock," that is to say, in the Wounds of Jesus Christ? "The clefts of the rock," says St. Peter Damian, "are the Redeemer's Wounds; in these my soul has placed its hope."

## I.

There is no means which can more surely kindle in us Divine love than to consider the Passion of Jesus Christ. St. Bonaventure says that the Wounds of Jesus Christ, because they are Wounds of love, are darts which wound hearts the most hard, and flames which set on fire souls the most cold: "O Wounds, wounding stony hearts, and inflaming frozen minds!" It is impossible that a soul which believes and thinks on the Passion of the Lord should offend Him and not love Him, nay,

rather that it should not run into a holy madness of love, at seeing a God as it were mad for love of us: "We have seen," says St. Laurence Justinian, "Wisdom infatuated by too much love." Hence it is that the Gentiles, as the Apostle says, when hearing him preach the Passion of Jesus crucified, thought it a folly: *We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews indeed a scandal, but to the Gentiles foolishness* (1 Cor. i. 23). How is it possible, said they, that a God, almighty and most happy, such as He Who is preached to us, could have been wiling to die for His creatures?

Ah, my Jesus, if I gaze upon Thy body, without I see only Wounds and Blood. If within in Thy Heart, I find nothing but bitterness and anguish which make Thee suffer the agonies of death. Ah, God enamoured of men, how is it possible that goodness so great, and such a love, should remain so badly corresponded to by men? It is wont to be said that love is repaid by love; but Thy love -- with what manner of love can it be ever repaid? It would be necessary that a God should die for Thee to make recompense for the love which Thou hast borne towards us in dying for us. O Cross, O Wounds, O Death of Jesus, you bind me closely to love my loving Jesus!

## II.

Behold your Redeemer expiring, and with His dying breath saying: *It is consummated* (John xix. 30). As if He had said: O men, all has been completed and done for your redemption. Love Me, then, since I have nothing more that I can do to make you love Me. My soul, look up at thy Jesus Who is now going to die. Look at those eyes growing dim, that face grown pale, that Heart which is beating with languid pulse, that Body which is now abandoning itself to death: and look at that beautiful Soul which is just on the point of forsaking that Sacred Body. The heavens are darkened, the earth trembles, the sepulchres are opened; signs that now the Maker of the world is about to die. Lo, at last, Jesus, after having commended His Blessed Soul to His Father, first giving a deep sigh from His afflicted Heart, and then bowing His head in sign of the offering of His life, which at this moment He renewed for our salvation, at length, by the violence of His sorrow, expires and renders up His Spirit into the hands of His beloved Father.

Approach, my soul, to this holy Cross. Embrace the feet of thy dead Saviour, and think that He is dead through the love which He bore to thee. Ah, my Jesus, to what has Thy affection towards me reduced Thee? And who, more than I, has enjoyed the fruits of Thy death? Make me, I beseech Thee, understand what love that must have been that a God should die for me, to the end that from this day forth I may love none other than Thee. I love Thee, O greatest Good; O true Lover of my soul, into Thy hands I here commend it. I beseech Thee, by the merits of Thy death, make me to die to all earthly loves, in order that I may love Thee alone, Who art alone worthy of all my love. Mary, my hope, pray to Jesus for me.

Hail, Jesus, our Love, and Mary, our hope!

"O riven Heart, O Love for me now crucified! Give to my soul repose within Thy wounded side!"

### **Spiritual Reading**

#### **CONFESSION.**

#### **IV. -- PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT: FIRM, UNIVERSAL, EFFICACIOUS.**

In the third place, a purpose to sin no more is necessary for a good Confession; and this purpose must be *firm*, *universal*, and *efficacious*.

First, it must be *firm*. Some say: I would wish never more to commit this sin: I would wish never more to offend God. Alas this expression, *I would wish*; denotes that the purpose is not firm. In order to have; a firm purpose, you must say with a resolute will: *I will never more commit this sin: I will never more deliberately offend God.*

Secondly, it must be *universal*. The penitent must purpose to avoid all sins without exception, that is, all mortal sins. With regard to venial sins, it is sufficient for the validity of the Sacrament to have sorrow for one species of them, and to have a firm purpose to avoid it. Spiritual souls should purpose to avoid all deliberate venial sins; and with regard to indeliberate venial sins, it is enough to resolve to guard against them according to the best of their ability; for it is impossible to avoid all indeliberate sins.

Thirdly, the purpose of avoiding sin must be *efficacious*; that

is, it must make the penitent adopt the means of not relapsing into the sins that he confesses, and must make him avoid the proximate occasions of a relapse. An occasion is called proximate in which a person has frequently fallen into grievous sin, or has been, without a just cause, an occasion of sin to others. It is not enough for penitents to purpose merely to renounce sin: it is necessary also to resolve to remove the occasion of it; otherwise all their confessions, though they should receive a thousand absolutions, will be invalid: for not to remove the proximate occasion of mortal sin is in itself a mortal sin. And, as I have already shown in my *Moral Theology* (Lib. 6, n. 454), he that receives absolution without a firm purpose of removing the proximate occasion of mortal sins, commits a new mortal sin, and is guilty of sacrilege.

But some one may say: If I separate from such a person, if I give up such a familiarity, scandal will be the consequence, and it will be an occasion of talk. I answer: You are wrong; you will, on the contrary, give scandal by not removing the occasion, to those who are aware of the friendship; and be assured, that although they may not speak in your presence, they think your conduct deserving of blame. But you will say: To separate from such a one would be an act of incivility, and even of ingratitude, for such a one assists, serves me, and relieves me. Yes, such a one helps to remove you from God, and to make you lead an unhappy life here, and a more unhappy life hereafter. Is it incivility or ingratitude to avoid such a person?

Civility and gratitude are first due to Jesus Christ, Who is a Sovereign of infinite Majesty, and from Whom we have received immense benefits. Do you not then see that it is passion makes you speak in this manner, and makes you seek pretexts in order to bring you to eternal perdition? Ah! give no more pain to the Heart of Jesus Christ. To St. Ludgard, while she was miserably entangled in a dangerous friendship, Jesus appeared, and showed her His Heart grievously wounded. The Saint began to weep over her fault, and took leave of her friend, saying that she could love no other than Jesus Christ, to Whom she had been espoused. Thenceforward she consecrated herself entirely to the love of her Spouse, and became a Saint.

## Evening Meditation.

THE PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST.

III. -- HOW DESERVING JESUS CHRIST IS OF OUR LOVE ON ACCOUNT OF THE LOVE HE HAS SHOWN US IN HIS PASSION.

I.

The Divine Son of God, through His love towards us, has given Himself wholly to us: *Who loved me, and delivered himself for me* (Gal. 20). In order to redeem us from everlasting death, and to recover for us the Divine grace and Heaven which we had forfeited, He became Man, and assumed flesh like our own: *Et verbum caro factum est; And the word was made flesh*. Behold, then, a God reduced to nothingness: *But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant... and in habit found as a man* (Philipp. 7). Behold the Sovereign Lord of the world humbling Himself so low as to subject Himself to all the miseries which the rest of men endure.

But what is more astonishing still is that He could very well have saved us without dying and without suffering at all; and yet He chose a life of sorrow and contempt, and a death of bitterness and ignominy even so far as to expire on a Cross -- the gibbet of infamy, the award of vilest criminals: *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross* (Philipp. ii. 8). But why, if He could have ransomed us without suffering, why should He choose to die, and to die on a Cross? To show us how He loved us. Who loved me, and delivered himself far me. He loved us, and because He loved us He delivered Himself up to sorrows, and ignominies, and to a death more cruel than ever any man endured in this world.

II.

That great lover of Jesus Christ, St. Paul, has written: *The charity of Christ presseth us* (2 Cor. v. 14); wishing to show us by these words that it is not so much the sufferings themselves of Jesus Christ as His love in enduring them that obliges us and, as it were, constrains us to love Him. Let us hear what St. Francis de Sales says on this text: "When we remember that Jesus Christ, true God, has loved us to such an excess as to suffer death, and the death of the Cross for us, our hearts are, as it were, put in a wine-press, and suffer violence, until love be extorted from

them; but a violence which, the stronger it is, becomes the more delightful." He then goes on to say: "Ah! why do we not therefore cast ourselves on Jesus crucified, to die on the Cross with Him, Who has chosen to die for love of us? I will hold Him, we should say, and I will never let Him go; I will die with Him, and will be consumed in the flames of His love. One flame shall consume this Divine Creator and His miserable creature. My Jesus gives Himself unreservedly to me, and I will give myself unreservedly to Him. I will live and die on His loving Breast; neither life nor death shall ever separate me from Him. O eternal Lover my soul longs after Thee, and makes choice of Thee for ever! Come, O Holy Spirit, and inflame our hearts with love. O love, O death, to die to all other loves, to live solely to that of Jesus Christ! O Redeemer of our Souls, grant that we may eternally sing: 'Live, Jesus! I love Jesus; live, Jesus, Whom I love! Yes, I love Jesus, Who reigns for evermore.'"

## **Saturday in Easter Week**

### **Morning Meditation.**

#### **THE LOVE OF MARY'S HEART FOR GOD.**

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.* In Mary Divine love was so ardent that well might even the Seraphim have descended from Heaven to learn in the heart of Mary how to love God.

#### **I.**

St. Anselm says that "wherever there is the greatest purity, there is also the greatest charity." The more a heart is pure, and empty of itself, the greater is the fullness of its love towards God. The most holy Mary, because she was all humility, and had nothing of self in her, was filled with Divine love, so that "her love towards God surpassed that of all men and Angels," as St. Bernardine writes. Therefore St. Francis de Sales with reason called her "the Queen of love."

God has indeed given men the precept to love Him with their whole heart: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart* (Matt. xxii. 37); but, as St. Thomas declares, "this commandment will be fully and perfectly fulfilled by men only in Heaven, and not on earth, where it is only fulfilled imperfect-



ly." On this subject Blessed Albert the Great remarks, that, in a certain sense, it would have been unbecoming had God given a precept that was never to have been perfectly fulfilled. But this would have been the case had not the Divine Mother perfectly fulfilled it. The Saint says: "Either some one fulfilled this precept, or no one; if any one, it must have been the most Blessed Virgin." Richard of St. Victor confirms this opinion, saying: "The Mother of our Emmanuel practised virtues in their very highest perfection. Who has ever fulfilled as she did that first commandment, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart?* In her Divine love was so ardent that no defect of any kind could have access to her." "Divine love," says St. Bernard, "so penetrated and filled the soul of Mary, that no part of her was left untouched; so that she loved with her whole heart, with her whole soul, with her whole strength, and was full of grace." Therefore Mary could well say: My Beloved has given Himself all to me, and I have given myself all to Him: *My Beloved to me, and I to him* (Cant. ii. 16). "Ah! well might even the Seraphim," says Richard, "have descended from Heaven to learn, in the heart of Mary, how to love God."

O Mary, my Mother, thou desirest nothing else but to see Jesus loved; do thou obtain for me this grace above all others. I do not ask of thee for earthly goods, or honours, or riches. I ask for what thy own heart desires most for me. I wish to love my God.

## II.

God, Who is love, came on earth to enkindle in the hearts of all the flame of His Divine charity; but in no heart did He enkindle it so much as in that of His Mother; for her heart was entirely pure from all earthly affections, and fully prepared to burn with this blessed flame. Thus St. Sophronius says that "Divine love so inflamed her that nothing earthly could enter her affections; she was always burning with this heavenly flame, and, so to say, inebriated with it." Hence the heart of Mary became all fire and flames, as we read of her in the sacred Canticles: *The lamps thereof are fire and flame* (Cant. viii. 6); fire burning within through love, as St. Anselm explains it; and flames shining without by the example she gave to all in the practice of virtues. When Mary, then, was in this world, and bore Jesus in her arms, she could well be called, "fire carrying fire"; and with far more reason

than the woman spoken of by Hippocrates, who was thus called because she carried fire in her hand. Yes, for St. Ildephonsus said that "the Holy Ghost heated, inflamed, and melted Mary with love, as the fire does iron; so that the flame of the Holy Spirit was seen, and nothing was felt but the fire of the love of God." St. Thomas of Villanova says that the bush seen by Moses, which burnt without being consumed, was a real symbol of Mary's heart. Therefore with reason, says St. Bernard, was she seen by St. John clothed with the sun: *and there appeared a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun* (Apoc. xii. 1); "for," continues the Saint, "*she was so closely united to God by love*, and penetrated so deeply the abyss of Divine wisdom, that, without a personal union with God, it would seem impossible for a creature to have a closer union with Him."

O most beautiful Mary, O most amiable Mary, thou hast gained the Heart of God! Take also my heart, and make me a saint. I love thee. In thee is my confidence. Most amiable Mother, pray for me.

### **Spiritual Reading.**

CONFESSION.

V. -- FALSE SHAME.

O God, how many souls shall, on account of this accursed shame, burn and burn forever in the very depths of hell! Some Christians, through human respect, and through fear of losing the esteem of others, easily continue for months and years to make sacrilegious Confessions and Communions. In the Chronicles of the Discalced Carmelites it is related that a young girl of great virtue consented to a sin against chastity; she concealed the sin three times in Confession, and went to Communion; after the third Communion she suddenly fell dead. Because she was regarded as a Saint her body was laid in a particular part of the church of the Jesuits; but after the obsequies were finished, and the Church closed, the confessor was conducted by two Angels to the place of interment; she came forth, fell on her knees, and threw from her mouth into a chalice prepared for them, the three consecrated Hosts which had been sacrilegiously received, and miraculously preserved in her breast. The Angels stripped her of the scapular; the miserable girl instantly presented a horri-

ble aspect, and was carried out of sight by two devils.

But how can a Christian that has been so daring as to sin grievously against the Divine Majesty, and has thus merited hell, where he should suffer eternal shame, find an excuse before God for concealing a sin in Confession, in order to avoid the momentary and trifling confusion that would arise from confessing it to a priest? If he wishes to be pardoned by God, and to deliver himself from the hell he has deserved, the shame caused by the confession of his sin disposes him to receive pardon. It is but just that the man that has despised God should humble and confound himself. Adelaide, the sinner, gave a beautiful answer to the devil. Being called by God to a change of life, she was converted, and instantly resolved to make a good Confession; the devil placed before her eyes the shame that she should suffer in confessing all her sins, and said to her: "Adelaide, where are you going?" She courageously answered: "Filthy beast, do you ask me where I am going? I am going to confound myself and to confound you."

### **Evening Meditation.**

THE PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST.

IV. -- HOW DESERVING JESUS CHRIST IS OF OUR LOVE ON ACCOUNT OF THE LOVE HE HAS SHOWN US IN HIS PASSION.

I.

The love of Jesus Christ towards men created in Him a longing desire for the moment of His death, when His love should be fully manifested to them; hence He was wont to say in His lifetime: *I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!* (Luke xii. 50). I have to be baptized in My own Blood; and how do I feel Myself straitened with the desire that the hour of My Passion may soon arrive; for then man will know the love I bear him! Hence St. John, speaking of that night in which Jesus began His Passion, writes: *Jesus knowing that his hour was come, that he should pass out of this world to the Father; having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end* (John xiii. 1). The Redeemer called that hour His own hour (*horra ejus*), because the time of His death was the time desired by Him, as it was then that He wished to give men the last proof

of His love, by dying for them upon a Cross, overwhelmed by sorrows.

But what could have ever induced a God to die as a malefactor upon a Cross between two sinners with such insult to His Divine Majesty? "What did this?" asks St. Bernard. He answers: "It was love, careless of its dignity." Ah, love indeed, when it tries to make itself known, does not seek what is becoming to the dignity of the lover, but what will serve best to declare itself to the object loved. St. Francis of Paula, therefore, had good reason to cry out at the sight of a Crucifix: "O charity! O charity! O charity!" And in like manner, when we look upon Jesus on the Cross, we should all exclaim: O love! O love! O love!

## II.

Ah, if Faith had not assured us of it, who could have ever believed that a God, almighty, most happy, and the Lord of all, should have condescended to love man to such an extent that He seems to go out of Himself for the love of him? We have seen Wisdom itself, that is the Eternal Word, become foolish through the excessive love He bore to man! So spoke St. Laurence Justinian. "We see Wisdom itself infatuated through excess of love." St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi said the same. One day, being in an ecstasy, she took a wooden Crucifix in her hands and cried out: "Yes, my Jesus, Thou art mad with love! I repeat it, and I will say it for ever: My Jesus, Thou art mad with love!" But no, says St. Denis the Areopagite: "No, it is not madness, but the ordinary effect of Divine love, which makes him who loves go out of himself in order to give himself up entirely to the object of his love: Divine love causes ecstasy."

Oh, if men would only pause and, looking at Jesus on the Cross, consider the love He has borne each one of them! "With what love," says St. Francis de Sales, "would not our souls become enkindled at the sight of those flames which are in the Redeemer's breast! And oh, what happiness, to be able to be consumed by that same fire with which our God burns for us! What joy, to be united to God by the chains of love!" St. Bonaventure called the Wounds of Jesus Christ, Wounds which pierce the most senseless hearts, and which inflame the most icy souls. How many darts of love come forth from those Wounds, to wound the

hardest hearts! Oh, what flames issue from the burning Heart of Jesus Christ to inflame the coldest souls! And chains, how many, from that wounded side, to bind the most stubborn wills!

## Low Sunday Morning Meditation

"THIS IS THE VICTORY THAT OVERCOMETH THE WORLD, OUR FAITH."

*A false balance is in his hand* (Osee xii. 7). In these words the Holy Spirit warns us not to be deceived by the world, because the world weighs its goods in a false balance; we should weigh them in the true balance of Faith, which will show us what are the true goods. Oh, how wretched I have been, O Lord, in having, for so many years, gone after the vanities of the world, and left Thee, the Sovereign Good!

### I.

The thought of the vanity of the world, and that all things that the world values are but falsehood and deceit, has made many souls resolve to give themselves wholly to God. *What does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?* (Matt. xvi. 26). How many young persons has this great maxim of the Gospel brought to leave relatives, country, possessions, honours, and even crowns, to go to shut themselves up in cloisters or deserts, there to think of God alone! The day of death is called the day of destruction: *The day of destruction is at hand* (Deut. xxxii. 35). It is a day of destruction, because all the goods we have gained on earth must be left on the day of our death. Wherefore St. Ambrose wisely says that we falsely call these good things our good things, for we cannot carry them with us into the other world, where we must dwell forever. It is our holy deeds alone that accompany us, and they alone will comfort us in eternity.

All earthly fortunes, the highest dignities, gold, silver, the most precious jewels, when contemplated from the bed of death lose their splendour; the dark shadow of death obscures even sceptres and crowns, and makes us see that whatever the world values is but smoke, dust, vanity, and misery. And, in truth, at the time of death, what profit is there in all the riches acquired

by the dying person, if nothing belongs to him after death except a wooden box, in which he is placed to grow corrupt? For what will vaunted beauty of body serve when there remains of it only a little polluted dust and four fleshless limbs?

What is the life of man upon earth? Behold it, as described by St. James: *It is a vapour which appeareth for a little while, and afterwards will pass away* (James iv. 15). Today this great man is esteemed, feared, praised; tomorrow he is despised, contemned, and abused. *I have seen the wicked highly exalted and lifted up like the cedars of Libanus. And I passed by and, lo, he was not!* (Ps. xxxvi. 35, 36). He is no longer to be found in his beloved house, in this great palace which he built; and where is he? He is become dust in the grave!

*A false balance is in his hand* (Osee xii. 7). In these words the Holy Spirit warns us not to be deceived by the world, because the world weighs its goods in a false balance; we ought to weigh them in the true balance of Faith, which will show us what are the true goods which never end. St. Teresa said we should never take account of anything that ends with death. O God, what greatness has remained to those many first ministers of state, commanders of armies, princes, Roman emperors, now that the scene is changed, and they find themselves in eternity! *Their memory has perished with a noise* (Ps. ix. 7). They made a great figure in the world, and their names resounded among all; but when they were dead, for them was changed rank, name, and everything. It is useful here to notice an inscription placed over a certain cemetery in which many great men and ladies are buried: See where end all greatness, all earthly pomp, all beauty. Worms, dust, a worthless stone, a little sand, close the brief scene at the end of all."

Oh, how wretched I have been, O Lord, in having for so many years gone after the vanities of the world, ask! left Thee, the Sovereign Good!

## II.

*The fashion of this world passeth away* (1 Cor. vii. 31). Our life is but a scene that passes away and speedily ends; and it must end for all, whether nobles or commoners, kings or subjects, rich or poor. Happy he who, in this scene, has played his part well

before God. Philip III., King of Spain, died a young man, at the age of forty-two years; and before he died he said to those who stood by "When I am dead proclaim the spectacle that you now see; proclaim that, in death, to have been a king serves only to make one feel the pain of having reigned," And then he lamented, saying: "Oh that during this time I had been in a desert, becoming a Saint, that now I might appear with more confidence before the tribunal of Jesus Christ!"

We know the change of life of St. Francis Borgia at the sight of the corpse of the Empress Isabella, who, in life, was most beautiful, but, after death, struck horror into all who saw her. Borgia, when he saw her, exclaimed, "Thus, then, end the good things of this world!" and he gave himself wholly to God. Oh, that we could all imitate him before death comes upon us! But let us make haste, because death runs towards us, and we know not when it will arrive. Let us not so act that the light that God will then give us will cause us nothing but remorse, when we hold in our hands the candle of death. Let us resolve to do now what we shall then wish to have done, and shall not be able to do.

No, my God, it is not enough that Thou hast hitherto borne with me; I do not wish that Thou shouldst wait longer to see me give myself wholly to Thee. Thou hast warned me many times to have done with this world, and to give myself all to Thy love. Now Thou tellest to me to turn to Thee; behold, I come, receive me into Thy arms. I abandon myself wholly to Thee. O spotless Lamb, sacrificed on a Cross for me, wash me first with Thy Blood, and pardon all the injuries Thou hast received from me; and then inflame me with Thy holy love. I love Thee above everything; I love Thee with all my heart. And what can I find in the world more worthy of love than Thou art, or that has loved me more? O Mary, Mother of God, and my advocate, pray for me; obtain for me a true and lasting change of life. In thee I trust.

## **Spiritual Reading**

CONFESSION.

VI. -- DELUSIONS AND VAIN FEARS.

Along with false shame, the devil endeavours to fill the mind of sinners with many delusions and vain fears.

Such a one says: My confessor will rebuke me severely if I tell this sin. Why should he rebuke you? Tell me, were you a confessor, would you speak harshly to a poor penitent who should come to manifest his miseries to you, in the hope of being raised up from his fallen state? How, then, can you imagine that a confessor, who is bound by his office to show charity to those that come to the tribunal of penance, should treat you with harshness and severity, if you confess your sin to him?

Another says: But the confessor will, at least, be shocked at my sin, and will conceive a dislike for me. All false! He will be edified when he sees the good disposition that makes a sinner confess his sins with sincerity, in spite of the shame that he feels. And will he not have heard from other penitents similar or perhaps more grievous sins? Oh, would to God that you were the only sinner in the world! Neither is it true that he will conceive a dislike for those that disclose their guilt to him; on the contrary, he will entertain a greater esteem for them, and will labour more zealously to assist them when he sees the confidence that they place in him, and that has made them reveal their miseries to him.

Alas! what do certain sinners say? I will go to Confession, but not till another confessor comes. And will they, for the sake of avoiding shame, live in the meantime at enmity with God? In danger of being lost forever, in an actual hell caused by the remorse of conscience that lacerates the soul, and that leaves them without peace night or day? And will they remain in sin, or add several sacrileges to the sin they have committed? Do they not know that sacrilege is a horrible Sin? Will they change into the poison of eternal death the remedy that Jesus Christ has prepared for them by His Blood, in the Sacrament of Penance? They say they will go to Confession afterwards. But what will become of them for eternity if they meet a sudden death, which is now so frequent that we hear almost every day that someone has died suddenly.

But, some one will say, I have not confidence in my confessor. Go then to another. But should a person not be able to procure a strange confessor, would it not be madness to conceal his sin? Were he afflicted with an ulcer that might cause death,



would he not, if there were no other remedy, instantly call for a surgeon and, however great his shame, would he not make known his disease? And in order to recover the life of the soul and to escape hell a Christian cannot bring himself to open his conscience to a Spiritual Father.

You, then, should have courage, and generously conquer this shame that the devil magnifies so much in your mind. It will be enough to begin to reveal the sin that you have committed; all your vain apprehensions will instantly vanish. And you may be persuaded that after Confession you will feel more happy at having confessed your sins than if you were made monarch of all the earth. Recommend yourself to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and she will obtain for you strength to overcome all repugnance. And if you have not courage to disclose your sins at once to the confessor, say to him: Father, assist me, for I stand in need of help; I have committed a certain sin which I cannot bring myself to confess. The confessor will adopt an easy means of dragging from its den the wild beast that devours you. It will be enough for you to answer "yes" or "no" to his interrogations. Should a person be unwilling to tell his sin in words, he may write it on paper, and show it to the confessor, saying, "I accuse myself of this sin that you have read." And, behold! the eternal and temporal hell has disappeared, the grace of God is recovered, and with it peace of conscience. The greater the violence a person does himself in order to conquer shame, the greater will be the affection with which God will embrace him. Father Paul Segneri the Younger relates that a certain person made such an effort to confess certain sins committed in her infancy that, in disclosing them to her confessor, she swooned away. But in return for the violence that she had done herself the Lord gave her such fervent compunction that thenceforward she gave herself up to a life of perfection and of great austerities, and died with the reputation of a Saint.

### **Evening Meditation**

THE PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST.

V. -- HOW DESERVING JESUS CHRIST IS OF OUR LOVE ON ACCOUNT OF THE LOVE HE HAS SHOWN US IN HIS PASSION.

I.

The Blessed John of Avila, who was so enamoured with the love of Jesus Christ that he never failed in any of his sermons to speak of the love which Jesus Christ bears towards us, in a treatise on the love this most loving Redeemer bears to men, has expressed himself in sentiments so full of the fire of devotion and of such beauty that I desire to insert them here. He says: "Thou, O Redeemer, hast loved man in such a manner that whoso reflects upon this love cannot do less than love Thee; for Thy love offers violence to hearts: as the Apostle says: *The charity of Christ presseth us* (2 Cor. v. 14). The source of the love of Jesus Christ for men is His love for His Eternal Father. Hence He said on Maundy Thursday: *That the world may know that I love the Father, arise, let us go hence* (John xiv. 31). But whither? To die for men upon the Cross!

"No human intellect can conceive how strongly this fire burns in the Heart of Jesus Christ. As He was commanded to suffer death once, so, had He been commanded to die a thousand times, His love had been sufficient to endure it. And if what He suffered for all men had been imposed upon Him for the salvation of each single soul, He would have done the same for each in particular as He did for all. And as He remained three hours upon the Cross, so, had it been necessary, His love would have made Him remain there even to the Day of Judgment. So that Jesus Christ loved much more than He suffered. O Divine love, how far greater wert Thou than Thou didst outwardly seem to be; for though so many wounds and bruises tell us of great love, still they do not tell all its greatness. There was far more within than that which appeared externally. That was but as a spark which bounded forth from the vast ocean of infinite love. The greatest mark of love is to lay down our life for our friends. But this was not a sufficient mark for Jesus Christ wherewith to express His love."

## II.

"This is the love which causes holy souls to lose themselves, and to stand amazed when once they have been allowed to know it. From it spring those burning sentiments of ardour, the desire of Martyrdom, joy in sufferings, exultation under the storms of distress, the strength to walk on burning coals as if they were

roses, a thirst for sufferings, rejoicing in what the world dreads, embracing that which it abhors. St. Ambrose says that the soul which is espoused to Jesus Christ upon the Cross thinks nothing so glorious as to bear upon itself the marks of the Crucified One.

"But how, O my Lover, shall I repay this Thy love? It is right that blood should be compensated by blood. May I behold myself dyed in this Blood and nailed to this Cross! O holy Cross, receive me also! O crown of thorns, enlarge thyself, that I too may place thee on my head! O nails, leave those innocent hands of my Lord, and come and pierce my heart with compassion and with love! For Thou, my Jesus, didst die, as St. Paul says, in order to gain dominion over the living and the dead, not by means of chastisements but by love. *For to this end Christ died and rose again: that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living* (Rom. xiv. 9)."

